

International Liberty Association Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

Who would have thought, in the darkest days of September 2013, as 52 of the 101 "bravest of the brave" remaining in Ashraf 1 in Iraq were slaughtered in cold blood, the remainder transported to join the rest of the Ashrafis held in intolerable conditions in the prison infamously named Camp Liberty (Ashraf 2), that just 6 years on we would be devoting our newsletter to the phenomenon of Ashraf 3 rising like a phoenix in Albania and the inspiring events taking place there

Who would have thought, that same September 2013, when we found our way to Tirana to meet with some of the first 150 men and women of Ashraf just given a place of safety by the Albanian government, many of them living in refuge centres, or scattered in small numbers across the city, that there would so soon be a new Ashraf, a new bastion of hope and optimism for the people of Iran and one capable of hosting hundreds of dignitaries from all over the world, catered for in the Ashrafi's own facilities, built with their own hands.

Who dared to believe that, in September 2016, despite increasingly fierce rocket attacks and the determination of the Iranian regime that many of the Ashrafis would not leave Iraq alive, all of them would be safely transported to Albania.

We will never forget the generosity of the government and people of Albania who opened their country and their hearts to the refugees and to all of you who heartened us by your unstinting support through all the resettlement challenges.

In our October 2016 editorial, we expressed the relief we all felt at the Ashrafis safety, but also celebrated the event as a major turning point, at last enabling the focus to be directed without distraction towards the human rights situation ... continued on p.2

PHOENIX RISING FROM THE ASHES A new Ashraf city is built in less than 2 years



Senator Ingrid Betancourt was among nearly 350 international figures who went to Albania in July 2019 to visit the newly built Ashraf city. On 13 July there was a big conference in the central hall in Ashraf city and Ms Betancourt told the huge crowd: "Six months ago this was a construction site, and today it's a well-designed city with an amazing victory arch and

magical lighted trees. I have come here several times to share with you Ashrafians, to stay here with you, I have been sleeping here, I have been sharing my meals with you, I have seen you in your activities, seeing where you prepare your daily chores, where you design your clothes, I've seen you gardening, building, repairing, constructing, ... continued on p.2

UN MUST INVESTIGATE IRAN'S 1988 MASSACRE



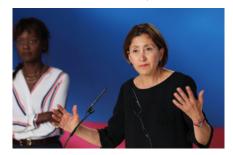
In the lead-up to the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances on 30 August, Amnesty International called on the United Nations to set up an independent inquiry into the 1988 massacre of political prisoners in Iran.

The Iranian authorities' "continued failure to disclose the fate and whereabouts of thousands of political dissidents who were forcibly disappeared and extrajudicially executed in secret during Iran's 1988 prison massacres has sparked a crisis that for decades has been largely overlooked by the international community," said the Amnesty International report of 28 August.

"Thousands of the victims' deaths remain ... continued on p.3

Phoenix Rising continued from p.1

communicating, I've seen you broadcasting and preparing the materials you launch on internet; and I say this because, as you know, over the past year the propaganda by the regime and its lobbyists and collaborators was that Ashraf 3 is a closed compound that no-one is allowed to come in. Well, the whole



world is here, right? (applause) You are the beacon of hope, you are the rose in the desert, as you all Ashrafians are, and you are the force of change, and you are the phoenix rising from the ashes.

"I wanted to say another thing, and now I'm talking to the mullahs. I want to say to them: we are going to get you because we want you to be accountable for the crimes against humanity that you have perpetrated for forty years in Iran, and we are ready. Hazer, Hazer (ready, ready)."

Ambassador Lincoln Bloomfield Former United States Assistant Secretary of State told the crowd:

"Clearly, this is an engineering and construction feat that shows how smart, how talented, how driven, how capable the residents are, so congratulations. That's just one point.

"Secondly, as you come in the entrance to this great facility, you see that this is a message, it's a symbol, to the regime in Tehran: that you have



tried, and tried, and tried, and you have failed to stop the resistance. It's a major symbol.



"However, those two things are not the significance of Ashraf 3, in my humble opinion. Well, let me tell you what the significance of this place is. I have been here for three days now. Like many of my friends, we had a dinner with a hall full of women for one evening. We walked under the stars, we spoke to them personally, privately, we heard amazing stories of courage, of conviction, of pain of a lifetime. These were the actions of people who are stronger than me, who have a major heart, who have a mission in life and who have made a choice, and they are dedicated to keeping that choice. Not only are the residents people of free will, speaking for themselves with courage

and with honour, dedicated to their countrymen of Iran, but they bear witness, as Director Freeh said so well, they are the evidence that this regime is a monstrous regime, as Ingrid Betancourt said, that must be brought to account. So we stand here with a new day, and we can now bring forward the evidence from your personal stories, and we can start to take the regime to account for all of the crimes that they have committed for forty years. Let it begin tonight."



Professor Yakin Ertürk, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women said:

"I'm impressed with your energy. It seems endless. Keep it up.

"I would like to start by giving voice to a 12th-century Persian poet, Sa'adi. He says: *The children of Adam are limbs* of one another, created ... continued on p.3

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in Iran and the plight of the people there suffering directly under the control of the mullahs.

At that time, the initiative to bring the perpetrators of the 1988 massacres to justice was just beginning to gather pace and momentum, putting the spotlight on the fact that many of those perpetrators still held high office in the Iranian regime.

Three years on, not only have great strides been made towards bringing those responsible for the 1988 massacre to justice, but also, there is now a powerful museum in Ashraf 3, which pays magnificent tribute to the years of people's struggle for human rights and to all those who have paid the heavy price for it.

Just as this newsletter was in final stage of design we learned that the President of Albania, llir Meta (see picture on

facing page) also visited the museum there and told Ashrafis that he "had no idea about the amount of sacrifice and the scale of the killings and genocide".

With continuing protests inside Iran since the end of 2017, the people have shown they too are ready to pay the price as they make the reality of life under the mullahs very visible to the world.

Meanwhile, the growing reality of Ashraf 3 is living proof of what can be achieved where there is dedication and perseverance to a cause with love as the guiding force. To visit, as so many have expressed, is to feel part of a loving family gathering.

We look forward to the day when these qualities can be put to service in a free Iran and the whole nation can come together as a family to make Iran and the world a better and safer place.





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from a single substance.

When one limb suffers misfortune, the others cannot be at rest.

You who do not suffer the pain of others do not deserve to be called human.

"And this was written way before the French Revolution or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which shows that human rights is embedded into the culture of this region. Now, the testimonies that we received yesterday from the Ashraf residents put our humanity to test. I was saddened, I felt shame and rage, but I also felt hope, seeing the survivors continue their struggle with determination, and the smile on their face was very empowering. Human dignity, I'm sure, will defeat evil."

Ad Melkert, former UN Special Representative to Iraq, said: "I'll limit



myself to just the one point that struck me upon arrival here in Ashraf 3, the one point being all the flags that are out there of so many countries that are represented here. What a change! What a change compared with a bit more than ten years ago when I arrived as a UN Special Representative for Iraq. It was hardly part of my brief that there was such

a thing as Ashraf. But it was the time, in 2009, that the oasis got suddenly under attack, ruthless attack, and I remember pictures that the UN team had to take of the victims and of the destruction; the pictures that we see now in your impressive exhibition. And it happened in 2009, it happened in 2011, it happened in 2013. And I am proud that we started to open the eyes of the international community for what was going on in Ashraf, and to open the eyes of the international community when Ashraf removed to what is rightly called Prison Liberty. I remember meetings with the diplomatic community in Baghdad and people looking at one another, nobody wanting to take responsibility, until our Albanian friends came around and helped to resolve the stalemate.

"And this is my message to you: your resolve has brought about being here in Ashraf 3, seeing all the flags that are welcoming us visitors from the whole world to support your cause, and I'm sure these flags will fly in the new Ashraf soon to come. Thank you very much."

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unregistered and, across the country, there are thousands of missing bodies buried in unidentified mass graves. For more than 30 years, the Iranian authorities have failed to officially acknowledge the existence of these mass graves and concealed their locations causing suffering to families who are still seeking answers about their missing loved ones," the human rights group wrote.

Philip Luther, Middle East and North Africa Research and Advocacy Director at Amnesty International, said: "The families of those secretly killed in the 1988 prison massacres are still living through a nightmare. They and many others in Iran are haunted by the thousands of missing bodies, which have cast a spectre over the country's justice system to this day."

"It is misguided to view the 1988 mass killings as historical events. The enforced disappearances are ongoing and, 30 years later, victims' families continue to be tormented by anguish and uncertainty over the fate of their loved ones," he added.

Under international law, the crime of enforced disappearance continues until the state reveals the fate or whereabouts of the individual concerned and this requires, when the disappeared person is found to be dead, returning the remains of the victims to their families.

Amnesty International's December 2018 report 'Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran's 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity' stresses that by continuing to systematically conceal the fate and whereabouts of victims of the secret extrajudicial killings of 1988, Iranian authorities are committing the ongoing crime against humanity of enforced disappearance.

The Iranian authorities have an obligation under

international law to investigate these ongoing crimes and in case of a death, the authorities have a duty to issue a death certificate, setting out accurately the date, location and cause of death. However, for victims of the secret extrajudicial killings of 1988 this has not happened for thousands of cases.

"Crimes against humanity are exactly what the term suggests: crimes so serious that they concern not only their victims, survivors and the state in question but also humanity as a whole," said Philip Luther.

"UN member states must use every opportunity, including the upcoming review of Iran's human rights record at the UN Human Rights Council in November, to press the Iranian government to identify mass graves and reveal the fate and whereabouts of all victims of these tragic events."



President of Albania, Ilir Meta visiting the museum at Ashraf 3 dedicated to those who have died for human rights in Iran.

OUR TRIP TO ALBANIA

Nearly 60 ILA supporters visit Ashrafis in their new residence

We had a 5 day trip to Albania to visit the Iranian refugees that we had helped to relocate from the horrors of Iraq to the relative safety of Albania. This relocation took place over 3 years from September 2013 to September 2016 when the last group arrived in Mother Teresa Airport of Tirana.

The visit was inspiring and enlightening. On day 2 of the trip we participated in a conference where all Ashrafis were welcoming their international and Albanian guests.



Peter Watsham took the stage on behalf of our group and told the Ashraf residents:

We in the UK, those of us here and many more, have followed you, we have been with you when you were attacked in Ashraf, we were with you when you were denied medical facilities, we have been with you when you were denied water, we have been with you when you have been subject to torture by all those voices on loud speakers, we have been with you when you have been attacked by rockets. I know I speak not just for my UK colleagues but those from other parts of Europe when we say, our reaction is: we are truly humbled. It is the love, the relationship, the endurance, the perseverance, the refusal to give up that vision and that hope for what we all long for: a world of peace!

But you know, peace is not the absence of conflict. Peace comes from the heart. Peace is how we relate to each other, men and women, people from different countries, people of different religion, people of political persuasions we don't agree with, people from different clans, from different tribes, who so often just want to fight one another and argue. But peace is the answer to that! Peace comes from the heart and refuses to give in to that intolerance.

In you we see tolerance, a

respect for all humanity, regardless of background, regardless of sex, regardless of anything; respect for all humanity, and a love for humanity!

There is only one way to finish my remarks which is to say Viva Ashraf!

The following excerpts from some of the many comments that we received after the trip from participants gives you a hint of what went on.

Ian: I thought that over three days we learned a lot about the construction and day-to-day operations of Ashraf 3, and we shared many meals and entertainments with our hosts. In particular for the first time we dined with the ladies of Ashraf, and we gained insights into the vital work of the Communications Centre, so much of it inspirational in purpose.

I trust that the self-confident, optimistic outlook of the Ashraf 3 residents will be effective in promoting the restoration of a free and democratic Iran, in the immediate future.

Judy: I am so glad that I did this - it was a wonderful trip - interesting and educational, superbly organised and I was touched moved and inspired by my meetings with the Ashrafis. When I think of the many benefits to my well-being and spirit I can honestly say that it was the best value for money I've had in a long time - not that that was an important criteria - more a pleasant surprise.

The trips to Ashraf 3 were all very interesting and I felt I had seen quite a lot and had been made very welcome by them. I liked the variety of the Ashraf programme and it was good to

have frequent opportunities to talk to individuals at mealtimes - I learned a lot doing this.

The last evening when we visited the new museum - this was a very powerful experience and emotionally quite challenging. It is an amazing exhibition to have all in one place - it's a pity it can not travel so more people can get the impact of the Iranian human rights story. It is very rich in information and graphics and the reconstructed cell and torture room are extremely impactful all the more so when you also meet the survivors of the atrocities in the same space. That was an exceptional experience for me and one I will not forget.

The volunteers were nothing short of amazing in their care, generosity and love for each and every one of us on the trip. They all maintained patience and good humour throughout, despite the heat and the very many small challenges along the way. They were, quite simply, outstanding!

I have been genuinely touched, moved and inspired by the stand you (and we, the friends) are all taking with the Ashrafis and feel privileged to be counted as a friend by you all.

Imogen: I came back inspired by the sheer enormity of the task that the Ashrafis have achieved. It was overwhelming. Under such conditions, in difficult territory, in such a short time. AMAZING.

The exhibition was very interesting and helps one to understand what they have gone through. It seems hard







for people to grasp.

I am very pleased I was able to join the group and I am sure I am one of many who thought the whole trip a great success.

Kathleen: It was so good to witness the results of their tremendous creative feat and to learn from the architects and engineers, how it was made possible.

David: It was an enjoyable and uplifting experience to see what the Ashrafis have achieved with the modest help of your English friends. I would be interested to go again some time

Philip: It was great to see the Ashrafis finally somewhere where they are safe and can plan a future, at least for a time, and it was good to know that they have had such a positive impact on the local community. What they have achieved in Ashraf 3 is amazing in the time, and I'm sure that the next time I go, there will be further transformations to see. Their constant welcoming was very humbling when they have gone through so much.

Jenny: I came back home feeling very humbled but also inspired, perhaps more optimistic, and even better informed about recent events and the activities of the Ashrafis.

Janet: For someone making a first visit, seeing Ashraf 3 was amazing and I am full of admiration at the dedication, skill and perseverance of all the Ashrafis. I was greatly interested in all that we saw, the kitchens, bakery, patisserie, meeting halls, museum, dormitories and very grateful to residents for allowing us to visit their home. The catering was brilliant.

I could have listened to the engineers all day!

Steve: It was a fantastic trip! Even now I am still learning about the history of the struggle!

On a personal level, I also did a lot of networking and made some new friends.

Rosalyn: I enjoyed the talk given by the architect and had no idea

how difficult it was for them to get the permission to do certain things. Imagine having to refer back with redrafted plans 80 times!!! It's certainly a lot worse than having to deal with the London Borough of Camden

Andrew: I loved the whole trip. It really opened my eyes to what you are doing. And would recommend you promote trips like this one to others. It was a great value for money as a trip, and very educational. Meeting other supporters of ILA was equally rewarding and beneficial.





Penny: I had only been to visit the first centre in Kashar a few years ago, so it was very interesting to see Ashraf 3 which is being built up in a similar way to Ashraf 1 and to hear from those involved in running the satellite channel and cyber security, as well as those running the bakery and other enterprises.

Originally I had expected us to be in Tirana, but being in Durres Beach was actually pleasant as we were able to use the pool and the hotel's section of the beach.

It was also interesting to visit the archaeological museum in Durres and Kruja, both of which I had last visited in 1991.

William: The new building with the explanations of what happened to the Iranian nation is truly great and well expresses the grandness of the Iranian civilisation and what it has been submitted to by the great tragedy of the Mullahs appearance and their efforts to destroy a great country by dragging it backwards into barbarism. It is essential that the world clearly knows what went on over these nightmare years and which is still happening. None of it can be forgotten until it is dealt with and the perpetrators brought to justice before the world.

Derek: My only previous visit was in November 2016 when the Ashrafis had only recently arrived and were in their temporary accommodation. What I found moving on that occasion was the knowledge that every Ashrafi who we passed in the street had, just weeks before, been in the hell-hole of Camp Liberty and that I had played a small part in their obtaining sanctuary in Albania.

What I found very valuable and enjoyable on this occasion was being entertained by Ashrafis at lunch and dinner in their 'homes'. I had three really interesting encounters which each happened to take on a different theme.

I also gained from talking in depth with some of the volunteers like Ali and Reza and hearing their histories.

The talk about the building of Ashraf 3 was fascinating and awe-inspiring and I enjoyed other things like the visit to the studio ... and the bakery! (oh those biscuits!!).

In a terrible way, the highlight of the trip - in terms of impact and lasting impression - was the visit to the museum. It is beautifully presented and the stories of the regime's brutality are beyond belief. (The hall of 120,000 names had the same impact on me as a synagogue in the old Jewish quarter of Prague whose walls are similarly inscribed).

I found it a hugely rewarding experience and would not have missed it for the world.



Chris: I was moved and impressed that we received so warm a welcome from those we have heard about, whose lives have been through such traumatic circumstances. Many were brave enough to speak of those times, but without bitterness. I took many questions to ... continued on p.8

OUR EVENT IN KINGSTON

ILA held an event in Kingston upon Thames on Thursday 22 August. Speakers at the event included **Mr Peter Carpenter**, Labour Councillor on Wandsworth Council and Chief Whip of the Labour Group, **Prof Sara Chandler QC**, a member of the Law Society Council and the first woman to become President of the Federation of European Bar Associations in 2017, and **Dr Tahar Boumedra**, former head of the Human Rights Office of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).



Mr Carpenter said in his speech: My attention was first drawn to the plight of the Ashrafis several years ago, when they were in the process of escaping from Camp Liberty to safety in Albania. This was an urgent humanitarian crisis and I was pleased to be able to help in supporting their move to Albania.

I've been particularly impressed by the way the Ashrafis are building a community in Albania, and ensuring that that community benefits the Albanians. They are reciprocating the generous hospitality that Albania has shown them.

What has really impressed me is that now that they are in the relative safety of Albania, they have not given up their fight, if anything they have intensified it.

I'm extremely pleased to see that the International Liberty Association is at the forefront of the fight. In many ways the Iranian regime is an exemplar of the abuse of human rights.

Whether it be the rights of Women that are suppressed in the name of religious orthodoxy; the rights of children who are denied an education and exploited as child soldiers and labourers; religious persecution of all those who do not follow an extreme Islamist faith, whether it be Christians, Jews or other religious minorities; all are persecuted, driven out of the country and in the worst cases imprisoned or put to death.

The threat of the death penalty is something the Iranian regime uses to terrorise the population and I am particularly impressed by the International Liberty Association's campaign to Stop the Executions, which, alongside efforts by other organisations such as Amnesty International, is having some success in reducing the use of the Death Penalty in Iran.



Human rights are universal rights and we must uphold them wherever we see them abused. Iran is a particularly egregious example, and the International Liberty Association is right to focus its efforts on Iran and the Ashrafis.

If we want to maintain and extend human rights we have to remain vigilant.



Prof Chandler said: I especially thank the ILA for your continued record of support for human rights in Iran and the practical support you've given to the Ashrafi residents, the refugees, which resulted in their relocation to a safe haven in Albania.

I am a member of the Council of the Law Society and a past Chair of our Human Rights Committee.

The Law Society has supported human rights in Iran for many years and has been active in work to investigate the 1988 massacre. Today, as we remember those massacred in the prisons of Iran in 1988, we must demand justice for the dead and their families. We must persuade governments and the United Nations to take action. Our governments must recognise and publicly condemn the 1988 massacre as a crime against humanity, and they must ask the Human Rights Commissioner and the Security Council to secure an investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

I conclude by restating the commitment as lawyers individually, and together as the international legal community through our representative legal organisations, to continue our work to attain these goals, and we will stand beside you all in the ILA in fighting for a future Iran with justice and respect for human rights at its heart. Thank you to all of you for your continued support... in the search for justice and truth.







NEWS IN BRIEF

94TH WOMAN EXECUTED IN IRAN UNDER ROUHANI



On Sunday, August 25, a woman was executed in Mashhad Central Prison. She was the 94th woman executed during six years of Hassan Rouhani's presidency. At least four women were executed in July 2019.

IRANIAN REGIME PLANS TO SELL ORGANS OF DEATH ROW PRISONERS



The organs of death row prisoners in Iran could be pre-sold to buyers under a new law condemned by Iran's Association of Surgeons.

Iran's new notorious Chief Justice, Ebrahim Raisi, who was a member of the death commission in Tehran during the 1988 massacre of political prisoners, told reporters that an article has been included in the criminal justice law that would allow a convict to "voluntarily offer his or her organs before or after execution".

A professor who works on liver transplant told the state-run ISNA news agency that no specialist surgeon would follow the law because "it is immoral and against all the values of our profession.

"Anyone sentenced to death would not be in a right frame of mind to 'voluntarily' offer their organs, unless they are forced to do so under immense pressure. Members of our Association of Surgeons will never abide by this law."

AUTHORITIES DENY HOSPITAL TREATMENT TO AGED POLITICAL PRISONER



Prison officials in Gohardasht Prison are disregarding doctors' orders for Mohammad Banazadeh Amirkhizi, to receive medical treatment and testing.

According to a physician at Karaj Civil Hospital, Amirkhizi is suspected of having prostate cancer and should immediately undergo prostate biopsy. The frequent appeals of the family of the prisoner who is also suffering from a tear of his knee meniscus has been ignored by prison authorities and the prosecutor's office.

Mohammad Banazadeh Amirkhizi, 73, was arrested on 30 January 2016, on charges of "acting against national security" and "propaganda against the regime." He was sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Mr Amirkhizi was previously arrested in 2009, along with many other members of his family, and released in 2014 after spending five years behind bars for trying to meet his children in Camp Ashraf, Iraq.

FEMALE JOURNALIST SENTENCED TO 10 YEARS PRISON AND 147 LASHES



Marzieh Amiri, a journalist and student activist, was sentenced to 10 years and 6 months in prison and 147 lashes on 13 August 2019 by the notorious

judge, Mohammad Moghiseh.

Marzieh Amiri suffered from epileptic seizures at the time of interrogation due to physical and psychological pressures. But 'Judge' Moghiseh has opposed bail and her temporary release for medical treatment. Marzieh Amiri was among a number of labour activists arrested during demonstrations in Tehran on International Labour Day.

MOTHER OF POLITICAL PRISONER ARRESTED





Farangis Mazloumi, the mother of imprisoned blogger Soheil Arabi, was arrested on Monday, 22 July, when eight intelligence agents raided her sister's residence.

Mrs Mazloumi has been under tremendous pressure since her son, Soheil, was arrested five years ago for posting comments critical of the clerical regime on Facebook. She often travelled long distances to see him but was systematically denied the chance to visit with her son. She then became a vocal critique of the regime herself.

"I FEEL LIKE A FREE BIRD"



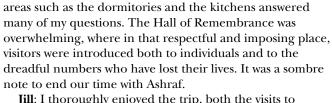
Arrested along with her daughter Aryani on 11 April 2019, Mrs Monireh Arabshahi, sentenced to 16 years in prison for not covering her hair in a women-only subway train, while giving flowers to women on International Women's Day, sent out an open letter on her birthday on 3 August. She concluded her letter: "I am actually happy that in the fifth decade of my life I have been able to pull aside the veil that had for many years covered my thoughts, ideas and beliefs. And today, on my birthday, I feel like a free bird who has chosen the path ahead of herself and moves on with confidence."

OUR TRIP TO ALBANIA continued from p.5

Albania, many of which were answered. I am still amazed at how much construction has been achieved in so short a time.

The most effective meeting was the one with the engineers on Sunday. Their professional account of the purchase of the land, the surveying and their innovative installation of the infra-structure was so clearly told and fascinating. I was moved by the plenary meeting where the whole body of the camp joined in chants.

The astonishing meals in the warm evening were unforgettable. My table was much involved in discussion with two Ashrafis and to my regret I missed the entertainment. The earlier walk-about the camp to see



Jill: I thoroughly enjoyed the trip, both the visits to Ashraf 3 and the sightseeing and as always I thought the Ashrafis were amazing and wonderfully welcoming.

Carolyn: All my questions on the subject of the conference were fully answered. As to the Ashrafis' hospitality, no words are adequate to say how much I admire it, or how much I admire Ashraf!









UPCOMING SOCIAL EVENINGS

at our North London Community Centre

FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER

SATURDAY 23 NOVEMBER

4.30pm-8.30pm

