

International Liberty Association Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our second newsletter of what has all the makings of being a very eventful and momentous year.

As reported in our first 2020 bulletin, the protests that swept across Iran in November 2019 and the ferocity with which they were met by Iranian security forces, resulting in 1,500 dead and 12,000 arrested, has infused all who witnessed the events with an increased determination and commitment to break the hold of the inhuman perpetrators and see the people of Iran finally able to claim a life with universally recognised rights and freedoms.

The sense that there is no going back to a place of submission to the repressive and brutal conditions that have enabled the regime to maintain control for so many decades is extremely tangible.

The very human stories in these pages, focusing on the children in Iran, whose childhood is being sacrificed to the need to provide for themselves and their families in times of severe hardship, put all our efforts into sharp context.

It is their courage and determination not to give up, no matter how hard life becomes, that encourages us to be their ever clearer voice and advocate.

The people in Iran are using every opportunity to protest and make their truth about the regime crystal clear; this clarity echoed by the parliamentarians here in Britain as they speak in support and urge our British government to take real and practical action. The momentum for change is here. It is time to dig deep within ourselves and put all our efforts into a big push to see this through to completion. We cannot thank you enough for being with us and look forward to celebrating with you on the other side of breakthrough.

DOWNED PASSENGER PLANE IGNITES NEW WAVE OF PROTESTS FOR 2020



Despite intense security measures to prevent them, people gathered at several locations across Iran to protest the downing of a passenger plane by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the notorious apparatus of the Supreme Leader for controlling and subverting the country's population. The bravery and resolve of the young protesters, often inspired by courageous women leading the crowds, stunned the world.

The protests started 3 days after the

Ukrainian airliner flight 752 was shot down on 8 January 2020 by missiles fired by an IRGC unit stationed near Tehran airport. For 3 days regime officials were telling lies to cover up the killing of 176 innocent civilians. On the third day an IRGC officer told a press conference that he had known right away that they had shot down the plane and had immediately informed his superiors. He did not actually disclose the name of his superiors, but they could ... continued on p.2

CROSS-PARTY PANEL CALLS FOR IRAN OFFICIALS TO BE REFERRED TO ICC



Lord Alton of Liverpool was among the many MPs and Peers who spoke on 21 January at a cross party conference on Iran and the fate of the 12,000 protesters who were recently detained for activism. In his concluding remarks, Lord Alton summed up the meeting and said:

The very people who are killing

their own people, who are massacring protesters, they are also the people who are destabilising their neighbours and the region. Think of the consequences there have been in the Yemen, think of the consequences in Syria, think of the consequences in Lebanon and then think about what has happened in Baghdad and the rest of Iraq as a result of Iranian interventions using further proxies, which of course resulted in the death of Soleimani, which has been referred to. Khamenei and Soleimani were two sides of one coin. They represent a pariah state, and pariahs at that who are corrupt and incompetent, brutal and intolerant.

So let me conclude by saying what we, the ... continued on p.2



Downed passenger plane

continued from p.1

only have been the Commander of the IRGC and his boss, the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

The regime officials were forced to admit their guilt only after international observers provided concrete evidence that the passenger plane was shot down by 2 missiles fired from the ground. The regime had tried to cover up the evidence and refused to deliver the plane's Black Box for inspection. The ground was bulldozed and evidence was buried. But, for all this effort, the conflicting stories of the Iranian authorities did not match up and they were finally forced to admit to the crime. However, the officials of various agencies then tried to play down the 'mistake'

and no one was held accountable. If a 'human error' was the cause of the killing of 176 people, those in positions of authority must be held to account. In a normal society many people are forced to resign or are sacked in these circumstances. But the Supreme Leader gave a Friday Prayer sermon in which he praised the IRGC and blamed the enemies of Iran for making an issue out of this episode.

As Iranian society is boiling with anger underneath the surface of oppression, a situation like this was just the spark needed to ignite a new wave of protests across the country that shook the regime to its foundations. These protests erupting just a few days after the regime had staged a funeral for the leader of the terrorist Qods Force, Qassem Soleimani, killed in Iraq on 3 January, put that recent event into sharp focus. Protesters chanted "Soleimani is a murderer, his Leader is also a murderer", referring to the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. The protesters were also chanting, "the mullahs must get lost", "they killed our geniuses".



In Zanjan, they were chanting: "Don't call me a seditionist! You're the seditionist, you dictator!", 'seditionist' being the term used by the Supreme Leader to describe the protesters. Protesters also expressed their utter disgust at the Revolutionary Guards, which has had a prominent role in suppressing protests and killing dissidents; "You are our ISIS", the protesters were chanting in Mashhad, north-western Iran.



Protesters held up photos of slain passengers of the plane most of whom were students or university graduates



The Guards were in full gear to crush the protests.

Cross-party panel *continued from p.1*

United Kingdom, can do. We are a respected member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, we are a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and we should be playing a much more leading role in adopting a firm international policy against the regime in Iran. The UK Government should take these steps: it should proscribe, as we heard earlier, the IRGC and Iran's regime's Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the MOIS, in their entirety as terrorist organisations. The United Kingdom should join the US campaign of maximum pressure on Iran and impose targeted sanctions on its officials and leaders of the clerical regime, and I applaud the fact that the Government is introducing what are called Magnitsky powers. I hope that they might use them on some of those I've just described. The United Kingdom should be working with regional, European and international allies to oust the clerical regime from the region by expelling the IRGC and its proxy militias from Iraq, from Syria, from Yemen, from Lebanon and

from Afghanistan, and it should work with international allies at the UN and the EU to reinstate the sixth UN Security Council Resolutions on Iran's regime's nuclear weapons programme and UN sanctions on Iran. We should take immediate steps at the Security Council to declare leaders of the clerical regime as perpetrators of crimes against humanity: four decades of systematic human rights abuses. We should be seeking a referral, at the

very minimum, to the International Criminal Court, and if that is vetoed and blocked we should be helping to establish a regional tribunal to bring those to justice who have been responsible for these atrocities. So let me end by saying those atrocities include the killing of over 1500 protesters and the brutal crackdown on the recent popular uprising as well as the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners in Iran's prisons.





STORY OF HARD WORKING WOMEN OF IRAN



Koulbari, carrying heavy loads on one's back, is one of those harsh pseudo jobs that, with the deteriorating economic situation in Iran, especially in the western border regions of the country, is increasingly lashing the body and soul of the people of this region.

Women, who normally have no social support, have no choice but to resort to Koulbari in order to support themselves and their families. At work they face the danger of being shot at by the Revolutionary Guards who patrol the area to prevent the "illicit" trade.

Twenty-one year old Tahmineh says: "Some days we had to stay in hiding for hours in heavy snow which sometimes covers our whole body, and wait for the guards to leave the area before we could continue our way and carry our heavy load again. For a while we were carrying sugar out and bringing in tea. But now, with the dollar being so expensive we can't buy anything with our money. We have to just carry something, anything to sell and make some money for survival."

A young girl with a thick Kurdish accent introduces herself as Heuva, and talks with sorrow of the days she used to escort her father to the hillside. "Every time my dad went for Koulbari, I couldn't sleep and waited for him to come back. Seven years ago he went to the mountains and never came back. We no longer had a breadwinner. We should do something to help ourselves. I had to start Koulbari, because there is no other job available.

"At the beginning it was very hard, but I had to get used to it. More or less men notice that I am a woman, but our living condition is so hard and difficult that they do understand my condition and if they can they help me get on with the heavy load. I wish I was stronger so that I could do this job more frequently. Every time I go and come back, I get severe back ache for a few days. I know many women who do this job and go to the mountains several times a month, along with their husbands. It is quite hard job, carrying 30 to 40 kg load for 4-5 hours on your back in mountains, and then taking back the same weight the same length of time and same route. But there is no other choice.

"During these 8 years that I am doing this job, I have seen many different people that are doing this job because of the circumstances of their lives. Some of them are highly educated and have a master's degree, but can't find another job.

"One day a man walked over a mine while carrying the load and lost his leg. No one was with us to help him. I left my load there and took the wounded man to the village clinic with a mule while all my clothes were soaked in blood. I was just crying.

"Every time I say goodbye to my children I think to myself, what will happen to them if I am not back this time.

"Many days when I made some money with thousands of misfortunes and then bought some goods to take home, I was confronted with Revolutionary Guards who took away my goods and I had to go back home with empty hands. I have no other option but to do it again."

Another woman said, "Don't write my name. My kids don't like me to talk about my work. They are not happy but what can I do? I have no choice."

The tale of these women is the bitter story of the people living in western Iran who, due to lack of jobs, mountains become their work place to earn meagre amounts by carrying heavy loads across impassable crossings. These days the hard work of Koulbari is no longer a men's job, it has become a common job for women too.

Since several years ago, livestock and agriculture in the western regions of Iran are no longer profitable jobs. The colour of women's clothing has changed and has become more like men's clothing so that they would be able to cross the mountains and treacherous roads with a masculine

appearance. In that part of Iran one can easily see queues of women who are the breadwinner for their families and their feminine zeal takes them to mountains to do the hard job of Koulbari.





TEENAGERS CARRYING HEAVY LOADS DIE IN SNOW

Rahim, father of Azad and Farhad, is an old man in the village of Ney near Marivan in the province of Kurdistan, western Iran. When he was young and able to work, he was a labourer, but gradually he lost his eyesight and then no one gave him a job. So, his sons had to do coolie jobs to earn a living.



Carrying heavy loads in mountainous passages to avoid the guards has been the only way for many families in that region to earn a living.

On 17 December 2019, Rahim's 14-year-old son Farhad was carrying a

heavy load along with his 17-year-old brother, Azad, when they got stuck in a snowstorm at the Tate ridge on the top of the Jalaneh mountain. It was the first time the two brothers were doing this job and the loads were heavy.

Local villagers set out to find the brothers after learning that they were stuck in the blizzard. Farhad's body was found after 3 days near a road. The body of Azad had been found two days earlier with Farhad's jacket on him. It appears that Farhad had left Azad to go and look for help. His body was found near the road to the city of Huraman.

The pictures and videos of the search for the brothers was widely circulated on social media and generated anger against the authorities. In their funeral procession

in the city of Marivan protesters were chanting "The Revolutionary Guards are responsible for this murder".



MOHAMMAD AND HIS SISTER GHAZAL

"Mam, please buy a chewing gum from me, for God's sake", "Sir, please buy a flower. It's cheap, please buy one for your spouse".... they beg and we just watched their childish innocence behind their repeated insistence. Innocence, which is gradually fading into the realities of the street. These children continually try to find more effective words to persuade passersby to buy their stuff, instead of playing children's games, study or perhaps having some comfort at a warm home, away from misery.



Grandma's voice caresses Mohammed's ear, and he slowly wakes up, washes his face and takes his sells bags which include some socks and chewing gums, and begins to leave home. But grandma points to Ghazal and says: "It's time to take her with you to work. You alone can't bring enough for our everyday expenses and I can't work anymore".

Mohammad looks at Ghazal and says: "No, I do it alone because she cannot tolerate it. She is just a child, and she is a girl and cannot defend herself. You know I walk the whole day and she is too young to do that, she gets tired."

Mohammad went out. No one is buying anything from him. He told himself, "If it goes this way, I can't go to school anymore, and can't pay our rent and our daily expenses."

Schools start soon and Ghazal must go to school too. Mohammad has just finished year 6 and must now start high school. "How can I leave school? It is not possible", he tells himself.

It is about noon. He has earned just a few hundred tomans (about 50 pence). He wants to eat something, but what if he cannot earn enough money till night? He changes his mind and continues walking on and asking people to buy something from him. Late in the evening he goes home desperately. He says nothing. Ghazal sits next to him and says: "Don't be upset, take me with you tomorrow". Ghazal begs Mohammad and finally he agrees to take her with him, but he says: "Just wait for a few days".

His grandma says: "You did a good job of not breaking her heart, Mohammad".

Grandma then tells him that his parents' precious possessions are all finished. "We sold them all", she

tells Mohammad. "Today I went to the corner shop to get some rice and cooking oil. He said I can't sell you on credit anymore".

Granny then told Mohammad: "I begged him this time but we need to pay his money sooner, as he has his own thousands of troubles". Grandma's eyes were full of tears.



Mohammad left and came home late at night with a gift for his sister that made her very happy. This special gift is not a toy. It is a tool for work, but she is so happy.

Mohammad says: "From tomorrow, you can come with me to work".

Tears flow from the old woman's eyes as she told them, "My beloved grandchildren, you deserve to study in the best schools, to have the best toys to play with, but you haven't seen any happiness in your childhood, and I'm so sorry that I can only pray for you."



A LETTER FROM A YOUNG VOLUNTEER



My name is Amir Hossein, 15 years old and high school student. My mother and I had to leave our motherland, when I was a little child. I am happy for being here, but my mum says nowhere is like one's homeland, and she thinks about Iran, our culture and history, all the

time. She constantly talks about Iran and its beauties.

We can't go to Iran because if we go, we will be arrested. They have

taken entire properties of my parents and my uncle's.

My aunts and uncle are very kind to me. They spend most of their times volunteering for ILA. They always think about Iran and the political prisoners and their children and work hard to help them.

My mother does her best to help me focus on my education, but when she goes for volunteering work, I go with her. I feel so good that I just don't think about myself and I am concerned about the children of prisoners and child labourers in Iran and I always try to do something to help them. I always think about them. I know if I had been in Iran, I would have a life like other children of political prisoners.

Sometimes I thought to myself, what is their sin, why can't they study?

It's a basic children's right.

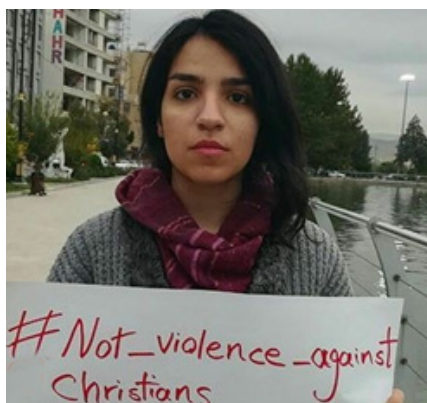
Last year, I was Santa with uncle Jamshid at ILA Christmas party. It was very good.

My mother always says that Iranians are clever and talented, but in poverty and discrimination, they are overwhelmed and cannot find the opportunity to use it.

How terrible it is for young people at my age to become a Koulbar. They have to cross the impassable heights and mountains to earn just enough to eat bread. Or others, who suffer from missing their parents who are in prison due to their human rights activities, or like children of Pastor Nadarkhani, are not allowed to study because they are Christians.

Some day I would love to be able to visit my motherland with all its beauty and rich culture. Hoping for that day!

CONVICTED FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN!



Fatemeh Mohammadi is deprived of her education for being a Christian and is now arrested and there is no information about her situation yet.

After going to university to enrol, the Christian convert from Tehran was informed that her name had been removed from the university registration process because she is a Christian.

Fatemeh Mohammadi was arrested near Tehran's Azadi Square and taken to an unknown location as protests

began following the shooting down of a Ukrainian passenger plane by the Revolutionary Guards.

Fatemeh had been arrested before and had been flogged because of her belief.

This is just one of thousands of cases where Christians are systematically not allowed to study and engage in social and political activity or even to hold religious ceremonies and are arrested, detained and imprisoned.

WHY DOES LIFE SMELL LIKE BLOOD?

Excerpts from a letter by a young daughter missing her imprisoned mum and dad.

My name is Atefeh Ahmadi, I am 15 years old. My parents are Dervish. Both of them were beaten and wounded severely in the morning of 22 February [last year]. Then they were arrested and sent to detention centre. I have got a little sister, Atieh, she asks about our mum all the time. She cries a lot. She has become fractious.

It is 154 days that my sister and I are alone, although we have parents. I have to play the role of a mother for my little sister, but most of the time I cannot do it well. My sister wants to hear our mother's voice, but the

prison authorities have closed the phones and don't let her talk to us.

I thought if I wear my mum's clothing and sleep next to my little sister, maybe her smell would make my sister calm and she could sleep but the smell has gone. I thought maybe I could get her clothes from her arrest time, but those may have a blood smell as my mum was beaten and wounded when they arrested her...

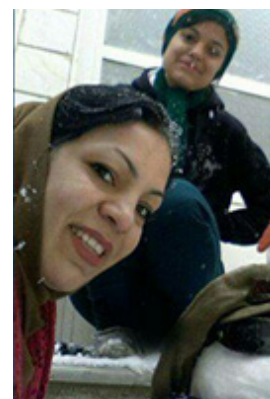
... the security forces had attacked the dervishes and had beaten them. They beat my mother with a baton. Her face was bloody. Her clothes were bloody.

When Atieh cries, I feel sorry for her but I wish I was her; because she can at least cry and empty herself. But,

what about me? I have to swallow my cries...

I would like to go to visit my mum and ask her why life smells like blood? What we have done?

What is our sin? What have we done that our hair, face, and clothes should have a blood smell? I would like to go to the prison and ask my mum, but I am sure when I see her I will cry so much that the whole prison along with all its prisoners and guards will drown into my tears.





OUR EVENT IN NORTH LONDON

In ILA's social evening in North London on 25 January Lord Clarke of Hampstead, former Chair of the Labour Party, and Mark Williams, former MP for Ceredigion, were the speakers. Following are excerpts of their speeches.



Mark Williams: It is an honour to be here this afternoon, but, you know, when you hear those testimonials of those injured people, when you see those films of what's going on, firstly it humbles you, doesn't it? So we've just gone through, some of us unsuccessfully, others successfully, a great experience of democracy. But whatever the outcome of that election, you know, we had the opportunity to take part, we had the opportunity to assemble freely, we have the opportunity as supporters of the International Liberty Association to be here on a gloomy January afternoon in London. We have the opportunity to assemble and talk, and talk about great causes without fear of repercussions, without fear of people being at the door or listening devices. We have that freedom which I really value, and firstly I just want to say thank you to the International Liberty Association and all our friends for bringing us together.

We are grateful to you for bringing us together, to socialise but also to be educated on what's going on.

I don't often agree with Donald Trump; however, I saw one of his tweets on that screen when he said he was inspired by the courage [of protesters]. And I do agree with Donald Trump on that. I'm sure we all do. People there on those streets, not wearing masks, not hiding in the shadows, but democratically trying, trying against the forces of tyranny, to campaign for their rights and their liberties. And so I do, and I'm sure you do too, salute those brave people many thousands of miles away in Tehran and elsewhere. We do indeed salute their bravery.



Lord Tony Clarke: May I say what a great pleasure it is to be here, sharing this evening with you. There's so much one could say, but I know that all of you are dedicated supporters of the cause, so you don't need me to tell you or to give you a litany of the dreadful goings-on of the regime in Iran.

Earlier this week, we had a meeting in Parliament, where we saw some very interesting people, we saw people's indignation about the plane being shot down, we saw the indignation of the repression, the terrible goings-on where peaceful, innocent protesters were being slaughtered by the regime. We saw, on that day, a number of MPs and some Peers who were able to say they will continue to fight. My message to them on that day is to – not necessary to you this evening because I know you are committed people – but the MPs that got elected have a special responsibility to draw attention to what's going on in Iran and the influence it's having on neighbouring countries around Iran and the bitter, dreadful, inhumane activities of a regime that thinks nothing of killing its own people.

We're particularly proud of the people in Iran who actually get the message out to us at great risk to themselves. You've only got to look at those boards there to see the tragedy

of the waste of human life and their murderous activities.

Now I'm one of the old-fashioned people who – I'm supposed to be, as a Christian, forgive and forget but I know I can't forgive what's going on. I can't forgive the viciousness with which they have attacked their own people and the way that they have spread terrorism throughout the region and other parts of the world. No, as an old-fashioned person I just feel that sometimes we've got to speak out. And at the moment I think we should be speaking out more about Rouhani and his past.

Rouhani was responsible for so many deaths in 1988 in the massacre. We've got to keep that message coming out.

We want our MPs and we want the people in positions of influence to talk about how inhumane it is to be an Iranian citizen, and as you know, I came from just across the road in North West Three, in Hampstead, and one of the residents there is in jail at this moment. She's been in jail for a long while on a trumped-up charge. We've got to keep on the pressure and keep exposing what they're doing.



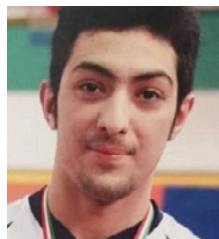
ILA volunteers performed an act to highlight the innocence of those killed in protests across Iran in recent weeks.





NEWS IN BRIEF

JUVENILE OFFENDER'S EXECUTION WAS POSTPONED



Following an intense international campaign to stop execution of child offenders, the execution of Arman Abdola'li,

who was only 17 years old at the time of the alleged offence, was halted due to the intervention of the family of the victim Arman is accused of killing.

AID IS NOT REACHING VICTIMS OF FLOOD IN SOUTHEAST IRAN



Heavy floods in Sistan and Baluchestan, an already underdeveloped province in south-east Iran, as well as two adjacent provinces, have so far killed four, injured several, and displaced thousands of others, since early January. The severe rainfall and flooding blocked roads, destroyed houses and displaced thousands of people in the provinces of Kerman, Sistan and Baluchestan, as well as Hormozgan Province in the south, over the past days.

The floods have affected 500 villages and 14 towns in Sistan and Baluchestan province alone and 20,000 homes have been damaged or destroyed.

AUSTRALIAN-BRITISH ACADEMIC ON HUNGER STRIKE IN IRANIAN JAIL



Australian-British academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert, is on hunger strike in Iranian jail.

Cambridge educated Moore-

Gilbert is a lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne. She holds both Australian and British citizenships, but was travelling on her Australian passport when she was detained at Tehran airport, about to board a flight out of the country after attending an academic conference.

Melbourne University lecturer Kylie Moore-Gilbert has been held in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran since October 2018.

NEW ACCUSATION AGAINST PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

The IRGC and the authorities of Evin Prison have filed new cases against civil activist prisoner Atena Daemi. The anti-death penalty activist stood trial on Sunday, 26 January, 2020, at Branch 3 of the Evin Prosecutor's Office, headed by Allahyari.

Ms Daemi has been accused of collusion and assembly against national security for "celebrating during prison's silence hours on



11 November 2019 during the holy month of Muharram; issuing a statement against the death penalty on 8 October 2019; releasing a statement along with 17 other inmates on the imprisoned mothers' plea for justice on 8 November 2019; holding a sit-in outside the prison office for several hours to protest being denied family visits and demanding to know the reason; insulting and accusing prison guards for being deprived of family visits on 2 November 2019; participating in a sit-in on 21 December 2019 along with 7 other inmates; and 'forcing' her fellow inmates to pass her statements out of prison."

The civil activist prisoner was threatened during her trial on 26 January 2020, to be exiled to a prison in a distant city.

IRAN'S SOLE FEMALE OLYMPIC MEDALLIST DEFECTED

Kimia Alizadeh, the first Iranian woman to win an Olympic medal after claiming bronze in the 57kg category of Taekwondo at the 2016 Rio Olympics, has defected the country and is no longer competing under the Iranian flag.



In her announcement on her Instagram page she wrote: "I am one of the millions of oppressed women in Iran who they [the authorities] have been playing with for years."

"My troubled spirit does not fit with your dirty economic ties and tight political lobbies. I wish for nothing else than Taekwondo, safety, and for a happy and healthy life," she told the officials who had exploited her for years.

PRISONER RELEASED ON BAIL



Soha Mortazai, a graduate student in Human Science and former secretary of the Central Student

Council of the University of Tehran, was released on bail on Wednesday, 22 January, from Qarchak prison. Ms Mortazai had been arrested by security forces during the November 2019 protests and transferred to the Revolutionary Guards' detention centre in Evin Prison and eventually to Qarchak Prison. Ms Mortazai went on hunger strike shortly after she was transferred to Qarchak prison on 31 December.



INTERNATIONAL LIBERTY ASSOCIATION CORDIALLY INVITES YOU AND YOUR FAMILY TO THE FOLLOWING ILA EVENTS:

ILA EVENT FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

4.30PM–8.00PM
SATURDAY
7 MARCH 2019

St John's Church
Lansdowne Crescent
London W11 2NN



ILA NORUZ CELEBRATION

3.00PM–7.00PM SATURDAY 18 APRIL 2020

Porchester Hall, Porchester Road, London W2 5HS

Spring, rebirth of nature, is a time for celebration and reunion. ILA trustees and volunteers cordially invite you to take part in our NoRuz celebration which is shared by all who care about nature and humanity and includes elements of the spirit of Easter and Passover.



Please let us know whether you can attend by email, post or telephone.