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End Modern Slavery

Liz Lynne

It is estimated that 200 years after the abolition of the slave trade, a staggering 12 million people still live in slavery. Half of them are children and trafficking accounts for a vast amount of those. The UN estimates that between 700,000 and 2 million women and children are trafficked around the world every single year.

Many will be forced into prostitution. Others will be used as forced labour or domestic servants. It is estimated that between 1,000 and 4,000 women, girls and boys, some as young as ten, are trafficked into Britain alone each year. They are used for sexual exploitation, yet when discovered, they are all too often treated as criminals or illegal immigrants, not victims of crime. We have to change that. Surely they have gone through enough already in their lives without us adding to their problems. It is also self-defeating because their traffickers play on their fears that authorities in a strange country will prosecute or deport them if they ask for help.

So many of them are too scared even to try and escape because of what will happen to them if they do. They end up staying where they are to be beaten and exploited by their captors yet again. One police force in the UK estimate trafficked women who have been forced into prostitution see between 20- 30 men per day. Many victims, on the other hand, are told if they try to escape their families at home will suffer.

This is by any standards an intolerable situation yet still not enough is being done to combat it. The British Government, most other EU States and countries around the world have done little to combat this vile trade. Many of them do not even acknowledge the extent of it. That is why I, and others in the European Parliament, have been trying to highlight the issue with Questions, Debates and Resolutions trying to make people more aware. We tried to do this with the run up to the World Cup in Germany pointing out that more sex slaves will be used.

Here it is important to make the distinction between forced prostitution and prostitutes who choose to do it. My concern has always been and always will be with those who have been forced into it against their will and we must not confuse the issue.

I would like to pay tribute to all those organisations in this country and across the world who are trying to raise awareness but it is up to Governments to act. It is disgraceful that the British Government has not signed up to the Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking. This gives, among other things, the victim a breathing period to decide whether they want to help to prosecute the trafficker. Invariably, what happens now is the victim is deported only in many cases to be re-trafficked. That has to stop. The UK and other EU countries must look at giving residence permits to victims of trafficking in compliance with the Council of Europe Convention and the EU Council Directive 2004/81/EC, which incidentally the British Government have opted out of.

A network of safe havens must be set up across Britain and the rest of Europe which will provide medical care, counselling and legal advice. We have precisely one at the moment in England, the Poppy Project, which caters for 25 women. They do an excellent job but we need more, many more to help the victims like the Lithuanian women trafficked to London who in her own words said, "I am scared for no reason. I think that someone is behind the door, window. Someone will find me, pick me up, beat me and kill me. I have run off and they are looking for me. My mood changes all the time. I cannot control my mind." Like the Romanian woman in Italy, "The strongest feeling is that I want to die. I feel tired of fighting alone." We have a duty to help victims like these.

We also need governments to launch awareness campaigns targeted at potential victims and to support campaigns like 'Business Travellers Against Trafficking'. Police forces should follow the lead of the South Yorkshire, West Midlands and Metropolitan Police in mounting major intelligence led operations like Operation Pentameter which led to the release of 84 women and girls since February. 12 of these victims were aged between 14 and 17. I congratulate the police who have visited 515 premises and arrested 232 people. We need more of the same.

Employers and Trade Unions must play their part. They must work together to uncover and support victims of trafficking.

It is only by highlighting this evil trade will we begin to find solutions. We have no right in a civilised world to sit idly by and allow governments to avoid their responsibilities.

Speech by Liz Lynne MEP for Policy Motion F46 End Modern Slavery and Trafficking, Liberal Democrat Conference 20th September 2006



Ming's Speech...

The international bits.

Labour has put our civil liberties under threat. Labour believes that terrorism should be tackled by taking away personal freedoms. Let me be very clear – Terrorism is a threat to everything that liberals stand for - individual freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

We support this government when it provides the police and security services with powers and resources when these are truly justified. It was, after all, the Liberal Democrats who won the argument for the creation of the new criminal offence of acts preparatory to terrorism.

But a strong and safe society can only be created if communities work together to tackle these threats.

Excessive powers - and the excessive use of powers - alienate the very communities we need on our side.

Terrorism thrives where civil liberties are denied. That is why Liberal Democrats, under my leadership, will fight to maintain the principles of the Human Rights Act. That is why Liberal Democrats, under my leadership, will fight for the independence of judges and the rule of law. That is why Liberal Democrats, under my leadership, will fight against any acceptance of torture.

And if the proposal comes back – and it will – we will fight to ensure that the government cannot imprison people for ninety days without trial or charge. When

tackling terrorism, we must recognise that how we act abroad is as important as how we act at home.

We should all be proud of the contribution the United Kingdom has made to democracy, to the values of tolerance and diversity, to the spread of the rule of law. But in a few short years, Britain's reputation has been tarnished.

In foreign policy, the Prime Minister has elevated belief over evidence, conviction over judgement, and instinct over understanding. Put quite simply, he has presided over a foreign policy which is neither ethical nor effective. Week after week in Parliament, the Prime Minister has had to lead tributes to the members of the armed forces who have been killed in action. Since Parliament last sat in July, another 29 have died. We must never forget the price that we ask the men and women of our armed forces to pay.

In Iraq we are approaching a state of civil war. Hundreds dying every week. Terrorism taking root.

And all the while, Guantanamo Bay stands as a shameful affront to justice and the rule of law. Secret prisons, rendition, the suspicion of torture. How can those who operate outside the rule of law argue credibly for its observance in Iraq? We Liberal Democrats will not shrink from our responsibility to challenge the government for the consequences of its decisions. Security is not being gained, it is being lost. Terrorism is not being defeated, it is being invigorated. Freedom is not being spread, it is being undermined.



Exec member Sue Simmonds with Davis Frous, Third Secretary of the Embassy of the Czech Republic.

On the Middle East let us be clear. We do not underestimate the difficulties for Israel – in dealing with Hezbollah or a government in the Palestinian territories led by Hamas. Hamas must recognise the state of Israel. It must renounce violence. And it must accept existing peace accords. These remain the necessary conditions for the development of long term peace.

But there will be no peace in the Middle East while the Palestinians are subject to daily humiliation, settlements are expanded on the West Bank and the Palestinian people have no viable homeland they can call their own. As long as this continues, Israel's legal and moral right to live in peace behind secure and recognized borders will be undermined.

And what, more recently, did Lebanon teach us?

Hezbollah's actions in kidnapping two Israeli soldiers were an outrage. So too was their shelling of innocent civilians in Israel. But the disproportionate response - the systematic destruction of roads, houses and bridges, the death and uprooting of so many innocent citizens - all of this has served to strengthen Hezbollah, not weaken it.

We Liberal Democrats led the call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. But the Prime Minister was silent. Yet again, Blair's Britain was out of step with everyone but the Bush administration.

But our country's reputation can be recovered. It can be recovered by a British government that works through international institutions and is unflinching in its support for the rule of law. I hope that at last our government recognises the depth of the crisis in Darfur. Hundreds of thousands dead - millions displaced - desperate for aid and in fear for their lives. You remember, in Rwanda the world looked the other way. It must not do so again. Britain must not do so again.



Sir Menzies Campbell & Ellen Kelly with Hon. Sec David Griffiths at the International Reception,

And now Mr Cameron expresses his reservations about Britain's foreign policy. Well I say to that – Where were you? Where were you when what was needed was not reservation but votes? I'll tell you where you were. You, Mr Cameron, were in the government lobby backing military action against Iraq. You should apologise for supporting that war.

Speech to the Liberal Democrat Conference, 21st September 2006

Friends of Israel Fringe

Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel (LDFI) enjoyed a well-attended and lively fringe meeting at this year's party conference. Our speaker was Gideon Sylvester, who works as an adviser in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, and who is in fact an ex-pat Brit, having gone to live in Israel after many years as the rabbi of Radlett Synagogue in Hertfordshire. He was speaking in a personal capacity, rather than directly on behalf of the Israeli Government.

LDFI invited Rabbi Sylvester to speak because we wanted a Liberal Democrat audience to hear an Orthodox Jew and mainstream Zionist speak about Israel's quest for peace, as that is not a perspective that many Lib Dems often get to hear. We particularly wanted to do this in light of this summer's conflict in Lebanon, about which passions have naturally run high in our party.

It is the general view of LDFI that Israel's actions in this war, while not beyond criticism, were not "disproportionate" in the manner suggested by many commentators. The Hizbullah attack in which two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped and others were killed was an attack by a well-armed movement which has pledged itself to Israel's destruction, a state within the Lebanese state which is not only part of Lebanon's government, but is also funded and armed by Syria and Iran, two states which choose to exist in a formal state of war with Israel. Israel had no choice but to take such action as would lead the Lebanese government and the UN to take steps to remove the Hizbullah threat from Israel's Lebanese border, as is now happening.

Hizbullah tactic of hiding among Lebanon's civilian population (which is in itself a war crime) meant that Israel's targeting of Hizbullah inevitably involved damage to civilian areas. Israel tried to mitigate this by warning Lebanese civilians when a particular area was going to be attacked, at great cost to Israel in terms of military advantage. The civilian casualties on both sides of this conflict were a tragedy, but there would have been no casualties at all (civilian or otherwise) if Hizbullah had not started this war. While Israel worked to minimise civilian casualties while fighting a war that can be called defensive, Hizbullah fired thousands of missiles with the express aim of killing as many civilians as possible, which Amnesty International has recently condemned as a war crime.

As Rabbi Sylvester put it at the meeting: "Hizbullah is not a ragtag group of guerrillas protecting Lebanon. It is a highly trained militia funded by Iran, which is dedicated to the destruction of Israel and the eradication of the liberal democratic values which we cherish."

Rabbi Sylvester's speech also covered the situation in the Palestinian territories. He noted that missiles have continued to be fired from the Gaza Strip since Israel withdrew its settlements from this disputed territory, setting a fearful example for Israeli public opinion for what might happen if Israel similarly withdrew settlements from the West Bank. The weapons fired from Gaza are intended to cause massive death and destruction, however inefficient they may often turn out to be in practice.

It is easy to imagine what the impact would be on British public opinion if missiles were regularly being fired at one of our towns and cities. It would hardly create a public mood of support for magnanimous

unilateral gestures towards the people who were firing the missiles, of which withdrawal of West Bank settlements would be an example.

Meanwhile the Hamas government refuses to abide by past agreements signed with Israel by the Palestinian Authority, refuses to recognise Israel's right to exist within any borders whatsoever and refuses to renounce violence against Israel. Let's remember that the violence concerned includes suicide bombings targeting civilians well within Israel's recognised pre-1967 borders. Let's also remember that Hamas is an organisation which, on its website, accuses Jews of conspiring with freemasons to cause the French Revolution and the two world wars. Hamas is to the Palestinian people what the Ku Klux Klan is to the American people.

The efforts of Fatah to join Hamas in a national unity government that would recognise Israel, abide by past agreements and renounce violence are to be applauded, but until such efforts succeed, it is difficult to see how Israel can realistically be expected to engage in peace talks with Hamas. As Rabbi Sylvester told the meeting: "Israel has demonstrated over and over again its commitment to the peace process and its willingness to make painful concessions. The Hamas government still refuses to recognise Israel, abandon violence and abide by the agreements made by the Palestinian Authority with Israel. In these circumstances, there is little hope for peace and Israel must do everything it can to protect its citizens from terror attacks."

On a more optimistic note, Rabbi Sylvester told the meeting of his extensive dialogue with Muslim faith leaders, including some who might not normally be considered palatable from an Israeli point of view. This dialogue symbolises Israel's ongoing efforts to win peace and security for itself, its neighbours and the Palestinians, but it is hard to be particularly optimistic about the current short-term outlook.

Matthew Harris, Press Officer, Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel

"It's Wrong To Force Israel To Defend Its Actions..."

The Palestine Solidarity Committee had its first ever stall at the Lib Dem Annual Conference at Brighton 18th to 21st September. But the Lib Dem 'Friends of Israel' pulled out the stops for its own Annual Reception, by having a Rabbi from Olmert's Office flown in especially. In addition to the presence of the Israeli Deputy Ambassador for good measure.

You knew it was serious when an Israeli Embassy Combined Security Team searched you before entering the Ambassador Suite of the Brighton Hilton Metropol Hotel. After you'd already had your bag checked by Lib Dem stewards at the entrance to the

Hotel. The Lib Dem 'Friends of Israel' Grouping had issued an open invitation to hear Rabbi Gideon Sylvester give 'his personal view of the situation in Israel'. They young man had just joined the Rabbinical team of Prime Minister Olmert's Office, and the Group had flown him from Israel especially for this Annual Reception.

Interestingly the Rabbi, in his treatise to the assembled invitees, mostly British Jews, referred to 'the land of Palestine'. Rabbi Sylvester then spoke of Israel's 'difficult moments' –of the magnanimous pull-out from Gaza, which tore out the heart and conscience of Israel, who clearly wanted peace so desperately that they gave up land and townships in the hope the Palestinians would carry on using the greenhouses left for them to grow food crops. And all they did, he said, was grow missiles and send them to us. The fact that Gaza was an open prison for Palestinians before the pull-out and that it remains an open prison now, and is near to humanitarian collapse, was not discussed.

He spoke of how Hizb'Allah stockpiled its weapons of destruction whilst the UN did nothing. Israel's response to two kidnapped soldiers was 'possibly not' proportional. But as a response to the 4000 missiles fired, then definitely 'Yes' he said. He spoke of the plight of the poor frightened Israeli children and UN Resolution 1701 and said "The world must stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel in these difficult times."

The question was asked about the Security Wall and what Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni had said about it being built with as much consideration to the Palestinians as possible- about how it cut through Anata Junior School. The Deputy Ambassador said it was a price to pay to keep people alive. The Rabbi supported her by saying that it was "wrong to force Israel to defend its actions. We try to provide reasonable responses to unreasonable situations".



Demonstrators against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Trafalgar Square, 30th July 2006

Interestingly, questions on cluster bombs were met with the response that it was a legal weapon of war,

when repeatedly pressed for an explanation as to why the IDF had used them, by several Jewish ladies at the meeting, who were clearly not at all content with the justification proffered.

After the meeting Rabbi Sylvester spoke to me one-to-one and I detailed to him the scenes of deprivation, control and lack of freedom of movement, access to medical services and to education for the Palestinians that I had seen first hand on a visit there last month. He said if it stopped a suicide bomber it was all worth it.

George Small

Packed Meeting of Lib Dem International Group enlivened by pro-Israeli hecklers

Lord Garden chaired a packed meeting of the Lib Dem International Group which was so well attended several extra chairs were needed. The talk was on Palestine and the EU – Ways Forward; guest speaker for the Lebanese view was the Chairman of the Centre for Lebanese Studies George Asseily, and presenting the Palestinian standpoint was the Palestine General Delegate, Professor Manuel Hassassian. The meeting witnessed a harrowing factual account of the social, economic and infrastructural impact of the Israeli ground and air offensive and continued sea blockade. Particular regret was voiced by the Lebanese speaker who described that in the 24 hours leading up to the ceasefire, Israeli forces delivered more cluster bombs in that last period than at any time in the preceding 33 days.

For the Palestinian side, Professor Hassassian gave a pithy and emotive resume of the failed opportunities of the last 15 years. He said he was convinced that Israel was not interested in peace, but rather land. His impassioned description of the effects of occupation clearly rankled with a small number of pro-Israeli members of the audience who repeatedly interrupted and heckled the speaker.

One member of the audience suggested that the EU should suspend its Trade Association Agreement with Israel given the customs, tax and clamp down on free passage of goods Israel enforces on Palestinian businesses to hinder the development of a viable Palestinian economy. Israel on the other hand, exports 60% of its goods to the EU unfettered. Might such a measure give the Israeli Government a clear message that the EU would no longer tolerate Israeli suppression of Palestinian trade? Sadly not, replied MEP Liz Lynne, who explained that she and like-minded MEPs had tried repeatedly to get the EU to suspend its Trade Association with Israel owing to the many violations and breaches viz-a-viz Palestine. But each time any such motions were put on the Parliament agenda, they were outvoted. Matters were made especially difficult in achieving fairness for Palestine, Liz continued, because of the overriding political veto of the Council of Ministers. But Liz and others would keep trying.

Responding to the heckling from a persistent interrupter, Professor Hassassian explained that Hamas was forced into being by the repressive occupation policies and actions of the Israeli Knesset and military. To which the heckler replied “So what?”

The meeting also heard the view that it was difficult to take official Israeli Government announcements regarding its desire for peace, given that both Prime Ministers Sharon and Barak had instructed settler groups to ‘grab the hills, grab the land’ and establish settlements ahead of any final resolutions or binding peace agreements. This intent was borne out, the audience heard, by the ever-faster expansion of settlements in violation of international law and many UN Resolutions. Particular reference was made to the East Jerusalem settlement of Ma’ale Adumim, which was being extended eastwards to connect with a settlement block near Jericho. Once this connection was complete, it would separate northern Palestine from its southern territory, thus making a contiguous Palestinian State impossible.

Lord Garden worked very hard in ensuring the meeting ran smoothly, despite the disruptions from the small but loud group of pro-Israeli Government hecklers, and there was a long and enthusiastic round of applause for the two guest speakers at this packed meeting.

LI(BG) Fringe - another view

I cannot write a separate article about Liberal International's meeting on Lebanon, as I was not there (I was chairing another fringe meeting), and most of LDFT's active members had left Brighton before Wednesday evening, and so were not there either. However, my one comment would be to express grave dissatisfaction at the lack of an Israeli speaker at this meeting, to balance the debate. I appreciate that LIBG had already had a separate meeting addressed by the Israeli Ambassador at the NLC, but that was an entirely separate debate from the one that took place at the Brighton meeting. I've been told that Liberal International believed that no Israeli speaker could be found to speak alongside a Lebanese speaker. This is not true, as it is Lebanon which refuses to recognise Israel and not vice versa; if Liberal International was finding it difficult to find an Israeli speaker, LDFT would have been delighted to assist in finding someone who would have proved acceptable to you, eg somebody from Peace Now UK, who would have expressed an Israeli viewpoint while also understanding Liberal International's reservations about Israeli policy. All I would say for the future is that we are here to help and look forward to more balanced debates in future - a debate about a war in which Israel was a party, without an Israeli speaker, is not a true debate at all.

Matthew Harris

PSC Stall at Brighton Conference

Thanks to the generosity of a supporter of justice for the Palestinian people, the PSC was able to have a stall in the Exhibition Area of the Conference. This was a remarkable and welcome ‘first’ for the PSC because it

meant that visitors to the Conference could access literature and other information spelling out the devastating effects on Palestinian families of nearly 40 years of Occupation and suppression.

The stall was very well placed at the front of the Exhibition on a main entrance concourse and it attracted many visitors, enquirers and signatories to the current petition. One notable visitor was Lord Jacob, staunch supporter of the Lib Dem Friends of Israel group. Thanks to PSC Brighton who ran the stall, its first ever presence at a Lib Dem Annual Conference was a success, attracting some 30 visitors each day.

Baroness Jenny Tonge has untapped widespread support for the formation of a Lib Dem Friends of Palestine. But she does not have the time or resource to found such a grouping on her own. It is hoped that if enough like-minded volunteers can be found within the Lib Dems, a group can be established to inform and educate about the situation in Palestine.

George Small

TIBET ATROCITIES

InterLib has long be concerned about the obscene violations of human rights by the People's Republic of China in occupied Tibet. Perhaps nothing so starkly illustrates these ongoing travesties of basic personal freedom than the slaughter of a young Tibetan nun and a other refugees, unarmed seeking to trek their way out of Tibet into Nepal. On this occasion cold blooded murder was recorded by a TV cameraman who happened to be with a team of international mountaineers who witnessed the atrocity.

In a sickening video shoot by a Romanian mountaineer, the Chinese border security were caught on camera shooting dead and wounding other refugees as they tried to escape across a 19,000 foot mountain pass. The video can be seen at <http://www.protv.ro/>, it is in Romanian, but the video is clear, and disturbing. The video is entitled 'Imagini în exclusivitate din Himalaya, cu execuția unui tibetan', and it maybe in their short archive list so scroll down.

Extraordinarily, the Chinese government actually responded by saying that the border guards were acting in self defence. MountEverest.net [Friday, October 13, 2006 09:17] gives the story Chinese border guards: "We killed in self-defence"

Guards forced to defend themselves? "The refugees were completely defenceless kids and youngsters, hunted like rats," say climbers. Half-an-hour later 14 children were marched through ABC in single file.

"They didn't see us - they weren't looking around the way kids normally would, they were too frightened," reported one climber. Image of some of the children and border guards, courtesy of Slovenian climber Pavle Kozjek China admits to the Nangpa La shootings but

claims self-defense. A Xinhua report quoted by AP said that the people trying to cross the border attacked the soldiers, who were then "forced to defend themselves." One person was reported killed and 2 were injured, including one who died later of altitude sickness.

This first official Chinese confirmation of the border incident appeared only hours after a foreign ministry spokes-man said he could not verify foreign news reports of a border incident in the Himalayas, according to Al Jazeera.

"I've seen the reports about this, but I've no knowledge of the specific situation," Liu Jianchao, a ministry spokesman, told a news conference in Beijing writes the news source.

The Times writes that such an official confirmation is rare and that the government in the restive region of Tibet may have felt forced to respond by mountaineers' witness statements.

The Times also writes that the official version did not clarify why armed border guards, who are often equipped with semi-automatic rifles, would need to shoot to defend themselves in a country where firearms are banned among civilians.

The refugees were mostly kids led by a young nun who was shot dead and a number of young adults. Out of the group of 70 people, 40 escaped but 30 still remain unaccounted for.

The refugees and also climbers on the spot have reported a different picture than the one offered by Chinese officials today.

While information was initially slow, more and more climbers have come forward in the last few days. An American climber reported to ExWeb, "Without warning, shots rang out. Over, and over and over. The line of people started to run uphill – they were at 19,000ft. 2 people were down, and they weren't getting up." A British climber told Save Tibet that climbers "could see Chinese soldiers quite close to Advance Base Camp kneeling, taking aim and shooting, again and again, at the group, who were completely defenceless."

Filipino climbing doctor Ted Esguerra said he saw at least three people - two women and a man - shot dead, while Romanian climber Sergiu Matei, reported, "The Chinese militias were hunting Tibetans onto the glacier... shooting them like rats, dogs, rabbits - you name it."

A monk refugee said he don't know how many were shot in the end, but that 14 kids, aged 8-10, were captured along with 16 young adults. The nun, who was killed, was leading the children.

The International Campaign for Tibet organization reported that the children and young adult refugees stated they fled Tibet to get an opportunity to go to school and practice their religion in peace.

Roberta Pumer

MARRAKECH

Members are reminded that the 54th LI Congress takes place in Marrakech on 9th-11th November. Details & forms can be obtained from the LI website <http://www.liberal-international.org> - click on Congress and follow through.

Liberal Democrats wishing to attend might wish to do so as party (rather than British Group) delegates. Contact Karla Hatrick, at Cowley Street 020 7227 1328 email k.hatrick@libdems.org.uk

Annual Dinner

Martin Bell will be the guest speaker at the LI(BG) Annual Dinner, which is held in the Dining Room of the Club on 20th November (6.30 for 7.00pm). He will join Lord Tim Garden and Paul Keetch MP. Tickets cost £38.00 (inclusive of drinks before & during the meal). Members of LI(BG) should apply to David Griffiths, 58 High Street, Bovingdon, Herts HP3 0HJ. Tel: 01442 834562

EVENTS

4th November CentreForum/Keynes Forum *Britain & the broader Middle East*. Regent's College, Regent's Park, London. 10.30am £55.00

8-11th November LI Executive - Marrakech

8th November 7:30 pm Medical Aid for Palestine: The Right to Health in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: A clash between power and responsibility". Speaker, Hadas Ziv, Executive Director of Physicians for Human Rights - Israel. Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London

20th November LI(BG) Dinner NLC

12th December Christmas Mince Pie Party, NLC

NLC= National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE
Underground: Embankment

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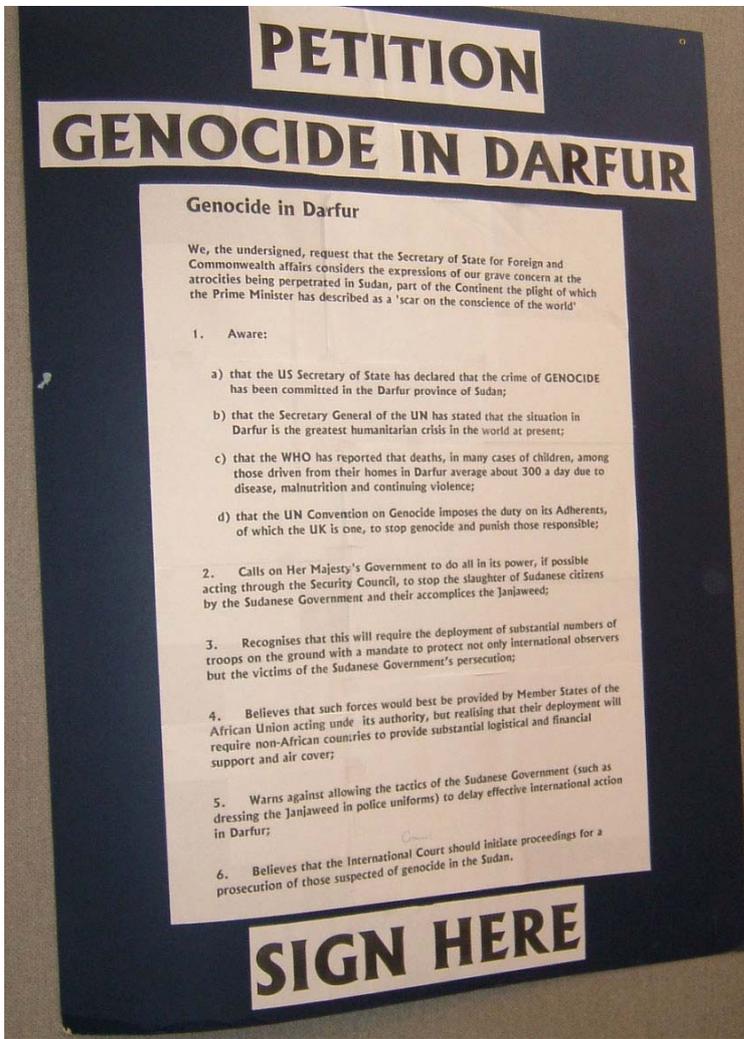
Some Brighton Snapshots...



Sharon & Tim



Tim with Palestinian speaker



Alexander Vigandt, board member, Yabloko St Petersburg branch, and Maxim Reznik (right) branch chairman



Iztok Mirošič, Ambassador of Slovenia



Sharon, Jonathan and Tim wait to greet guests at the International reception



LIBG exec member Baldev Sharma with L Edwin Pollard, Barbados High Commissioner



Ahmed Mallick staffs the stall