

## **What is Amnesty International?**

Amnesty International is a worldwide campaigning movement that works to promote internationally recognized human rights.

Amnesty International's vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards. Our mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of our work to promote all human rights.

Amnesty International has more than a million members and supporters in over 140 countries and territories. Amnesty International is impartial and independent of any government, political persuasion or religious creed. Our work is financed largely by subscriptions and donations from our worldwide membership.

"We could always tell when international protests were taking place... the food rations increased and the beatings were fewer. Letters from abroad were translated and passed around from cell to cell, but when the letters stopped, the dirty food and repression started again."

*Released prisoner of conscience, Vietnam*

"...if there's lots of pressure - like from Amnesty International or some foreign countries - we might

pass them on to a judge. But if there's no pressure, then they're dead."

*Former torturer, El Salvador*

"I was on the verge of total collapse and desperation before I was introduced to you, but you gave me strength and courage to go on."

*Relative of a released prisoner of conscience,  
Swaziland*

### **How did Amnesty get started?**

**1961:** British lawyer, Peter Benenson, launches an *Appeal for Amnesty '61* with the publication of an article "The Forgotten Prisoners" in The Observer newspaper, London, United Kingdom (UK), on May 28th. The imprisonment of two Portuguese students who had raised their wine glasses in a toast to freedom moved Benenson to write this article which proved to be the genesis of AI. The appeal was reprinted in other papers across the world.

In July, the first international meeting with delegates from Belgium, UK, France, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland and the United States decides to establish "a permanent international movement in defence of freedom of opinion and religion."

**1962:** In its second year, AI takes its first mission to Ghana in January, followed by Czechoslovakia in February (on behalf of a prisoner of conscience, Archbishop Josef Beran), and then to Portugal and East Germany.

AI groups are started in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Greece, Australia, Ireland, and the United States.

At a conference in Belgium, all the groups decide to set up a permanent organization that will be known as "Amnesty International".

AI sends observer to trial of Nelson Mandela.

**1977:** Amnesty wins the Nobel Peace Prize.

### **Amnesty International:**

- opposes abuses by opposition groups, including hostage-taking, torture and deliberate or arbitrary killings of prisoners and others;
- assists asylum-seekers who are at risk of being returned to a country where they will be at risk of violations of their basic and fundamental human rights;
- cooperates with other NGOs, the UN and regional intergovernmental organizations;
- organises human rights education and awareness-raising programs.

### **Facts and Figures**

- Amnesty International consists of more than 7,800 local, youth, specialist and professional groups in more than 100 countries and territories. There are nationally-organized sections in 56 countries, and pre-section coordinating structures in another 24 countries and territories worldwide.
- During 2001, AI's local groups and networks worked on behalf of 2,813 named victims of human rights violations.
- AI's Urgent Action Network undertook 408 actions on behalf of people in 81 countries and territories who were either at risk or had suffered human rights violations including torture, "disappearance," the death penalty, death in custody, or forcible return to countries where they would be in danger of human rights violations. Of these urgent actions, 117 resulted in good news about the case.
- The Urgent Action Network is made up of more than

80,000 volunteers in some 85 countries.

## **Organisation**

AI is a democratic movement, self-governed by a nine-member International Executive Committee (IEC) whose members are elected every two years by an International Council representing sections.

Amnesty International's nerve centre is the International Secretariat in London, with more than 350 staff members and over 100 volunteers from more than 50 countries around the world.

The Japanese section of AI was established in 1971, and as of 2001 had more than 6,600 members in about 120 groups nationwide. Group 78 is one of two English-language AI groups (there are also 24 Japanese-language groups) in Tokyo.

(The other, Group 1, meets twice a month on a Tuesday and a Friday. Contact: Ms. Shoko Fukui <shk.fukui@nifty.com>)

## **What can I do?**

You have already taken an important step by joining AI. Your membership fees alone are a vital contribution. Depending on the time you have, you can also:

- Write letters to overseas government ministers, prison governors, etc. about human rights abuses. Your monthly newsletter (*The Wire*) gives details of recent cases and who to write to.

- Join one of our four case groups, which arrange regular letter-writing and other specific activities in connection with their cases: Brazil (abduction and disappearance); China (Tibetan prisoners of conscience); Kenya (prison conditions in general); Laos (prisoner of conscience).

- Join AI's Urgent Action network (see below).
- Help staff our stall at events like the international school festivals in Tokyo to sell AI goods, collect signatures for our campaigns, and recruit new members.
- Help to organise our annual rock concert, or other fund-raiser.
- Encourage your friends and co-workers to join or make donations.
- AI also campaigns against the death penalty worldwide, against child soldiers, and on several other issues. For details, see the main Amnesty web site <[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)>
- Renew your membership promptly at the end of January (¥12,000; students pay half). Send all money, including donations, to our Post Office account:  
Amnesty International Group 78,  
**10100-2 2614 3581**  
Please fill in your NAME and ADDRESS clearly, and email our treasurer with details.
- Develop materials about human rights and related issues to use in text books and education packs.

### **Urgent Action Network**

The purpose of Urgent Actions is to rapidly produce an internationally coordinated mass protest, to stop or prevent serious human rights violations. E.g. A peasant activist 'disappears' in Mexico. In Turkey, a journalist is arrested and feared to be at risk of torture. Environmentalists in Kenya are imprisoned and beaten. An elderly political prisoner in Indonesia is denied insulin for his

diabetes...

Every day Amnesty International receives information about prisoners and other individuals in danger around the world. Researchers in Amnesty's headquarters in London compile an Urgent Action case-sheet with details of the individual(s) concerned, some background information, advice on the wording of appeals and the government officials to whom such appeals should be addressed.

### **Campaign to stop torture**

By subscribing at this page:

<http://www.stoptorture.org/subscribe/index.htm>  
(which takes less than 5 minutes), Amnesty will email you or text message your mobile phone about individuals who they think are at risk of torture. Every single time you respond, Amnesty will email the perpetrators of the torture.

You can also sign on-line petitions to make an urgent appeal for individuals suffering or at risk of torture:

<http://www.stoptorture.org/urgent/index.php>

### **Amnesty International's website: <[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)>**

AI's website contains more than 20,000 files and is visited by over 10,000 people daily from all over the world. It features a library of AI reports (since 1996), press releases, information on the latest campaigns and appeals for action, and details of AI offices worldwide. Sign up here for the Urgent Action network.

**The Group 78 Website:** <[www.geocities.com/aigroup78](http://www.geocities.com/aigroup78)> is a work in progress. If you can help to create and/or administer the site, mainly to publicise our

events in Tokyo, please contact us:

General enquiries: <cpitts@gol.com>

Membership & groups: <ajkaye@gol.com>

Treasurer: <tomlinson@i.bekkoame.ne.jp>

## **The Money**

No funds are sought or accepted from governments. Amnesty's work investigating and campaigning against human rights violations is financed by hundreds of thousands of donations from the pockets of its members, the public, and organizations such as trusts, foundations and ethical companies.

The international budget is spent on professional research into human rights violations worldwide, on delegations that observe trials and make representations to governments, and on the movement's international public information, campaigning and development activities.

During the financial year 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 the international budget adopted by Amnesty International was £20,940,000 (including contingency).

## **Letter writing guide**

There are a few simple rules:

1. Always be polite. This rule is essential and invariable. Your aim is to help a prisoner, not to relieve your own feelings. Governments don't respond to abusive or condemnatory letters (however well deserved).
2. Always write your letters on the basis that the government concerned is open to reason and discussion.
3. It is important where possible to stress a country's reputation for moderation and justice, to show respect for its constitution and judicial procedures, and to demonstrate an understanding of current difficulties. This will give more scope to point out ways in which the human rights situation can be improved.

4. Follow strictly the instructions given by Amnesty International in the case in question. For instance if the World Wide Appeal asks you to appeal for medical treatment for a prisoner, make sure that you request this, and not a speedy trial or release which might be appropriate in another case.

5. Never use political jargon. Don't give the impression that you are writing because you are ideologically or politically opposed to the government in question. It is far more effective to stress the fact that your concern for human rights is not politically based in any way, but in keeping with basic principles of international law.

6. If appropriate, please explain who you are and what you do. Some of our (below) do this. This indicates that the letter is genuine, and also shows that people from varying walks of life are following events in the country concerned.

7. If you have any special interest or link with the country, it is a good idea to mention this in your letter. For instance, you may have visited it or studied its history.

**BE BRIEF.** A simple, one-line letter is adequate (see sample letters A and B) and is certainly better than no letter at all. Sample letters C and D might be considered the standard length to aim at where you have nothing special to add. A good rule is not to write more than one page (i.e. one side).

## **Sample letters**

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

### **Sample letter A**

Dear Prime Minister,

I write to appeal to you, on humanitarian grounds, to release ..... .

Yours truly,

### **Sample letter B**

Your Excellency,

I write to appeal to you, on humanitarian grounds, to spare the life of..... presently under sentence of death.

Yours sincerely,

### **Sample letter C**

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to you, in the spirit of friendship that has always existed between your country and mine, about the plight of ..... who I understand has been detained for nearly three years under the Internal Security Act without any reason being given. If this information is correct, this would appear to violate Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which says "No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile". I therefore appeal to you to look into this case urgently, with a view to releasing .....

Yours respectfully,

### **Sample letter D**

Dear Minister,

I write this letter as a Board Member of the Moravian Friendship Association to appeal to you to ensure that Professor ....., a prisoner held in ..... State Prison, is given the medical treatment she requires and an adequate diet. In view of the seriousness of this case, I would ask you to make inquiries to satisfy yourself personally that the conditions under which she is kept in prison are in keeping with the basic standards expected today by all members of the international community.

I would like to add that our Association, whose function it is to promote friendship and goodwill between the peoples of our two countries, has every confidence that the human rights enshrined in your Constitution are fully observed in your country.

Yours sincerely,

### **Sample letter E**

Your Excellency,

I am a clerk in government service in Sri Lanka, and I also work in a voluntary Buddhist social service organization. I am deeply concerned at the news that ..... has been sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in your country for publishing an article critical of the government. If this is true, it appears to be a harsh and unjust punishment. I appeal to you on humanitarian grounds, and in furtherance of the principle of freedom of expression enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to review this case with a view to releasing .....

Yours sincerely,

### **Sample letter F**

Your Excellency,

In my capacity as President of the Women's Institute of Toronto, I am writing to you on the subject of the recent arrest of ..... who is, I understand, in detention under the regulations for the Suppression of Rebellion.

In view of the information available to me concerning this case, ..... is deprived of her freedom in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. May I take the liberty of drawing to your attention the specific violations of the Declaration apparently involved in her case.

Her arrest under the regulations for the Suppression of Rebellion constitutes a violation of Article 9 of the Declaration. She has been held since her arrest without charge (at least as far as is publicly known) and without trial, which constitutes a violation of Articles 9 and 10 of the Declaration.

The only reason which has been given for the arrest of ..... is her role in the legal and legitimate opposition in the public life of your country, not only as a parliamentarian, but as a political worker conducting actions guaranteed the full protection of your Constitution. It therefore appears that the rights proclaimed in Articles 18 and 19 of the Declaration have also been

violated.

Motivated solely by respect for human rights, I appeal to you to intervene personally in this case to secure the immediate release of ..... from detention or to grant her the right to an early, fair and open trial.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration,  
Yours sincerely,

### **Sample letter G**

Your Honour,

I am an engineer, and I worked on an irrigation project at ..... where the dam was constructed with the expert assistance of technicians from your country. This was truly a memorable experience. The dedication of your engineers, both to the irrigation project and to the development of your country, was really inspiring. Many misconceptions about your country were dispelled, and we became good friends too. It was therefore with special concern that I came to hear of the case of.....

I understand that he was arrested in November for publishing a book critical of some aspects of the government, and has been held since then without charge or trial in contravention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This matter has been the subject of discussion among my colleagues. If the facts are incorrect, please let me know and I will see that the true version is explained. If, however, they are true, I appeal to you to look into this case with a view to releasing.....

Yours sincerely,

### **Sample letter H**

Your Excellency,

Some time ago I wrote to you about the case of prisoner of conscience..... I was delighted to learn that ..... has been released and is now happily reunited with her four young children. I do appreciate very much this act of compassion and humanity on your part.

Yours sincerely,

