



## Krgyzstan: Rita Karasartova released from prison following Amnesty's Urgent Action

**“If we have a dream, then fears can be overcome.”**

Those are the words of Rita Karasartova, a peaceful human rights defender and expert in civic governance in Krgyzstan. Rita is also a mother who loves yoga, traveling, and sewing with her daughter.

For over a decade, Rita has dedicated her life to providing help to people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. She leads the non-governmental Institute for Public Analysis and is a member of the United Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, fighting against poverty and injustice.

Rita and other human rights defenders opposed a new border

agreement that gave control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. Their fear is that Uzbekistan could restrict or prohibit access to water, which is scarce already in the region.

The activists called for peaceful demonstrations and government transparency.

But in October of 2022, Rita and the others were detained under charges of “mass disorder.” She was then charged with attempting to “violently overthrow the government” – a serious charge with a sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment.

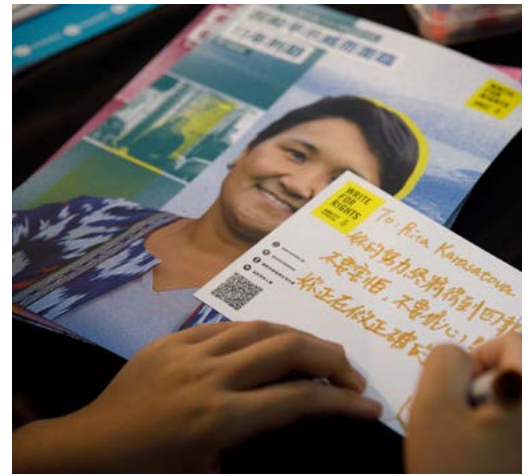
In early June 2023, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action to our members, asking for help to campaign for Rita’s release. She was the only woman who had been kept in pretrial detention – a small, unventilated cell with 10 people

crammed into it. She was denied visits and telephone conversations with relatives, even her young son.

On 23 June, we learned that the Pervomaisky District Court had released Rita. She is now under house arrest, with a curfew between 10PM to 6AM.

Rita’s temporary freedom is a great result of the Urgent Action. But the shadow of prison still looms over her and her family. Featured in our most recent *Write for Rights* campaign, Amnesty won’t stop campaigning until all charges are dropped, and Rita is permanently free.

**Turn the page to learn more about the success of *Write for Rights 2023***



## WRITE FOR RIGHTS 2023 WAS A RECORD-BREAKER



We are thrilled to report that *Write for Rights 2023* was the most successful one ever! Canadians took 125,000 actions, more than any other year.

Support for Amnesty and the people we work for has sprung back to pre-pandemic levels – and beyond. Members and activists supported eleven different campaigns with their letter-writing and actions.

Nationwide, supporters organized and held more than 200 different events, mobilizing letter-writers with potlucks, games, music, poetry, and art. Local venues from libraries to schools, homes to cafes became a beacon of hope whose light is shining around the world – letting prisoners and their families (and their oppressors) know that they have not been forgotten.

*Write for Rights 2023* received 118 mentions in the media – which is key to recruiting new supporters and campaigners in the future.

Our sincere thanks go to everyone who hosted, organized, and participated in this record-breaking event.



# Amnesty report tracks years-long campaign of criminalization and unlawful surveillance against Wet'suwet'en land defenders

The pipeline has already caused environmental destruction and cut the Wet'suwet'en people off from their ancestral territory.

Land defenders who take action to protect the territory and stop the pipeline have been surveilled, intimidated, and arrested. Now, several of them face criminal charges – and possibly prison time.

*“Indigenous People are stewards of natural ecosystems that mitigate against the impact climate change. Indigenous land defenders across the Americas are facing unprecedented danger for defending their territories against extractive projects. Canada should be protecting them instead of prosecuting them.”*

—Ana Piquer, Americas Director, Amnesty International

Amnesty International's report, *'Removed from our land for defending it': Criminalization, Intimidation and Harassment of Wet'suwet'en Land Defenders*, published in December 2023, advocates for Canadian officials to stop construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline that is cutting through Wet'suwet'en land, and halt similar projects on Indigenous territories that do not have the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples.



## A LASTING IMPACT: A tribute to Frank Flaman

On 9 October 2023, Amnesty International lost a dedicated supporter, Frank Flaman. He was an accomplished businessman and a great philanthropist. Frank started

the Flaman Group of Companies in 1959. It evolved into a thriving enterprise and in 2005, Frank used his company's profits to establish the Frank Flaman Foundation. Over the years, the Foundation has donated millions to not-for-profit organizations to help create a brighter future for all. Amnesty is one of the organizations that will continue to benefit from Frank's generosity. We spoke with his daughter, Crystal Flaman about Frank's lasting legacy:

### **What was Frank like? What are your favourite memories or traditions with your dad?**

Dad really focused on caring for the world. He served the global community in a way that is quite astounding

and like no other that I know, the legacy he's created is nothing short of remarkable.

### **Your dad supported human rights for all people. He'd been supporting Amnesty International since 1989. What motivated him to care about human rights?**

Amnesty's work was near and dear to his heart. He loved Amnesty and adored the work you're doing. Dad was a proponent of supporting the minority. He was a supporter of the little guy, the person in need, or the person who no one else will support.

*“He advocated for those who couldn't advocate for themselves, which is really, I think, part of the vision of Amnesty.”*

—Crystal Flaman

Dad would want to thank Amnesty for the work you're doing. The Flaman Foundation is nothing without its partners who do great work. Dad's vision was to make a profitable company, but his legacy has been to partner with organizations like Amnesty to make a difference in the world.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

# In 2023, you helped us

## BE THERE



**Be There** is an Amnesty International program that supports people around the world whose lives have been torn apart by conflict and crisis, on every step of their journey. We are living through the worst refugee crisis since World War II. We have the chance to turn the tide –before it’s too late.

### In Sudan

We warned of the growing civilian death toll and further ethnically-motivated attacks in the Darfur region. We raised the alarm about thousands of people forced to flee from the city of Wad Madani to Khartoum.

### In Myanmar

We investigated an air strike by the military on an internally displaced persons camp that killed 28 civilians and injured 57 others. We called for these attacks to be investigated as war crimes.

### In Iran

We worked to reveal the Iranian authorities’ brutal crackdown on Baluchi protesters and worshippers. Together with the Iran team, we investigated the case of 16 year-old Armita Garawand, who lost consciousness on a Tehran metro train after reports she was assaulted by an enforcer of Iran’s compulsory veiling laws.

### Safeguarding refugees

We are working to protect the rights and safety of refugees from Kenya, through East and Southern Africa, to Canada, Myanmar and Europe.

### In Gaza

As part of the organization’s long-term work to end the oppressive and discriminatory system of apartheid in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Amnesty International continues to document violations of international human rights and humanitarian law during the unprecedented conflict in the occupied Gaza strip where over two million people face a risk of genocide. Letters and petitions from thousands of Canadians pushed the government

to support a ceasefire, restore funding to UNRWA and implement a partial arms embargo.

We will continue to **Be There** with researchers gathering evidence and testimony of possible war crimes, and calling for an immediate sustained ceasefire by all parties and a complete lifting of Israel’s illegal blockade of Gaza. Amnesty International is also calling for armed groups to release hostages held in Gaza and for Israeli authorities to release arbitrarily detained Palestinians.



Palestinian children inspect their damaged building in Gaza city. The shattered building was once home to 17 people, including children. (Majdi Fathi/NurPhoto via Getty Images)



Older people's isolation and inadequate access to housing amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine has placed unprecedented strain on an already overburdened care system.

## Around the world: Defending the rights of older people

Amnesty International is defending the rights of older people. This includes a briefing to the UN to address the gaps in human rights protections for older people.

We delivered training on older people's rights in Czechia, Slovakia and Germany, and collaborated with other Amnesty Sections in Poland, Slovakia and Iceland.

We also published a report and commissioned a documentary film about older people and people with disabilities in the Ukraine.

## Stopping the repression trade

We published an investigation into the transfer of weapons used to crush dissent and abuse protesters and detainees. These weapons include tear gas, rubber bullets, batons and stun grenades.

If you would like to see the full version of the **Be There 2023** report please get in touch: email us at [members@amnesty.ca](mailto:members@amnesty.ca)



# With your support Amnesty International will **BE THERE**

**Right now, with your help, these actions are underway:**

### Rohingya refugees

Approximately one million Rohingya people still live in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Amid increasing violence and deteriorating conditions there, many Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers are undertaking irregular boat journeys across the Andaman Sea to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.



These journeys are rife with danger and exploitation, and Rohingya people face further dangers and hostility on arrival.

### Afghan refugees

Call for Pakistan to halt the deportation of Afghan refugees. Petitions are ongoing asking countries to give visas to Afghan women.

### Tech and migration

A primer was published in February: *Defending the Rights of Refugees and Migrants in the Digital Age*.

### North-East Syria: Mass detention

Major report, based on more than 18 months of investigation, on the system of mass detention and related violations against those with perceived affiliation to the Islamic State in north-east Syria.

The report documents how the region's autonomous authorities are responsible for the large-scale violation of the rights of more than 56,000 people, including 30,000 children held in at least 27 detention facilities and two detention camps.

### Toolkit on older people

We commissioned the development marketing and communications toolkit to support our campaign for a UN Convention on the rights of older people. Call for states, including Canada, to support a new Convention on the rights of older people.

### DRC

Evidence Lab has supported comprehensive investigation into a massacre in Goma, DRC where Congolese soldiers brutally attacked and killed followers of a political and religious group.



## GOOD NEWS

### **YEMEN** Journalists on death row released

On 16 April 2023, Yemeni journalists Akram al-Walidi, Abdelkhaleq Amran, Hareth Hamid, and Tawfiq al-Mansouri were released as part of a prisoner exchange after being detained by the Huthi de facto authorities for more than seven years. Arrested in 2015, they were held without charge until December 2018. They were charged with a series of serious offenses, including “spying for Saudi Arabia”; which carries the death penalty, as well as “broadcasting rumours, fake news and statements in support of the enemy Saudi Arabia and its allies against the Republic of Yemen.”

In April 2020 they were sentenced to death by the Specialized Criminal Court in Sana’a following a grossly unfair trial: their lawyer was barred from attending nearly all court sessions. Neither their lawyer nor their families were informed of the potential death sentence. The Specialized Criminal Appeals Division in Sana’a postponed appeal hearings at least 10 times. In July and September 2022, Tawfiq al-Mansouri was denied urgent medical treatment despite being critically ill.

Amnesty has been campaigning alongside these journalists, their families and legal team since 2016.

### **AFGHANISTAN** Three women human rights defenders released

Zholia Parsi, Neda Parwani, and Parisa Azada were released in December 2023, two weeks after Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action on their behalf. The three women had been arbitrarily arrested and detained by the Taliban General Directorate of Intelligence for three months, and held without lawyers, regular family visits, or medical care. Their “crime”

was simply peacefully ‘protesting’ the Taliban’s draconian policies and gender persecution in Afghanistan. During this period, they were exposed to the Taliban’s mental and physical torture and ill-treatment including sleep deprivation and solitary confinement.

Under Taliban rule, there has been a significant increase in violations of women’s rights. The courage shown by these human rights defenders is inspiring. Our Urgent Action on behalf of other Afghani women is still active – please sign up at Afghanistan: Stop the crackdown on women’s rights protesters ([amnesty.ca](https://www.amnesty.ca))

### **IRAN** Protestors’ convictions and death sentences overturned

On 20 June 2023, Mansour Hout and Nezamoldin Hout, from Iran’s oppressed Baluchi ethnic minority were released on bail after their convictions and death sentences were overturned by the Supreme Court. They had been sentenced to death in relation to the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising from September to December 2022 and Amnesty International campaigned successfully on their behalf since February 2023.

### **CONGO** Activist and prisoner of conscience, Elias Bizimungu acquitted

Elias Bizimungu was acquitted by the Goma High Court and freed from prison on the evening of 29 May 2023. The court found that the charges against him – for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly - were baseless and ordered his immediate release. Speaking to Amnesty’s Democratic Republic of Congo team, Elias said he’s happy to be free again, and extremely grateful to Amnesty International and its activists for their support.

### **Amnesty’s Urgent Action Network has become one of our most effective campaign tools.**

- More than 500,000 volunteers worldwide are standing by to help those facing imminent human rights violations.
- These volunteers respond immediately with letters, emails, faxes, and social media posts.
- Their actions pressure authorities and let them know the world is watching to help protect people from torture, wrongful imprisonment, and abuse in prison.



The group meets in person every summer at a picnic to share food, ideas and sign petitions.

## REGINA VOLUNTEERS CELEBRATE 40 YEARS OF ACTIVISM



The 'Amnesty Rocks The Boat' team of 22 has participated in the Regina Dragon Boat Festival for ten years. "If it's not fun, it's not sustainable! Human rights work is very serious work, providing opportunities for team building is essential." Dave Wessel, team captain

Amnesty International Canada, Regina Group 91 was formed in 1984. It was pre- internet and email, and urgent actions were faxed.

Now their activism is both online and at events in the city.

Amnesty Regina has had an entry in the Queen City Pride Parade for many years and was Grand Marshall of the Pride Parade in 2017.

They been an important supporter of and refugee rights and the diaspora communities in Regina.



## CANADA Stop incarcerating immigration detainees

Did you know that under Canadian law, a non-citizen can be incarcerated indefinitely in immigration detention, based solely on administrative grounds?

Through the power of the #WelcomeToCanada campaign we launched with Human Rights Watch in 2021, all ten provinces' have committed to ending immigration detention in their provincial jails. These are human rights victories.

Now, instead of following the provinces' lead and working to end immigration detention, the federal government plans to use federal prisons for immigration detention.

Using jails or prisons for immigration detention is a violation of international human rights standards. Why is the federal government expanding this practice, and codifying it in legislation? We are urging the government to cancel these plans.

**#WelcomeToCanada**



# TODAY'S PROTESTS ARE TOMORROW'S HUMAN RIGHTS

## You help us Protect the Protest

It is more dangerous than ever before to call out human rights violations. Those who work to expose human rights abuses live with the constant threat of intimidation and violence at the hands of their own governments.

Your support enables us to continue campaigning around the globe for the safety and security of human rights defenders in all countries through Protect the Protest.

## You help us support human rights defenders

We support Individuals at Risk through legal aid, medical support, personal protection, alarm systems, and relocation.

Amnesty International advocates using evidence from many sources to protect crowds protesting in person or of advocates in digital spaces.

Our campaigns, Research Reports, and Urgent Actions are coordinated to advocate on behalf of those unfairly persecuted or jailed.

## Russia makes anti-war protests a crime

In Russia, merely speaking out against the war in Ukraine is an act of protest. Russian authorities have introduced a special set of laws, the so-called war censorship laws.



Alexandra Skochilenko, is serving her 7-year sentence under one of the Russian war censorship laws. She was protesting the war in Ukraine by changing supermarket price tags to anti-war statements.

These laws introduced prison sentences of up to 15 years for spreading “fake news” and up to seven years for “discrediting” the Russian army. Many in Russia are now serving unjust prison sentences because of these laws.

## LEAVING A GIFT IN YOUR WILL HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER

Having an up-to-date Will provides peace of mind.

Amnesty International has partnered with Epilogue, Canada's leading online Will platform, to make it easier and more affordable than ever to create your Will and, if you choose, leave a gift to Amnesty and the causes you care about.\*

Visit [epiloguewills.com/give/amnesty-international](https://epiloguewills.com/give/amnesty-international) or scan the QR code below.

\* There is absolutely no obligation to leave a gift in your Will in order to complete your Will online.

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