


YOUR WORDS CHANGE LIVES

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**
AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 



Human Rights
Education
Activity



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

More than 20 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. In the years that followed, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to nearly 6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2023, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. In 2023 alone, more than 1.4 million people were engaged through human rights education activities. Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, by releasing activists from detention, securing justice for those whose rights have been abused and protecting people who advocate for change.

This year's campaign once again includes people from around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for them to receive justice. Through Write for Rights, each of the individuals will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities to demand that they end the injustice, we can create a more just and equal world.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals and others in a similar situation. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there.”

Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the context and group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity, delivering it in-person or online, and any limitations. When participants want to take action for an individual or group, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyse and question issues relating to the individuals' stories. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competencies and skills

FORM their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.



Letter writing with friends in Czechia for Write for Rights 2023.

© Valerie Miric

Read about the people we're fighting for: [amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R24

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: academy.amnesty.org/learn

YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ACQUITTED

Rita Karasartova is a human rights defender and an expert in civic governance. For more than a decade she has dedicated her life to providing independent legal advice, helping people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. Alongside 26 others, Rita was arrested for opposing a new border agreement giving control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. Charged with attempting to “violently overthrow the government”, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment, Rita and at least 21 other defendants were acquitted on 14 June 2024.

“I would like to express my huge, huge gratitude... Your timely actions – these letters, petitions, signatures, and the huge number of letters that went to the court, that went to the prosecutor’s office – it was all very powerful. In fact, it was very empowering to us all... Of course, the acquittal was totally unexpected. I don’t even know how to process it in my head. We had been playing with all sorts of scenarios, different outcomes in our heads, but we didn’t think we would all be acquitted!... I thank you all.”

Rita Karasartova
from Kyrgyzstan



© Private

“I feel so relieved, and I thank you for the amazing Write for Rights campaign. I am forever indebted. It is like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Reading all the letters and cards made me feel so loved and appreciated.”

Cecillia Chimhiri from Zimbabwe



OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS FREED

Opposition activists Cecillia Chimhiri, Joana Mamombe and Netsai Marova were abducted, tortured and imprisoned after attending a protest in Zimbabwe. They were charged with “communicating falsehoods” and “obstructing the course of justice”. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After being featured in Write for Rights 2022, Cecillia and Joana were acquitted by the High Court.



© Amnesty International Togo

Amnesty supporters in the Netherlands (far left) and Togo (left) at events for Write For Rights 2023.

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



Write for Rights event in Benin in 2023.



© UN Photo

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

HUMAN RIGHTS: EMPATHY IN ACTION

KEY CONCEPTS

- Shrinking civic space
- Rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly
- Human rights defenders

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the people featured in the 2024 Write for Rights campaign. They will explore how shrinking civic space and restrictions on freedom of expression and other human rights have affected these individuals and groups. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write letters and take other actions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** that the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are essential to advocate for social change.
- **recognize** how government policies and repression restrict civic space and the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- **develop** empathy for individuals and groups whose human rights are being violated for their participation in public life.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with people whose rights are at risk.

AGE: 13+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

MATERIALS

- **Handout: Story cards** (pages 13-21)
- **Handout: Take action cards** (pages 14-22)
- **World map** (page 12)
- **Background information** (page 11)
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- **A large, open space** (a classroom or any outdoor space)
- **String, tape or chalk** to mark boundaries
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

PREPARATION

- Print the handouts and copies of the simplified UDHR for each participant/group.
- Cut out the world map.
- Prepare the game space before the activity (see step one).
- Read the background information on page 11 and the story cards.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about human rights including the right to freedom of expression at the Amnesty Academy: www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/

PRECAUTIONS

Some of the cases featured in this activity include concepts that might be triggering or upsetting for participants, such as police violence, discrimination and exclusion. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the content and anticipate potential areas of sensitivity. Prior to the activity, inform participants about the topics to be discussed and provide them with the option to change groups to work on a different case, or to step out if they feel uncomfortable at any point. Regularly check in with your participants during the activity. During and after the activity, allow participants to express their feelings and thoughts about the topics discussed. This can help them process any strong emotions they might have experienced.

1. EXPLORING SHRINKING SPACE

Before the activity begins, set up an area indoors or outdoors. Use chalk, string or tape to mark out three rings or circles on the ground: a small circle, a medium circle and a large circle. It is important that in the medium and small circles it is increasingly difficult for the participants to move. In the smallest circle it should be almost impossible for anyone to move at all.

Introduce the game: Explain to the participants that civic space is a place where people can talk, meet and share ideas freely. However, certain rules or actions make this space smaller, limiting these freedoms.

Explain the rules: Tell the participants that they will play a game to see how different actions either make the space bigger (giving more freedom) or smaller (restricting freedom).

Show the participants the three rings or circles. Explain that you will read out different actions, and based on whether the action limits or expands their freedom, they will move to a different circle.



- If the action limits their freedom, they move to a smaller circle.
- If the action expands their freedom, they move to a larger circle.
- Encourage them to walk, talk and even dance in the circles as they move.

Start the game: Let the participants walk, talk or dance freely within the largest circle for about a minute. Then, read out the actions one by one. After each action, ask the participants, “Does this give you more or less freedom?”

Based on their answer, they should move to the appropriate circle. Give them another minute to walk, talk or dance in the circle before reading the next action.

Actions to read out:

- You cannot use social media to express what you like or do not like.
- You are no longer allowed to meet your friends after 5pm.
- You are encouraged to join organizations that help others.
- You cannot speak out when you see or hear something that you feel is unjust.
- You are free to protest peacefully for change.
- You cannot meet in groups of more than two people.

After reading the actions, stop the game and ask participants how it felt when the space got smaller.

- When was it harder to move or do things you wanted to do?
- How did you feel when you had more freedom to move ?
- How did you feel when you had less freedom to move?
- What did you do?

Facilitators should be mindful of any participants with disabilities and adapt the activity and instructions accordingly.

2. DISCUSSION

Explain that civic space includes activities like protests, meetings, online discussions and even writing letters to leaders. When we say “shrinking civic space”, we mean that those with power are making it harder for people to do these things. Imagine if your school started making rules to prevent you talking about certain things or starting a club to help others. That would be shrinking your space to do the things that matter to you. In some countries, this happens when the government doesn’t want people to question them or demand change. They might make it illegal to protest, shut down websites where people share ideas, or even arrest people just for speaking up. This is a big problem because it means that people can’t speak up for their rights or the rights of others, and it becomes harder to make the world a fair and just place.

Ask participants:

- How does the game represent real-life rules and laws?
- How can these rules and laws affect people’s freedoms?

Explain that we will now explore what has happened to some people and groups whose governments have repressed and violated their rights.

Conclude the discussion by saying that it is important to keep civic space open and that everyone can help protect it.



3. STORIES OF COURAGE FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Explain that the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association (the right to come together publicly or privately in groups for a common purpose) are connected. Together, these human right principles are fundamental for people to voice their opinions, share information and join together to peacefully advocate for change and take collective action. This includes peaceful protests, but it can take other forms as well.

Tell the group that they will now analyse stories of people or groups whose human rights are being violated precisely because they exercised their rights to express themselves and advocate for change. The stories illustrate how these individuals have faced intimidation, silencing or persecution by their governments. Emphasize that governments around the world often create and use laws to restrict civic space and criminalize activists, human rights defenders, journalists, political opponents, lawyers, and ordinary citizens.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders are individuals who take non-violent actions to defend and promote human rights. They may work individually or with others. Their activities might focus on a specific area of human rights or on the rights of a specific group. However, they must accept the universality of human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This means they cannot deny some human rights or take actions that undermine the rights of others. A person will not be considered to be a human rights defender if they engage in or support hatred, discrimination or violence.

Divide participants into small groups, assigning each group one of the stories you have selected from pages 13-22. Provide each group with a copy of the relevant story card and a copy of the simplified UDHR from page 5. Have the groups read their story card and discuss it by addressing the following questions:

- Who is this story about? What are the main issues in this story?
- How does this story relate to freedom of expression, human rights defenders, and/or shrinking civic space?
- Which human rights are being violated?
- Who do you think is responsible for these human rights violations?

If this is the first time that participants are introduced to the UDHR, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what it is first, using the information starting on page 4.



After about 15 minutes, invite everyone back together and ask each group to briefly introduce their story card to the others and list the injustices they have found. Debrief by asking:

- Upon hearing about these stories, is there anything that surprises or shocks you?
- Are there similarities between some of the stories?

OPTIONAL: Use the world map on page 12 to locate the case that each group is working on. Ask the participants what stands out when looking at the world map and why it is important that we care about these people and act to uphold their rights. Highlight that human rights violations can happen in any country and in any region in the world, no matter whether the country is rich or poor, at war or in crisis, or seemingly peaceful and safe. Human rights are not just about ‘other’ people; they are about everyone, everywhere. This is why it is important to learn about our rights and to defend them and the rights of others.

4. TAKE ACTION

Tell participants about Amnesty International’s Write for Rights campaign and explain that Amnesty International is calling on people to write letters to the individuals affected and to the authorities responsible for protecting, respecting and fulfilling their human rights. You can give examples from last year’s campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch the “Write for Rights: Take action” video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn’t enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.



If you have time, you can show participants the videos of the people featured in this year’s campaign at www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

Amnesty members hold up images of people featured in Write for Rights 2023, at the General Assembly of Amnesty International Morocco in Rabat, January 2024





WRITE A LETTER

Ask participants to choose one of the people whose stories they have learned about and give them a copy of the take action card for that person. Tell the participants that their letters will be sent to the authorities responsible for protecting that person's human rights.

Give everyone letter-writing materials and allow time for them to write their letters. Explain that a personal message to the officials can have the most impact. Ask them to:

- Write something about themselves.
- Tell the official what shocks them about the case.
- Say why they think it is important that governments respect human rights.

If people wish to share their letters afterwards, provide an opportunity for them to do so.

Conclude by asking participants to use a few words to express their feelings at the end of the activity. Try to take contributions from everyone.

SHOW SOLIDARITY

If you have time, you can also do some of the solidarity actions on the **take action cards**.

The solidarity letters are often a great source of support and strength for the people whose human rights are being violated.

Amnesty supporters take action during Write for Rights 2023 in the Netherlands and Zimbabwe.



© Anne Harbers (left), © Amnesty International Zimbabwe (right)



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

ARTICLE 19 OF THE UDHR

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) protects the right to freedom of expression. Freedom of expression guarantees your right to hold your own opinions and to express them freely, without government interference. This includes the right to express views through public protests or through written materials, media broadcasts, the internet and works of art. This right is regarded as a very important element in any society. We need a free flow of ideas to ensure that different opinions are taken into account and different ideas are aired. The right to freedom of expression enhances transparency and accountability. Our right to seek, receive and share information and ideas, without fear or unlawful interference, is crucial for our education and development as individuals, to help our communities, to access justice and to enjoy all our other rights.

Yet the conditions necessary for debate – such as civic engagement and political participation, transparency and access to trustworthy information – have been increasingly eroded. Not everyone is safe when expressing their opinion, especially when it concerns the political situation in their country. The threats to freedom of expression are greatest when the ideas or opinions being expressed challenge the status quo and the position of people in power. Around the world there is a growing number of laws and other repressive measures intended to restrict the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Those who raise their voice or criticize the authorities risk being silenced, harassed and criminalized through the misuse of criminal, civil and administrative laws. Authorities discourage protest with the threat of violence, arbitrary detention and multiple violations of the right to a fair trial. Governments around the world routinely imprison people – or worse – for speaking out, even though almost every country’s constitution refers to the value of ‘free speech’.

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Peaceful protest is a dynamic and public way of exercising our human rights. Throughout history, protests have allowed individuals and groups to express dissent, opinions and ideas, expose injustice and abuse, and demand accountability from those in power.

When people engage in protests, whether individually or collectively, they are exercising a variety of rights which can include the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Without the ability to freely express opinions, public assemblies are simply mass gatherings of people without a message. And without the ability to freely assemble, people’s opinions may lack the force of numbers to have their message properly heard.

Other rights are also essential in enabling people to protest peacefully, including the rights to life, privacy, freedom of association, freedom from torture and other ill-treatment or punishment, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, for example.



WORLD MAP

The individuals in this year's Write for Rights campaign come from nine different countries around the world. By taking part in the campaign, you can show that geography is no barrier to solidarity.



**WET'SUWET'EN NATION
LAND DEFENDERS
CANADA**



**OQBA HASHAD
EGYPT**



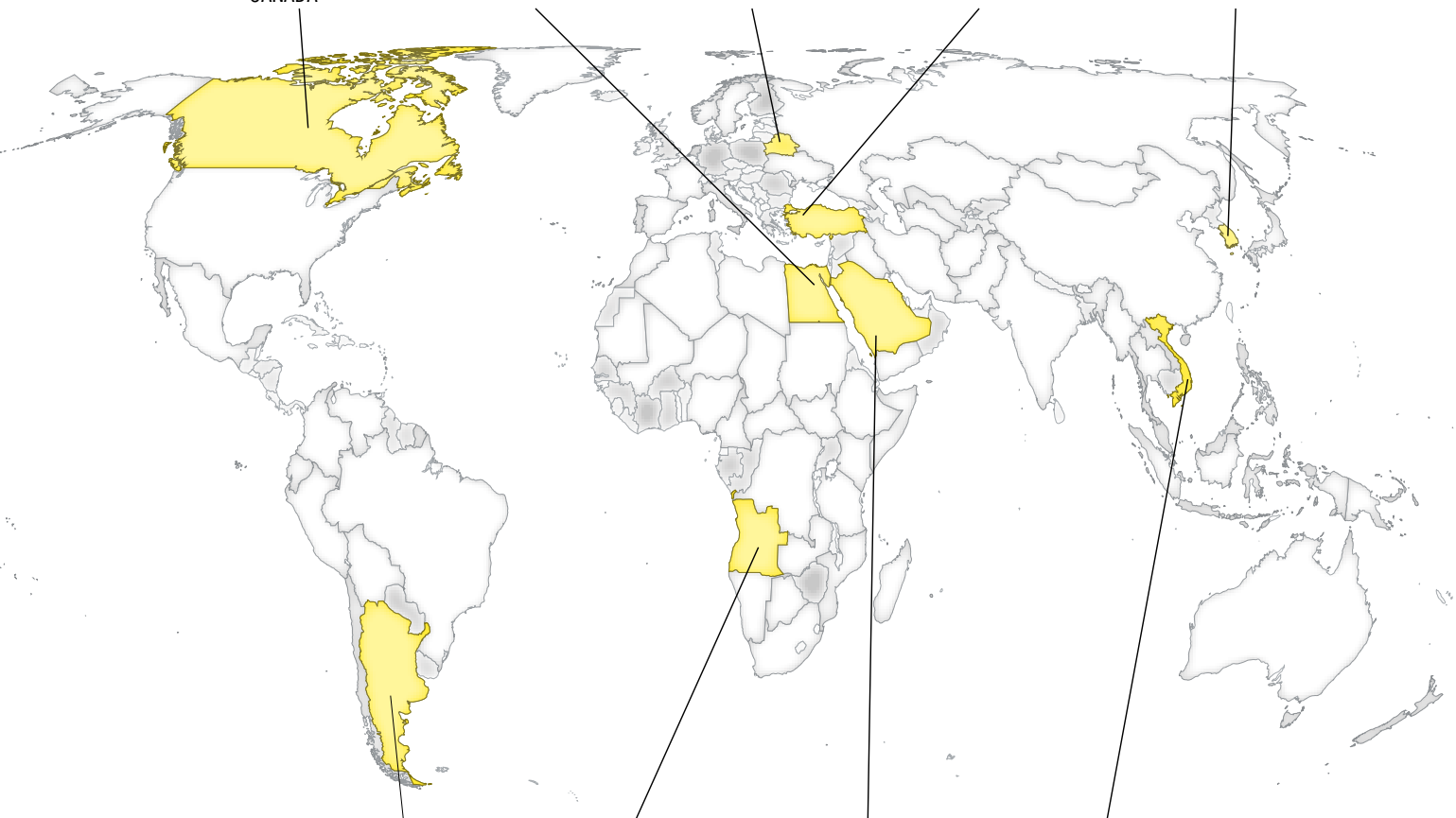
**MARYIA KALESNIKAVA
BELARUS**



**ŞEBNEM KORUR FINCANCI
TÜRKİYE**



**KYUNG SEOK PARK
SOUTH KOREA**



**JOEL PAREDES
ARGENTINA**



**NETH NAHARA
ANGOLA**



**MANAHEL AL-OTAIBI
SAUDI ARABIA**



**DANG DINH BACH
VIET NAM**



READ OUR STORIES

The people featured in this year's campaign are from all around the world – from a TikToker in Angola to a women's rights defender in Saudi Arabia, all these amazing people are connected because their human rights have been violated.

SUPPORT US – WRITE A LETTER!

You're here to learn about human rights and also because you want to make a real difference. Through these actions, you will learn how your voice can positively affect people's lives. Whether you do this with a group of friends, classmates, your family or by yourself, the words you write will change lives.

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STORY CARDS

NETH NAHARA

Angola 

TIKTOKER JAILED FOR CRITICIZING PRESIDENT

For Ana da Silva Miguel, a 32-year-old singer and mother of two young children, life in Angola was frustrating and hard. How could a country with so much potential allow so many of its people to live in poverty? Fed up with the lack of schools, employment and opportunity, Ana took to TikTok, becoming "Neth Nahara" – social media influencer and commentator.

Neth shared stories of her life with her followers. She was bubbly, fun and unafraid to speak her truth. Neth encouraged women to seek an education and gain independence. She also bravely shared that she had HIV and gave advice on how to stay healthy.

On 12 August 2023, Neth went live on her TikTok channel, openly criticizing President João Lourenço. The next day, Neth was arrested. She was summarily

tried, convicted and sentenced to six months in prison. On 27 September 2023 the sentence was increased to two years.

The Angolan authorities are using a controversial law (Article 333 of the Penal Code) to silence critical voices like Neth's. The law makes "insulting" the president a crime.

For the first eight months that Neth spent in arbitrary detention she was denied the daily medication needed to treat HIV. Neth Nahara and others like her are being detained and mistreated because they dare to speak out.

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STORY CARD



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

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TAKE ACTION

Write for Rights 2023 in Côte d'Ivoire.
© Astrid Chitou/Amnesty International

DEMAND JUSTICE FOR NETH

WRITE TO THE PRESIDENT

Demand that Neth Nahara is immediately and unconditionally released, since her conviction and ongoing arbitrary detention stem solely from the peaceful exercise of her human rights, including the right to freedom of expression.

President of Angola
Palácio Presidencial
Cidade Alta
Rua 17 de Setembro
Luanda
Angola

Email: secretariageral@oapr.gov.ao
Facebook: www.facebook.com/cdajoalourenco
X: [@jlprdeangola](https://twitter.com/jlprdeangola)

Hashtags: #FreeNethNahara #NethLivre
#W4R24 #ProtectTheProtest

Salutation: Your Excellency

SHOW NETH THAT YOU SUPPORT HER

Help keep Neth's spirits up; let her know she is not alone. Send her your letters and cards of hope.

Ana da Silva Miguel (Neth Nahara)
Estabelecimento prisional feminino de Viana, Vila de Viana
Avenida 11 de Novembro
Rua Nzinga Mbande
Luanda
Angola



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

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TAKE ACTION

JOEL PAREDES

Argentina 

‘MY CHILDREN DESERVE A FUTURE, I FOUGHT FOR IT’

Joel Paredes is a 29-year-old ceramicist living in Jujuy province in northern Argentina. In June 2023 the local government made changes to Jujuy’s constitution including restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly as well as introducing measures that may damage the environment and risk violating Indigenous Peoples’ land rights. The changes were approved without consulting with Indigenous Peoples or the wider population.

Jujuy is a province rich in lithium, a metal known as “white gold”. Argentina’s authorities want to expand lithium exports. But people who live on the land, like Joel and his family, have serious concerns.

Although not Indigenous himself, Joel sympathized greatly and was concerned for the future of his children who would grow up on the land. Joel joined an evening protest alongside hundreds of other peaceful demonstrators, where he played a drum with his band. For Joel: “Our musical instruments are our weapons.”

In the early hours, the police arrived at the protest and started recklessly firing rubber bullets into the crowd. Joel was hit in his right eye. The injury required surgery, but doctors could not save his sight and Joel is now permanently blind in his right eye and has debilitating nerve pain. No one has been held accountable for what happened to Joel and the other protesters.

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MARYIA KALESNIKAVA

Belarus 

ABDUCTED AND JAILED FOR DEMANDING CHANGE

A professional musician, Maryia Kalesnikava has filled her life with music, art and people. She dreams of a Belarus where everyone is respected and allowed to speak freely.

This led Maryia to become involved in the August 2020 presidential elections. She joined the campaign of independent candidate Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya alongside Veranika Tsapkala. In a country where freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are severely restricted, the three women called for change and offered hope to many.

It is widely believed the opposition won, but the election was rigged, and Alyaksandr Lukashenka returned for his sixth term as president. Following the election, Svyatlana and Veranika were forced into exile and Maryia emerged

as the highest profile opposition figure. She stood at the front line of peaceful protests, confronting abusive police officers and making a heart-shaped symbol with her hands.

On 7 September 2020, Maryia was abducted by the Belarus authorities. Dragged into a van by masked men, she was taken to the border, intimidated and pressured to leave the country. She escaped through the van’s window and tore up her passport to resist deportation. Maryia was arrested, detained and later sentenced to 11 years in prison on false charges.

Maryia is imprisoned in appalling conditions, with limited access to the healthcare she needs and isolated from other inmates inside the prison. Maryia’s family and friends have not heard from her for over a year.

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STORY CARD



DEMAND JUSTICE FOR JOEL

WRITE TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Demand that those found responsible for Joel Paredes's injuries and all other violations against protesters are brought to justice in accordance with international law and standards.

Attorney General of the Public
Prosecutor's Office
Sarmiento 427
4600 San Salvador de Jujuy
Argentina

Email: slello@mpajujuy.gob.ar
X: [@MpaJujuy](https://twitter.com/MpaJujuy)
Instagram: [@mpajujuy](https://www.instagram.com/mpajujuy)

Hashtags: [#justiciaparaJoel](https://twitter.com/hashtag/justiciaparaJoel)
[#justiceforJoel](https://twitter.com/hashtag/justiceforJoel) [#W4R24](https://twitter.com/hashtag/W4R24)
[#ProtectTheProtest](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ProtectTheProtest)

Salutation: Dear Sir

SHOW JOEL AND HIS FAMILY THAT YOU SUPPORT THEM

Send your messages of support to show Joel and his family that they are not alone.

Joel Paredes
c/o Amnesty International Argentina
Santos Dumont 3429, 2nd Floor
1427 Buenos Aires
Argentina

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TAKE ACTION



TELL BELARUS TO IMMEDIATELY RELEASE MARYIA

WRITE TO THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Demand that Maryia Kalesnikava is immediately and unconditionally released from prison, and that her unjust conviction is overturned.

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Belarus
vul. Lenina 19
220030, Minsk
Republic of Belarus

Email: mail@mfa.gov.by
X: [@BelarusMFA](https://twitter.com/BelarusMFA)
Instagram: [@belarusmfa](https://www.instagram.com/belarusmfa)

Hashtags: [#FreeKalesnikava](https://twitter.com/hashtag/FreeKalesnikava) [#W4R24](https://twitter.com/hashtag/W4R24)
[#ProtectTheProtest](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ProtectTheProtest)

Salutation: Dear Minister

SHOW MARYIA THAT SHE IS NOT ALONE

Send Maryia messages of hope and solidarity. Let her know you support her in her fight for human rights in Belarus. Include red hearts and musical notes in your messages.

Maryia Kalesnikava
Penal colony No. 4
vul. Antoshkina 3
246035, Homel
Republic of Belarus

Instagram: [@kalesnikava](https://www.instagram.com/kalesnikava)
X: [@by_kalesnikava](https://twitter.com/by_kalesnikava)
Facebook: www.facebook.com/maria.kalesnikava/

Hashtags: [#FreeKalesnikava](https://twitter.com/hashtag/FreeKalesnikava) [#W4R24](https://twitter.com/hashtag/W4R24)
[#ProtectTheProtest](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ProtectTheProtest)

WRITE
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AMNESTY
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TAKE ACTION



FIGHTING TO PROTECT THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS

“Our medicines, our berries, our food, the animals, our water, our culture, are all here since time immemorial. We are obligated to protect our ways of life for our babies unborn.” These are the words of Sleydo’, a member of the Indigenous Wet’suwet’en Nation, who lives on land inhabited by her ancestors for thousands of years.

In 2019, Coastal GasLink Pipeline Ltd (CGL) began constructing a fossil fuel pipeline through the Wet’suwet’en Nation’s ancestral territory, without the consent of the Hereditary Chiefs and their clans. They never agreed to the pipeline and the Nation has the right to decide what development takes place on its territory.

Committed to protecting their ancestral lands and everyone’s right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment,

Sleydo’ and other land defenders began taking action to stop the pipeline construction. But their peaceful actions have been met with intimidation, harassment and criminalization.

In 2018, the British Columbia Supreme Court granted CGL an injunction to prevent interference with pipeline construction. The police have enforced this injunction with four violent raids on Wet’suwet’en territory, using weapons, helicopters and dogs. More than 75 land defenders have been arrested.

In November 2021, Sleydo’ was arrested during one of these raids, alongside nearly 30 other land defenders. Along with two other defenders, she was later found guilty of “criminal contempt”. They now face prison and a criminal record.

© Amnesty International (Photo: Alii McCracken)



WRITE FOR RIGHTS



STORY CARD



TORTURED FOR HIS BROTHER’S ACTIVISM

Student Oqba Hashad’s life changed on 20 May 2019 when National Security Agency agents stormed his university dorm. They arrested all the students present. After a few days, the other students were released – except Oqba. The agents realized that Oqba was the brother of human rights activist Amr Hashad. After fleeing Egypt earlier that year, Amr had continued to denounce Egypt’s human rights violations from exile.

For 77 days, Oqba’s family had no idea where he was, and they feared for his safety. During this time, Oqba was tortured – including electric shocks to his genitals and to the stump of his right leg, which had been amputated following an accident when he was a child.

In August 2022, Oqba’s prosthetic leg broke. For 16 months, prison authorities denied him a replacement and Oqba became reliant on other prisoners for everyday tasks. A new prosthesis given to him on 4 January 2024 does not fit and causes further injury when used. Officials are also denying him the medicines he needs.

On 20 February 2024, a judge ordered Oqba’s release. To bypass this, prosecutors opened a new bogus case against him to justify his continued detention.

Oqba is being detained solely in retaliation for his brother’s human rights work. Denied proper medical care and even a bed to sleep in, Oqba’s psychological and physical health is gravely deteriorating.

© Private



WRITE FOR RIGHTS



STORY CARD

STOP CRIMINALIZING LAND DEFENDERS

WRITE TO THE PREMIER OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Demand that they stop the criminalization of Wet'suwet'en land defenders.

Premier of British Columbia
PO box 9041
STN Prov. Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E1
Canada

Email: premier@gov.bc.ca
Facebook: www.facebook.com/bcndp/
X: @bcndp
Instagram: @bcndp
Hashtags: #WetsuwetenStrong
#AllOutforWedzinkwa #W4R24

Salutation: Dear Premier

SHOW THE LAND DEFENDERS THAT YOU SUPPORT THEM

Send your messages of support to show the Wet'suwet'en Nation land defenders that you support them in their fight to protect their ancestral lands.

Wet'suwet'en Nation
c/o Amnesty International Canada
312 Laurier Avenue East
Ottawa ON K1N 1H9
Canada

X: @Gidimten
Instagram: @yintah_access
Website: yintahaccess.com

Hashtags: #WetsuwetenStrong
#AllOutforWedzinkwa #W4R24

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TELL EGYPT TO RELEASE OQBA

WRITE TO THE PRESIDENT

Demand Oqba Hashad's immediate and unconditional release, as his detention is related solely to his brother's human rights activism.

President of Egypt
Office of the President
Al-Ittihadiya Palace
Al Nadi, El-Montaza, Heliopolis
Cairo Governorate
4460210
Egypt

Email: p.spokesman@op.gov.eg
Facebook: www.facebook.com/AlSisiOfficial
X: @AlSisiOfficial

Hashtags: #FreeOqba #W4R24

Salutation: Your Excellency

SHOW OQBA HE IS NOT ALONE

Send your support to Oqba and his family, share your messages of hope.

Oqba Hashad
c/o Amnesty International Tunis
Regional Office
24 Avenue de la livre
Les Berges du lac 2
1053 Tunis
Tunisia

X: @FreeOqba
Hashtags: #FreeOqba #W4R24

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MANAHEL AL-OTAIBI

Saudi Arabia 

IMPRISONED FOR SUPPORTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In recent years, Saudi Arabia's authorities have claimed they are advancing women's rights in the Kingdom. Manahel al-Otaibi believed these promises and felt freer to express her views and wear what she liked. Now, facing over a decade behind bars, these promises are utterly hollow.

Before her arrest, Manahel was a fitness instructor and a brave and outspoken advocate for women's rights, using social media to call for greater freedoms for women in her country. Manahel was arrested on 16 November 2022 and charged with violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law for her tweets supporting women's rights and for posting to Snapchat photos of herself at a shopping mall, not wearing an *abaya*, a traditional robe.

Her case was referred to the country's counter-terrorism court, the Specialized Criminal Court, notorious for its grossly unfair trials and harsh sentences. In a secret hearing on 9 January 2024, Manahel was given an 11-year prison sentence for "terrorist offences" for her online expression.

In November 2023, Manahel told her family she had been beaten by a fellow prisoner. As a result, she was cut off from the outside world, unable to communicate with anyone. In April 2024, Manahel was able to call her family for the first time in months and, sounding distressed, told them she was being held in solitary confinement and had again been brutally beaten, leaving her with a broken leg and no medical treatment.

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL 

STORY CARD



© Private

KYUNG SEOK PARK

South Korea 

'WE DEMAND A WORLD WHERE NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND'

Kyung Seok Park developed paraplegia following a hang-gliding accident in 1983. He was 22 years old and busy studying at university, playing guitar and having fun with friends. When Kyung Seok attempted to live as a person with a disability, he soon found daily life for people with disabilities in South Korea was unacceptably difficult, even dangerous. His life as an activist began.

Representing Solidarity Against Disability Discrimination (SADD), Kyung Seok focuses his activism on public transportation. Barriers to accessing public transport mean that people with disabilities cannot participate fully in all aspects of life – travelling to work or school and living independently. Numerous wheelchair users in Seoul have been killed or injured when using unsafe wheelchair lifts at train and subway stations.

Demanding an increase to the public budget for disability rights, in 2021 Kyung Seok and SADD activists began peaceful protests, during which many wheelchair users simultaneously boarded and disembarked subway trains during busy commuting hours. Authorities in the capital, Seoul, have reacted negatively, including with violence, with police forcibly dragging activists out of stations. Politicians have characterized disability activists as a public nuisance. Seoul Metropolitan Government has filed lawsuits against peaceful protesters to quash their activism.

Despite facing multiple lawsuits because of his activism, Kyung Seok continues to fight, declaring: "We refuse to wait any longer. We demand a world where no one is left behind."

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL 

STORY CARD



© Amnesty International (Photo: Yoon Ra)

DEMAND SAUDI ARABIA FREES MANAHEL

WRITE TO THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Demand that Manahel al-Otaibi is immediately and unconditionally released, and all charges against her are dropped.

Minister of Justice for Saudi Arabia
PO box 7775
11472
Riyadh
Saudi Arabia

Email: minister-office@moj.gov.sa and
1950@moj.gov.sa
X: @MojKsa

Hashtags: #FreeManahel #W4R24

Salutation: Your Excellency

SHOW MANAHEL SHE IS NOT ALONE

Send your messages of support to Manahel and her family, let them know you care.

Manahel al-Otaibi
c/o Saudi Arabia Team
Amnesty International
1 Easton Street
London
WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom

X: @ManahelAl_otibi

Hashtags: #FreeManahel #W4R24

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DEMAND THAT KYUNG SEOK'S RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED

WRITE TO THE MAYOR OF SEOUL

Urge the mayor to ensure the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by stopping the use of unlawful force against Kyung Seok Park and SADD activists, dropping all litigation, and ending the media smear campaign so that activists can keep campaigning for a world where people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of life.

Mayor of Seoul
6F, Seoul Metropolitan Government
110 Sejong-daero
Jung-gu
Seoul 04524
Republic of Korea

Email: seoulcity@seoul.go.kr
Facebook: www.facebook.com/seoul.kr
X: @seoulmania
Instagram: @seoul_official

Hashtags: #RidingSeoulMetroWithPark
#LeaveNoOneBehind #W4R24
#ProtectTheProtest

SHOW KYUNG SEOK THAT YOU SUPPORT HIS ACTIVISM

Send your messages of strength and hope. Show Kyung Seok Park and SADD activists that they are valued and respected.

Kyung Seok Park
c/o Solidarity Against Disability
Discrimination
5F, 25, Dongsung-gil
Jongno-gu
Seoul 03086
Republic of Korea

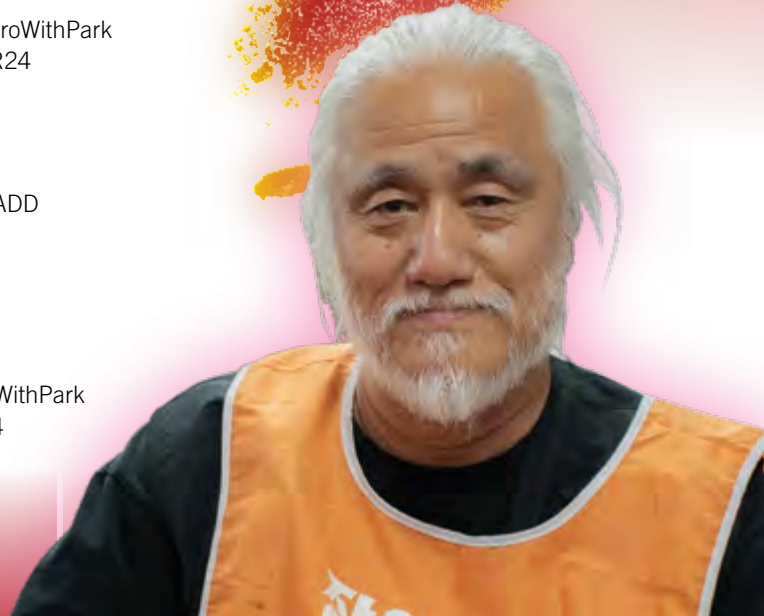
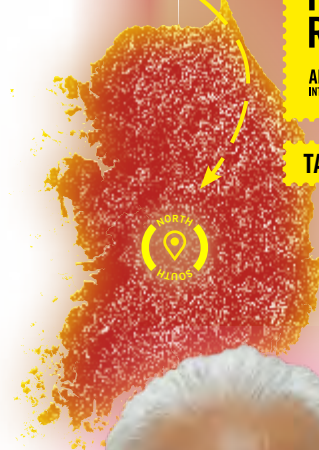
Instagram: @sadd420
X: @sadd0420S

Hashtags: #RidingSeoulMetroWithPark
#LeaveNoOneBehind #W4R24
#ProtectTheProtest

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ŞEBNEM KORUR FİNCANCI

Türkiye 

CONVICTED FOR DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

At home, Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı enjoys spending time with her cats, Simone and Ulula, cooking and listening to music. Beethoven is her favourite composer.

To the world, Şebnem is a forensic medicine expert, renowned for her work to eradicate torture. Until June 2024, she was the head of the Turkish Medical Association. Şebnem has also continually fought to protect the human rights of people in Türkiye, including their right to freedom of expression.

In a bid to silence her and stop her important work, for years the Turkish authorities have subjected Şebnem to baseless criminal investigations, detention and prosecutions. In January 2023, she was convicted for allegedly “making propaganda for a terrorist

organization” after she had called for an investigation into allegations that the Turkish military was using chemical weapons in Iraq. Şebnem is appealing against her conviction but could be imprisoned for almost two years if her appeal is unsuccessful.

The government is cracking down on people’s freedom of expression and putting restrictions on the work of human rights defenders like Şebnem. But Şebnem refuses to give in to their intimidation. Undeterred by the hostility she faces, she says: “I have never had the habit of bowing to any authority to this day.”



© Private

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL 

STORY CARD

DANG DINH BACH

Viet Nam 

ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYER UNFAIRLY JAILED

Environmental justice lawyer Dang Dinh Bach has dedicated his life to improving the health and livelihoods of people in Viet Nam and protecting them from pollution and climate change.

His organization was the first in Viet Nam to take legal action against the government and corporations for serious environmental and public health violations. The illegal disposal of pesticides and the increased risk of cancer caused by industrial pollution are just some of the issues against which it has fought.

The organization’s work is crucial. Through its public campaigns and training, it raises awareness and help communities understand their rights, empowering them to confront powerful economic and political interests to protect their social, economic and environmental well-being.

In June 2021, Bach was arrested and detained. His newborn son was just two weeks old. His organization was forced to close. Bach was charged with “tax evasion” and sentenced to five years in prison following an unfair trial.

Since 2021, at least five environmental and climate justice advocates have been charged with tax evasion, a tactic used by the Vietnamese authorities to silence the growing movement of activists calling on the government to protect the environment.

Bach should be allowed to continue his work to support the communities he cares deeply about. Instead, he is locked up in poor conditions. His health has deteriorated, and he has been harassed by prison officers. He has not seen his young son since his arrest.



© Private

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

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STORY CARD

DEMAND JUSTICE FOR ŞEBNEM

WRITE TO THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Demand that the authorities stop misusing the criminal justice system to harass Şebnem Korur Fincancı and refrain from bringing any other charges against her for defending human rights.

Minister of Justice
Kızılay
Milli Müdafı Cd. No: 5
06420 Çankaya
Ankara
Türkiye

Email: ozelkalem@adalet.gov.tr
Facebook: www.facebook.com/bmyilmaztunc/
X: [@yilmaztunc](https://twitter.com/yilmaztunc)
Instagram: [@yilmaztunc](https://www.instagram.com/yilmaztunc)

Salutation: Dear Minister

SHOW ŞEBNEM THAT YOU SUPPORT HER

Send your messages of support to show Şebnem that you support her in her fight to protect people's rights in Türkiye.

Prof. Şebnem Korur Fincancı
c/o Türk Tabipleri Birliği
GMK Bulvarı
Şht. Danış Tunalıgil Sk. No: 2/17-23
06570 Maltepe
Ankara, Türkiye

X: [@SKorurFincanci](https://twitter.com/SKorurFincanci)
Hashtags: #ŞebnemKorurFincancı
#W4R24

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TELL VIET NAM TO RELEASE BACH

WRITE TO THE PRESIDENT

Tell the president to immediately and unconditionally release Dang Dinh Bach. Pending his release, Dang Dinh Bach must be protected from all forms of torture and other ill-treatment and be given access to adequate healthcare.

President of Viet Nam
President's Office
No. 2, Hung Vuong Street
Ba Dinh District
Hanoi 11100
Viet Nam

Email: vpccp@chinhphu.vn
X: [@MOFAVietNam](https://twitter.com/MOFAVietNam)

Hashtags: #FreeBach #W4R24

Salutation: Your Excellency

KEEP BACH'S HOPE ALIVE

Let Bach know he is not alone by sending your messages and drawings of friendship and hope.

Dang Dinh Bach
Prison No. 6
R684+GPV, H15 Road
Thanh Chuong District
Nghe An Province 460000
Viet Nam

Facebook: www.facebook.com/dang.d.bach

Hashtags: #StandWithBach #FreeBach
#W4R24

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WHY DOES SOLIDARITY MATTER?

You might think that writing to somebody you don't know can't make a difference, or that they won't want to hear from you. But, when you're locked up or in fear for your life, or you're desperately seeking justice for a loved one, having somebody tell you that they believe in you matters a lot. They may feel anxious and alone, and your words can bring comfort and hope to them.

Through the solidarity she received in 2023, Ana Maria Santos Cruz felt the embrace of a global community. It helped her to keep hope alive after the death of her son, Pedro Henrique. Pedro was an activist and an advocate of racial justice and human rights. He was murdered in 2018.

Ana Maria has bravely sought the truth about her son's death, calling on the authorities in Brazil to conduct a thorough investigation and trial. When she received thousands of letters of support from around the world, she felt more able to cope with her grief and with the ongoing threats against her. She said:

“I always say that Pedro taught me a lot, including how to be a tireless fighter for justice. It was also Pedro who connected me with Amnesty International, as he was a supporter of the movement. He used to say to me, joking, that Amnesty International would one day take him to countries of Africa, to Jamaica and other places to do human rights work. Who would imagine that he was right?”

After his murder, through the Write for Rights campaign, Pedro Henrique and I were, in a way, taken to different countries through this story of the fight for justice. I'm very happy and feel strengthened by this wave of solidarity, which comforts my heart.”



© Amnesty International (Photo: Gabriel Yjalade)



© Amnesty International Zimbabwe

From the top: Ana Maria Santos Cruz; Amnesty activists in Zimbabwe work on Pedro's case.

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

Index: POL 32/8289/2024
Original language: English

All images © Amnesty International
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**WRITE
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FIGHTING TO PROTECT THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS, AND OUR PLANET

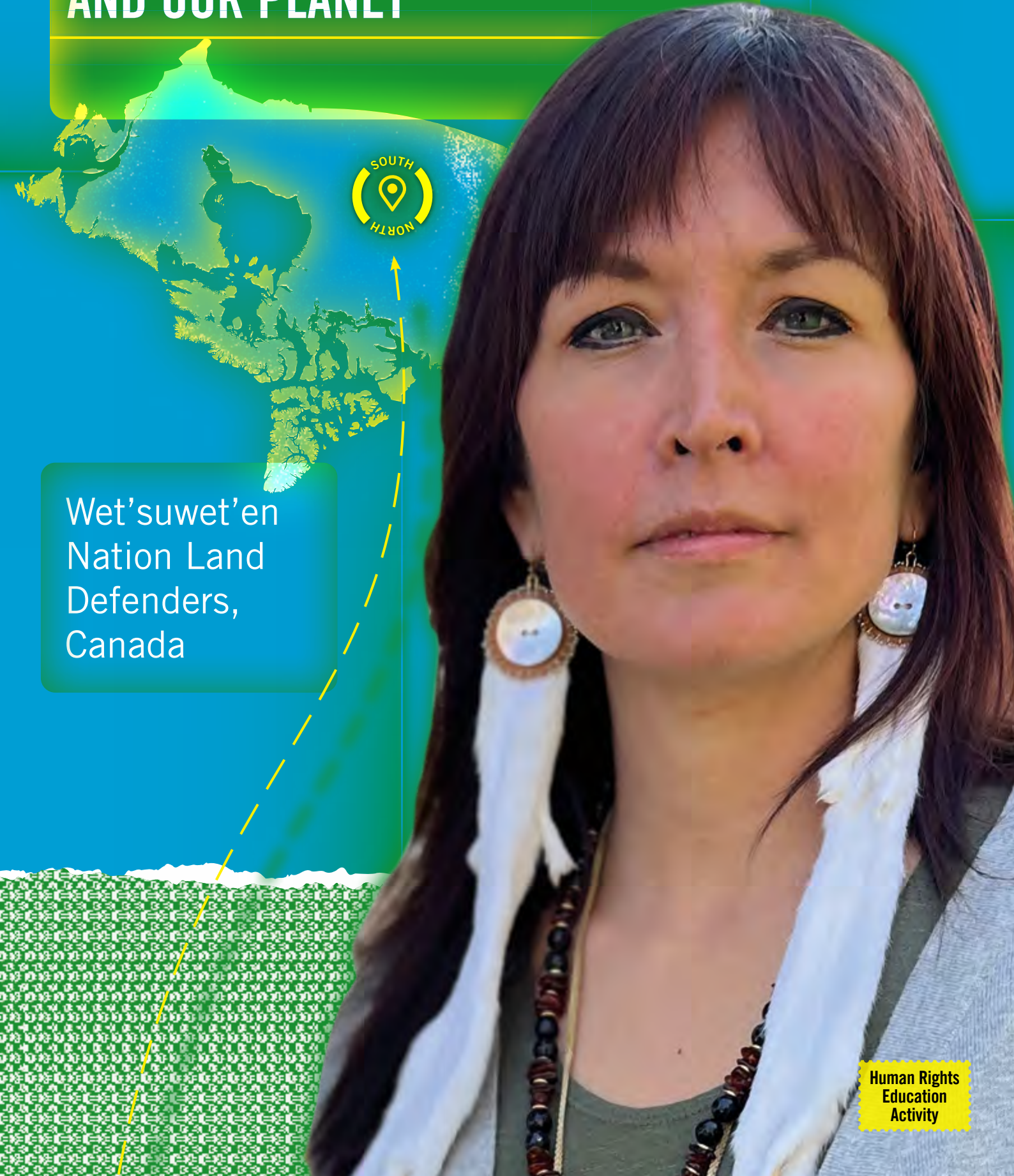
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Wet'suwet'en
Nation Land
Defenders,
Canada

Human Rights
Education
Activity



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

More than 20 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. In the years that followed, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to nearly 6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2023, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. In 2023 alone, more than 1.4 million people were engaged through human rights education activities. Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, by releasing activists from detention, securing justice for those whose rights have been abused and protecting people who advocate for change.

This year's campaign once again includes people from around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for them to receive justice. Through Write for Rights, each of the individuals will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities to demand that they end the injustice, we can create a more just and equal world.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals and others in a similar situation. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there.”

Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the context and group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity, delivering it in-person or online, and any limitations. When participants want to take action for an individual or group, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyse and question issues relating to the individuals' stories. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competencies and skills

FORM their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.



Letter writing with friends in Czechia for Write for Rights 2023.

© Valerie Miric

Read about the people we're fighting for: [amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R24

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: academy.amnesty.org/learn

YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ACQUITTED

Rita Karasartova is a human rights defender and an expert in civic governance. For more than a decade she has dedicated her life to providing independent legal advice, helping people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. Alongside 26 others, Rita was arrested for opposing a new border agreement giving control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. Charged with attempting to “violently overthrow the government”, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment, Rita and at least 21 other defendants were acquitted on 14 June 2024.

“I would like to express my huge, huge gratitude... Your timely actions – these letters, petitions, signatures, and the huge number of letters that went to the court, that went to the prosecutor’s office – it was all very powerful. In fact, it was very empowering to us all... Of course, the acquittal was totally unexpected. I don’t even know how to process it in my head. We had been playing with all sorts of scenarios, different outcomes in our heads, but we didn’t think we would all be acquitted!... I thank you all.”

Rita Karasartova
from Kyrgyzstan



© Private

“I feel so relieved, and I thank you for the amazing Write for Rights campaign. I am forever indebted. It is like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Reading all the letters and cards made me feel so loved and appreciated.”

Cecillia Chimбири from Zimbabwe



OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS FREED

Opposition activists Cecillia Chimбири, Joana Mamombe and Netsai Marova were abducted, tortured and imprisoned after attending a protest in Zimbabwe. They were charged with “communicating falsehoods” and “obstructing the course of justice”. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After being featured in Write for Rights 2022, Cecillia and Joana were acquitted by the High Court.



© Amnesty International Togo



Amnesty supporters in the Netherlands (far left) and Togo (left) at events for Write For Rights 2023.

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



Write for Rights event in Benin in 2023.



© UN Photo

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

KEY CONCEPTS

- Indigenous Peoples' rights
- Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly
- Free, prior and informed consent
- Territory, land and environmental rights defenders

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the Wet'suwet'en Nation, an Indigenous People in Canada, and why they are protecting their lands and waters from the negative consequences of industrial development. Through their story, participants will learn how the Nation's land rights and other rights have been violated and will take action to support them.

AGE: 13+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the importance of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- **recognize** the implications of industrial projects on Indigenous territories.
- **feel** empathy with those whose rights are being violated and whose lands are being threatened.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en Nation.

PREPARATION

- Print the handouts and copies of the simplified UDHR for each participant/group.
- Read the background information on page 10 and the Wet'suwet'en Nation's story on page 11.

MORE INFORMATION

- Learn more about human rights including the right to freedom of expression at the Amnesty Academy: www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/
- Read about the incompatibility of fossil fuels with human rights in Amnesty's report, *Fatal fuels*, available at www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/7382/2023/en/

MATERIALS

- **Handout: Indigenous Peoples in Canada** (page 9)
- **Handout: The Wet'suwet'en Nation's story** (page 11)
- **Background information** (page 10)
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

1. OUR MEDICINES, OUR BERRIES

Write on a large sheet of paper, or read aloud:

"Our medicines, our berries, our food, the animals, our water, our culture, are all here since time immemorial. We are obligated to protect our ways of life for our babies unborn."

Invite participants to reflect on its meaning. Ask a few volunteers to share:

- **What do you think this quote is about?**
- **What does this person mean when they say "time immemorial" and "babies unborn"?**
- **Who do you think might have said this?**

Gently direct participants to the quote's connection to the environment and ancestral relationships, leading on to discussing Indigenous Peoples and their relationship to the environment. Explain that this quote is from Sleydo', a member of the Indigenous Wet'suwet'en Nation. Sleydo' lives on land that has been inhabited by her ancestors for thousands of years in a place that is known today as British Columbia in north-western Canada.

Explain that the Wet'suwet'en Nation is deeply connected to its ancestral lands and waterways, but that this connection is threatened by the construction of a fossil fuel pipeline through their territory. On their lands, the Wet'suwet'en hunt and fish to feed their



communities, pick berries and medicinal plants, and hold ceremonies. Through these activities, they pass on traditional knowledge, language and culture to future generations.

The Hereditary Chiefs, on behalf of the five clans, did not consent to the pipeline's construction. Land defenders have faced violence and been arrested and charged for blocking pipeline construction sites, even though these sites are on their ancestral lands. They could face time in prison and a criminal record if they are found guilty.

2. THE STORY OF THE WET'SUWET'EN NATION



Distribute copies of the Wet'suwet'en Nation's story (page 11) and give participants a few minutes to read the story.

In plenary, ask a few volunteers to briefly share:

- **What shocks or surprises you about the story of Sleydo'?**
- **Why do you think the police are arresting Indigenous Peoples?**
- **Whose interests do you think are being protected by the police and by the government? Those of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, or those of the pipeline company?**
- **How do you think the pipeline construction affects the Wet'suwet'en Nation?**

3. EFFECTS ON INDIGENOUS RIGHTS INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT



Divide participants into small groups and provide them with copies of the simplified version of the UDHR from page 5 and the handout on Indigenous Peoples from page 9.

Explain that industrial projects, including fossil fuels infrastructure such as pipelines, can have significant negative effects on the environment and the people living in those areas. Invite participants to imagine that they will soon travel to the Wet'suwet'en Nation to conduct an environmental and human rights impact assessment.

Which environmental and other rights do they think may be at risk, and would they suggest need investigating? Possible answers can include impacts related to water quality, wildlife, plant life, soil integrity, pollution, habitat destruction, changes in land use and changes in the Nation's way of life and cultural practices. What about their right to decide what happens on their territory? You may also remind participants that fossil fuels are driving the climate crisis.

Ask each group to identify what human rights the Wet'suwet'en Nation has, and which of these rights they think might be at risk or might have been violated. They could do this by making a drawing of before and after the installation of the pipeline, for example.

Possible answers may include the rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, water, health, cultural heritage, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, the right to consultation, and Indigenous Peoples' rights including self-determination and the right to free, prior and informed consent.

Ask the groups to briefly report back in plenary. In closing, refer to relevant articles from the UDHR, emphasizing the connection between the right to self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the right to health and other human rights. If there is still time, debrief using the following questions:

- **Why is it important for the Wet'suwet'en Nation to have the right to decide what happens on their ancestral territory?**
- **How does the construction of the pipeline violate their rights?**
- **What can be done to support Sleydo' and the Wet'suwet'en Nation in their struggle?**

If this is the first time that participants are introduced to the UDHR, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what it is first, using the information starting on page 4.

4. TAKE ACTION



Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to demand justice for the Wet'suwet'en Nation. You can give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch the "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Premier of British Columbia using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the premier something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell them what shocks you about the story of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.
- Tell them why you think it is important that governments respect and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Urge the premier to **stop the criminalization of Wet'suwet'en and other Indigenous land defenders.**

Premier of British Columbia

PO box 9041
STN Prov. Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E1
Canada

Email: premier@gov.bc.ca

Facebook: www.facebook.com/bcndp/

X: @bcndp

Instagram: @bcndp

Hashtags: #WetsuwetenStrong
#AllOutforWedzinkwa #W4R24

Salutation: Dear Premier

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Send your messages of support to show the Wet'suwet'en Nation land defenders that you support them in their fight to protect their ancestral lands and waterways. You could send drawings or postcards of your favourite places in nature or the place where you live.

Suggested messages:

Thank you for protecting our Earth!

Indigenous rights are human rights. We are with you!

I stand in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en land defenders!

Wet'suwet'en Nation

c/o Amnesty International Canada
312 Laurier Avenue East
Ottawa ON K1N 1H9
Canada

X: @Gidimten

Instagram: @yintah_access

Hashtags: #WetsuwetenStrong
#AllOutforWedzinkwa #W4R24

Website: yintahaccess.com



HANDOUT

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, are the original inhabitants of Canada. These diverse Peoples have lived on their ancestral lands for thousands of years, maintaining a deep connection to the land, water and natural resources. The Wet'suwet'en Nation is one such Indigenous Nation, with a rich cultural heritage that is intricately linked with their ancestral territories and waterways in what is now British Columbia. These lands and waters are integral to their identity, culture and way of life.

The Wet'suwet'en territory is "unceded". In the Canadian context, unceded lands or territory means lands or territory that Indigenous Peoples have never given up, surrendered or legally signed away to Canada, which was colonized by Great Britain. The Wet'suwet'en have never signed a treaty agreement with the Canadian government. The Government of British Columbia has also recognized the Wet'suwet'en as the ancestral authorities of their traditional territory.

KEY CONCEPTS

Indigenous rights: Indigenous rights refers to the collective and individual human rights of Indigenous Peoples. These rights are enshrined in international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Key aspects include the right to self-determination, the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social, and cultural institutions, and the right to the lands, territories and resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used.

Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC): FPIC is based on the rights to self-determination, self-governance and freedom from racial discrimination. It means that Indigenous Peoples have the right to be consulted with and to give or withhold their consent in all cases where their rights may be significantly affected, for example a project that may affect their lands and natural resources. This consent must be given freely, without coercion, prior to any commencement of activities and throughout the project when significant changes are planned, and with full information about the project and its potential impacts.

Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment: in 2022, after years of campaigning by civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples and frontline communities, the UN General Assembly recognized the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It is essential to the enjoyment of a range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food and water.

Molly Wickham, also known as Sleydo', of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.





BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND GOVERNMENT DUTIES IN THE CONTEXT OF BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

All companies have a responsibility to **respect** human rights and the environment. This includes:

- Conducting thorough and ongoing environmental and human rights due diligence.
- Engaging in meaningful consultation with and providing accessible information to affected communities, especially Indigenous Peoples.
- Obtaining free, prior and informed consent from Indigenous Peoples before proceeding with projects.
- Mitigating negative impacts on the environment and human rights.
- Providing transparent information about the project and its potential impacts.
- Providing effective remedy to people whose rights have been harmed. This includes a guarantee of non-repetition.

Governments have a duty to **protect** the rights of Indigenous Peoples and **ensure** that corporate activities do not harm the environment or violate human rights. This includes:

- Upholding free, prior and informed consent and ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are meaningfully consulted and that their decision is respected and upheld by states and corporations.
- Enforcing environmental protection laws and regulations.
- Monitoring and regulating the activities of companies to prevent environmental degradation and human rights abuses.
- Providing legal and institutional support to Indigenous Peoples to defend their rights and territories.



THE WET'SUWET'EN NATION'S STORY

“Our medicines, our berries, our food, the animals, our water, our culture, are all here since time immemorial. We are obligated to protect our ways of life for our babies unborn.” These are the words of Sleydo', a member of the Indigenous Wet'suwet'en Nation, who lives on land inhabited by her ancestors for thousands of years.

In 2019, Coastal GasLink Pipeline Ltd (CGL) began constructing a fossil fuel pipeline through the Wet'suwet'en Nation's ancestral territory, without the consent of the Hereditary Chiefs and their clans. They never agreed to the pipeline and the Nation has the right to decide what development takes place on its territory.

Committed to protecting their ancestral lands and everyone's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, Sleydo' and other land defenders began taking action to stop the pipeline construction. But their peaceful actions have been met with intimidation, harassment and criminalization.

In 2018, the British Columbia Supreme Court (BCSC) granted CGL an injunction to prevent any interference with pipeline construction. The police have enforced this injunction with four violent raids on Wet'suwet'en territory, using weapons, helicopters and dogs. More than 75 land defenders have been arrested.

In November 2021, Sleydo' was arrested during one of these raids. Along with two other defenders, she was later found guilty of “criminal contempt” for allegedly disobeying the injunction order to stay away from pipeline construction sites, despite them being on her ancestral territory. The land defenders have made an application to the BCSC stating that their human rights were violated by police during the raids. Their future depends on the outcome of the application. If unsuccessful, they face prison.



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© Amnesty International (Photo: Alli McCracken)



© Gidimt'en Access Point YouTube Channel

Top: Molly Wickham, also known as Sleydo'.

Middle: Wet'suwet'en territory.

Bottom: Police confronting Wet'suwet'en Nation land defenders.

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2024
Index: **POL 32/8285/2024**
Original language: **English**

All images © Amnesty International
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Cover photo: © Amnesty
International (Photo: Alli McCracken)

amnesty.org

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL** 

TIKTOKER JAILED FOR CRITICIZING PRESIDENT

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Neth Nahara,
Angola

Human Rights
Education
Activity



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

More than 20 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. In the years that followed, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to nearly 6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2023, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. In 2023 alone, more than 1.4 million people were engaged through human rights education activities. Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, by releasing activists from detention, securing justice for those whose rights have been abused and protecting people who advocate for change.

This year's campaign once again includes people from around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for them to receive justice. Through Write for Rights, each of the individuals will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities to demand that they end the injustice, we can create a more just and equal world.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals and others in a similar situation. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there.”

Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the context and group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity, delivering it in-person or online, and any limitations. When participants want to take action for an individual or group, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyse and question issues relating to the individuals' stories. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competencies and skills

FORM their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.



Letter writing with friends in Czechia for Write for Rights 2023.

© Valerie Miric

Read about the people we're fighting for: [amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R24

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: academy.amnesty.org/learn

YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ACQUITTED

Rita Karasartova is a human rights defender and an expert in civic governance. For more than a decade she has dedicated her life to providing independent legal advice, helping people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. Alongside 26 others, Rita was arrested for opposing a new border agreement giving control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. Charged with attempting to “violently overthrow the government”, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment, Rita and at least 21 other defendants were acquitted on 14 June 2024.

“I would like to express my huge, huge gratitude... Your timely actions – these letters, petitions, signatures, and the huge number of letters that went to the court, that went to the prosecutor’s office – it was all very powerful. In fact, it was very empowering to us all... Of course, the acquittal was totally unexpected. I don’t even know how to process it in my head. We had been playing with all sorts of scenarios, different outcomes in our heads, but we didn’t think we would all be acquitted!... I thank you all.”

Rita Karasartova
from Kyrgyzstan



© Private

“I feel so relieved, and I thank you for the amazing Write for Rights campaign. I am forever indebted. It is like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Reading all the letters and cards made me feel so loved and appreciated.”

Cecillia Chimhiri from Zimbabwe



OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS FREED

Opposition activists Cecillia Chimhiri, Joana Mamombe and Netsai Marova were abducted, tortured and imprisoned after attending a protest in Zimbabwe. They were charged with “communicating falsehoods” and “obstructing the course of justice”. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After being featured in Write for Rights 2022, Cecillia and Joana were acquitted by the High Court.



© Amnesty International Togo



Amnesty supporters in the Netherlands (far left) and Togo (left) at events for Write For Rights 2023.

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



Write for Rights event in Benin in 2023.



THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

KEY CONCEPTS

- Right to freedom of expression
- Arbitrary detention
- Right to health
- Shrinking civic space

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the right to freedom of expression through the real story of Neth Nahara, a digital influencer in Angola who has been arbitrarily detained for her outspoken views on social media. Participants will engage in discussions, creative activities and letter writing to advocate for her release.

AGE: 14+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** concept of the right to freedom of expression and its importance.
- **describe** the consequences of a violation of the right to freedom of expression.
- **feel** empathy for individuals whose right to freedom of expression has been violated.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Neth Nahara.

PREPARATION

- Print the **handout Neth Nahara's story** and copies of the simplified UDHR for each participant/group.
- Read the background information on page 10.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about human rights including the right to freedom of expression at the Amnesty Academy: www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/

MATERIALS

- **Handout: Neth Nahara's story** (page 11)
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- **Creative materials**
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Video of Neth Nahara from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos
- Optional: "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/

PRECAUTIONS

This activity discusses the right to freedom of expression, assuming that participants generally experience a high level of freedom in expressing their thoughts, ideas, identities, religious beliefs, and so on. However, this may not be the case for everyone. Some participants may have faced significant limitations on their right to freedom of expression, which can evoke strong emotional responses. Facilitators should assess the participants' backgrounds and experiences beforehand, adjust questions and discussions to be sensitive to these experiences and provide a safe space for participants to express their feelings and offer support as needed.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Welcome participants and ask them to close their eyes and think for one minute about how they express themselves, their ideas and their concerns. Provide prompts:

- **Think of a time when you were concerned about something happening around you. Did you express those concerns? How? Where? To whom?**
- **Why is it important to be able to express yourself? What does it mean to you personally to be able to have your voice heard?**

Invite two or three participants to share their thoughts.

Discuss the importance of the right to freedom of expression. Explain that the right to freedom of expression includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, through any media. Use the background information on page 10 to complement the discussion.

Ask:

- **How do you think your life would change if you were restricted from expressing your thoughts and opinions freely, or you were being censored?**



Share these words with the group: *“Your voice matters. You have the right to say what you think, share information and demand a better world. You also have the right to agree or disagree with those in power and to express these opinions in peaceful protests. Exercising these rights – without fear of unlawful interference – is central to living in an open and fair society; one in which people can access justice and enjoy their human rights.”*

End by telling participants that they will now examine a powerful example of how the right to freedom of expression can be violated, focusing on a real-life case that highlights the profound impact of such restrictions on the life of one social media influencer and singer.

If this is the first time that participants are introduced to the UDHR, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what it is first, using the information starting on page 4.

2. NETH NAHARA'S STORY



Hand out Neth's story from page 11 and copies of the simplified UDHR from page 5. Ask a volunteer to read her story aloud. After listening, ask the participants:

- **Is there anything that surprises you about Neth's story?**
- **Which human right(s) can you identify that have been violated in Neth's case?**

Point out that Neth Nahara's detention is considered arbitrary. Arbitrary detention means being held without a legitimate reason or without legal process, often as a way to suppress people's right to freedom of expression and other human rights.

Divide participants into small groups or pairs and ask:

- **How do violations of the right to freedom of expression put other rights at risk?**

Ask each group/pair to choose one or two rights from the UDHR list and discuss how these might be affected.

After about 10 minutes, bring everyone back together and have a short debriefing. Ask a few people to share the main points from their group's discussion.

Following on from the points raised by the groups, the plenary discussion might include the following topics:

- How restrictions on the right to freedom of expression can limit the right to access information, which is crucial for education and personal development.
- How censorship of artistic expression restrains creativity and cultural development, possibly violating the right to culture.
- How limitations on the right to freedom of expression can lead to arbitrary detentions or house arrests for political reasons, restricting the right to freedom of movement.
- How prosecution based on expressing religious beliefs can violate the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- How government surveillance to suppress the right to freedom of expression intrudes on personal privacy.

These are just a few examples. Participants are encouraged to think of other possible impacts.

If time allows, use these additional prompts:

- **Did you find any surprising connections between the right to freedom of expression and other rights?**
- **What emotions did Neth's story evoke in you, and why?**





3. CREATIVE VOICES FOR FREEDOM

Neth Nahara is a TikTok influencer, an artist and a singer. Invite participants to express their support for Neth through a creative activity. Tell participants:

“Imagine that, like Neth, you use social media to speak out about topics that concern you. Now, express yourself in support of Neth.”

Participants can choose any creative way to express their support. For example, they could draft a social media message, create an artistic poster, write a poem or song, or script a TikTok video.

Have them consider what their message or appeal would be, and to whom they would direct the message.

In the creation of this message, participants might consider the importance of the right to freedom of expression, share a detail about Neth’s story, make an emotional appeal, or include a call to action or justice for Neth.

If time allows, you can finish this part of the activity by inviting a few participants to share their creations with the group, or by having participants display their posters, poems or messages around the room and doing a group gallery walk.

As a final reflection, share these words with participants: *“As is the case for many people who speak up when something is wrong, Neth became a victim of a system that has repeatedly arrested, tortured and even killed people for peaceful dissent. Speaking up for Neth is speaking up for the right to freedom of expression. Supporting Neth’s case sends a strong message to people and authorities that the world is watching, and that human rights violations in the country do not go unnoticed.”*

4. TAKE ACTION

Explain about Amnesty International’s Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to demand justice for Neth Nahara. You can give examples from last year’s campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch the “Write for Rights: Take action” video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn’t enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative. They might be able to use their creative outputs from activity three above.

 15 MINUTES

 15 MINUTES

Show participants the video of Neth Nahara which can be found here: www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).





WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the President of Angola using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the president and his government something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell them what shocks you about the case of Neth Nahara.
- Tell them why you think it is important that governments respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression.
- Demand that **Neth Nahara is immediately and unconditionally released, since her conviction and ongoing arbitrary detention stem solely from the peaceful exercise of her human rights, including the right to freedom of expression.**

President of Angola

Palácio Presidencial
Cidade Alta
Rua 17 de Setembro
Luanda
Angola

Email: secretariageral@oapr.gov.ao

Facebook: www.facebook.com/cdajoalourenco

X: [@jlprdeangola](https://twitter.com/@jlprdeangola)

Hashtags: #FreeNethNahara

#NethLivre #W4R24

#ProtectTheProtest

Salutation: Your Excellency

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Show Neth that she is not alone. Send your message of solidarity and hope to keep Neth's spirits up. She likes to dance and sing. You could draw a microphone or draw Neth with her two children (a five-year-old boy and a two-year-old girl). Be creative! Then send your message to the address to the right. **Make sure you include Neth's real name – Ana da Silva Miguel – when addressing your letter to the prison.**

Neth speaks English and Portuguese. Here are some example messages to include:

Portuguese: **“Muita força Neth. Desejo que você saia da prisão o mais rápido possível. Você foi forte por exercer seu direito de liberdade de expressão e desejo que você continue se expressando sem medo.”**

English: **“Lots of strength, Neth. I hope you get out of prison soon. You are strong for exercising your right to freedom of expression and I hope you can continue expressing yourself without fear.”**

Portuguese: **“Estou a torcer pela sua liberdade. Você poderia ter calado, mas você preferiu falar e exercer seu direito de liberdade de expressão. Que você saia da prisão de cabeça erguida e com a mesma coragem.”**

English: **“I'm rooting for your freedom. You could have remained silent, but you preferred to speak out and exercise your right to freedom of expression. May you leave prison with your head held high and with the same courage.”**

Ana da Silva Miguel (Neth Nahara)

Estabelecimento prisional feminino
de Viana
Vila de Viana
Avenida 11 de Novembro
Rua Nzinga Mbande
Luanda
Angola



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

ARTICLE 19 OF THE UDHR

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guarantees the right to freedom of expression including the right to hold your own opinions and to express them freely, without government interference. This also includes the right to express views through public protests or through written materials, media broadcasts, the internet and works of art. This right is regarded as a very important feature in any society. We need a free flow of ideas to ensure that different opinions are taken into account and different points of view are aired. Limiting the right to freedom of expression undermines transparency and accountability and also undermines other human rights.

The right to freedom of expression is important to society as a whole and to individuals. Our opinions and thoughts are a fundamental part of what makes us human. Stopping people from expressing these is equivalent to cutting off a part of their personality!

The human rights treaties which expand the rights in the UDHR allow for the right to freedom of expression to be restricted only in some very specific cases. Most countries, for example, have laws against racist or other discriminatory speech. However, limits on the right to freedom of expression are only permitted where these are necessary for the protection of the rights of other people or groups of people, or to protect national security, public order or public health.

Protesters at a pro-democracy rally in Hong Kong in May 2020.



NETH NAHARA'S STORY

Ana da Silva Miguel, known online as Neth Nahara, is a 32-year-old singer and mother of two young children. For her, life in Angola was frustrating and hard. How could a country with so much potential allow so many of its people to live in poverty? Fed up with the lack of schools, employment and opportunities, she took to TikTok to share stories of her life with her followers, the good times and the bad. She was bubbly, fun and unafraid to speak her truth. Neth encouraged women to seek out education and gain independence. She also bravely shared that she had HIV and gave advice on how to stay healthy.

On 12 August 2023, Neth went live on her TikTok channel, openly criticizing President João Lourenço. The next day, she was arrested. She was summarily tried, convicted and sentenced to six months in prison. On 27 September 2023, her sentence was increased to two years' imprisonment.

The Angolan authorities are using a controversial law (Article 333 of the Penal Code) to silence critical voices like Neth's. The law was passed during the Covid-19 pandemic – a time when the Angolan people took to the streets to express their discontent with the president's leadership – and makes "insulting" the president a crime.

During Neth's first eight months in arbitrary detention, she was denied the daily medication needed to treat HIV. She was only given the necessary medicine after repeated requests from her lawyers. Neth Nahara and others like her are being detained and mistreated simply because they dare to speak out.



© Neth Nahara



© José Silva Pinto

From the top: Neth Nahara; View of Luanda, Angola.

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2024
Index: **POL 32/8282/2024**
Original language: **English**

All images © Amnesty International
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Cover photo: © Private

amnesty.org

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL** 

POLITICAL ACTIVIST

ABDUCTED AND LOCKED UP

FOR 11 YEARS

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Maryia
Kalesnikava,
Belarus

Human Rights
Education
Activity



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

More than 20 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. In the years that followed, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to nearly 6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2023, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. In 2023 alone, more than 1.4 million people were engaged through human rights education activities. Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, by releasing activists from detention, securing justice for those whose rights have been abused and protecting people who advocate for change.

This year's campaign once again includes people from around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for them to receive justice. Through Write for Rights, each of the individuals will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities to demand that they end the injustice, we can create a more just and equal world.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals and others in a similar situation. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there.”

Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the context and group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity, delivering it in-person or online, and any limitations. When participants want to take action for an individual or group, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyse and question issues relating to the individuals' stories. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competencies and skills

FORM their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.



Letter writing with friends in Czechia for Write for Rights 2023.

© Valerie Miric

Read about the people we're fighting for: [amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R24

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: academy.amnesty.org/learn



YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ACQUITTED

Rita Karasartova is a human rights defender and an expert in civic governance. For more than a decade she has dedicated her life to providing independent legal advice, helping people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. Alongside 26 others, Rita was arrested for opposing a new border agreement giving control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. Charged with attempting to “violently overthrow the government”, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment, Rita and at least 21 other defendants were acquitted on 14 June 2024.

“I would like to express my huge, huge gratitude... Your timely actions – these letters, petitions, signatures, and the huge number of letters that went to the court, that went to the prosecutor’s office – it was all very powerful. In fact, it was very empowering to us all... Of course, the acquittal was totally unexpected. I don’t even know how to process it in my head. We had been playing with all sorts of scenarios, different outcomes in our heads, but we didn’t think we would all be acquitted!... I thank you all.”

Rita Karasartova
from Kyrgyzstan



© Private

“I feel so relieved, and I thank you for the amazing Write for Rights campaign. I am forever indebted. It is like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Reading all the letters and cards made me feel so loved and appreciated.”

Cecillia Chimhiri from Zimbabwe



OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS FREED

Opposition activists Cecillia Chimhiri, Joana Mamombe and Netsai Marova were abducted, tortured and imprisoned after attending a protest in Zimbabwe. They were charged with “communicating falsehoods” and “obstructing the course of justice”. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After being featured in Write for Rights 2022, Cecillia and Joana were acquitted by the High Court.



© Amnesty International Togo



Amnesty supporters in the Netherlands (far left) and Togo (left) at events for Write For Rights 2023.

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



© Amnesty International Benin

Write for Rights event in Benin in 2023.



© UN Photo

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

KEY CONCEPTS

- Right to peaceful protest
- Freedom of peaceful assembly
- Freedom of expression
- Human rights defenders and activists

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about human rights, with an emphasis on two of the rights that enable peaceful protest: freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. To fully understand these rights, the participants will get to know Maryia Kalesnikava from Belarus, who was arrested after exercising her right to peaceful protest. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write letters in support of and showing solidarity with Maryia.

AGE: 14+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about human rights including the right to protest and the right to freedom of expression at the Amnesty Academy: www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **learn** about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- **understand** the concepts of freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression and how they relate to the right to peaceful protest.
- **explore** the consequences for people if their government does not respect the right to peaceful protest.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Mariya Kalesnikava.

PREPARATION

- Print the picture of Maryia Kalesnikava from page 10 or prepare to show it on a screen.
- Print Maryia Kalesnikava's story for each participant/group.
- Print and cut out the matching rights cards for each group.
- Read the background information and Maryia Kalesnikava's story.

MATERIALS

- **Handout: Matching rights cards** (pages 11-12)
- **Handout: Maryia Kalesnikava's story** (page 15)
- **Picture of Maryia Kalesnikava** (page 10)
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- **Background information** (pages 13-14)
- **Paper and pens**
- **Envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: Video of Maryia Kalesnikava from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos
- Optional: "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

PRECAUTIONS

This activity discusses the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. It assumes that participants generally experience a high level of freedom in expressing their thoughts, ideas, identities, religious beliefs, and so on. However, some participants may have faced significant limitations on their right to protest and other human rights, which can evoke a strong emotional response. Facilitators should be mindful of participants' backgrounds and experiences, adjust questions and discussions to be sensitive to these experiences, provide a safe space for participants to express their feelings and offer support as needed.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHT TO PROTEST



Split the participants into small groups. Distribute paper and pens. Read out loud the following statement:

"Imagine you are living in a country where the government is constantly violating the human rights of its inhabitants. A close friend of yours, who has not committed any crime, is in jail without a fair trial. The situation is incredibly unfair. You want to protest against the government's action by making people aware of what has happened to your friend, as well as letting people know that your government is not respecting human rights."

Ask each participant to draw or write down different ways in which they would draw attention to and protest against what happened to their friend and the other human rights violations taking place in that country.

After drawing/writing down their ideas, let the participants share their examples in small groups. Ask them to discuss the following questions:

- **What did you draw/write down?**
- **How and where would you try to draw attention to the human rights violations and protest against them?**
- **Can you think of more ways of drawing attention and protesting?**

Bring the groups back together to share their thoughts in plenary. Write down on a board or large piece of paper the different ideas so that all the participants can see them. Point out ideas related to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression as part of the right to protest. Give the participants credit for their creativity.

Next, cross out some of the ideas. Explain that, in a country where freedom of assembly and freedom of expression are unduly restricted, these actions might not be accepted by the government.

Ask the participants the following questions and take answers from a few volunteers:

- **How would you feel if your way of protesting was not allowed by the government or you were punished for protesting in this way?**
- **Why do you think the government (in this case) would not accept your actions?**

Discuss why the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression are important. Use the background information on page 13 to facilitate this discussion.

2. MARYIA KALESNIKAVA'S STORY



Show participants the picture of Maryia Kalesnikava (page 10). Introduce her to the participants by explaining that Maryia is a musician, a political activist and an outspoken advocate for human rights in Belarus.

Using the background information on Belarus on page 14, explain the context in Belarus to the participants and outline some of the human rights violations perpetrated by the authorities there. Read out loud the following paragraphs:

“Maryia Kalesnikava likes to say that ‘love is stronger than fear’. With her creativity and spirit, she believes in change, and in Belarus becoming a country where everyone can live freely and with their human rights respected. Her activism has inspired and given hope to the Belarusian people that a better future is possible. In 2020, the Government of Belarus had Maryia arrested for ‘extremism’, ‘trying to seize power’, and for making ‘calls for actions causing harm to national security’, solely because of her peaceful activism.

“Maryia was sentenced to 11 years in prison. She is in poor health and is being kept in inhuman conditions. Her family worries about her and has not heard from her since February 2023. It is extremely difficult for anyone in Belarus to stand up for Maryia’s rights because independent lawyers have been prevented from working, and human rights organizations and independent media have been closed down or fled the country. Maryia’s family, who are still in Belarus, risk punishment if they try to show her support.”

Divide the participants into groups and hand out copies of Maryia’s story (page 15). Ask participants to read through it in their groups.

Then, ask the groups to discuss the following questions:

- **What are your thoughts after having heard Maryia’s story?**
- **What do you believe gives Maryia the strength to protest?**

Bring the participants back together and ask the groups to share their thoughts.



3. MATCHING RIGHTS

Hand out the matching rights cards (pages 11-12) to each group. Some of the cards describe episodes from Maryia's story. The other cards describe different human rights that can be found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Explain to the participants that they are going to pair up the cards describing Maryia's story with the cards that describe human rights.

The groups can share their answers in plenary when they have finished the exercise.

To end the exercise, ask the participants:

- What do you think should happen to Maryia now?

4. TAKE ACTION

Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to demand justice for Maryia Kalesnikava. You can give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch the "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.



If this is the first time that participants are introduced to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what it is first, using the information starting on page 4. For example, you could ask the participants to think about the human rights they have made use of today, relating human rights to their everyday life. You can also ask how they would feel or react if that right was taken away from them.



Show participants the video of Maryia Kalesnikava which can be found here: www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).

Prior to her arrest, Maryia mobilized people in Belarus and stood at the frontline of peaceful protest.



WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Belarus using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the minister something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell them what shocks you about Maryia's story.
- Tell them why you think it is important that the government respects and upholds the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.
- Tell them to **immediately and unconditionally release Maryia from prison, and that her unjust conviction must be overturned.**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Belarus
vul. Lenina 19
220030, Minsk
Republic of Belarus

Email: mail@mfa.gov.by

X: [@BelarusMFA](https://twitter.com/BelarusMFA)

Instagram: [@belarusmfa](https://www.instagram.com/belarusmfa)

Hashtags: #FreeKalesnikava

#W4R24 #ProtectTheProtest

Salutation: Dear Minister

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Send Maryia a message of hope and solidarity to show her and the Belarusian prison authorities that she is not forgotten.

Maryia speaks Russian, Belarusian, German and some English.

Maryia Kalesnikava
Penal colony No. 4
vul. Antoshkina 3
246035, Homel
Republic of Belarus

Instagram: [@kalesnikava](https://www.instagram.com/kalesnikava)

X: [@by_kalesnikava](https://twitter.com/by_kalesnikava)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/
maria.kalesnikava/](https://www.facebook.com/maria.kalesnikava/)

Hashtags: #FreeKalesnikava

#W4R24 #ProtectTheProtest



Maryia's sister, Tatsiana Khomich, stands in front of a mural of Maryia.

MARYIA KALESNIKAVA



HANDOUT**MATCHING RIGHTS CARDS****HUMAN RIGHTS CARDS****UDHR ARTICLE 1**

**FREEDOM AND EQUALITY IN
DIGNITY AND RIGHTS**

**UDHR ARTICLE 3**

**RIGHT TO LIFE, LIBERTY AND
SECURITY OF PERSON**

**UDHR ARTICLE 9**


**NO UNJUST DETENTION,
IMPRISONMENT OR EXILE**

**UDHR ARTICLE 19**


**FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
AND THE RIGHT TO SPREAD
INFORMATION**

**MARYIA'S EXPERIENCE CARDS**


On 7 September 2020, Maryia was forcibly disappeared by the Belarusian authorities. She was dragged into a van by masked men. The government did not approve of Maryia's or other opposition members' political activism and therefore did not respect their rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.




Maryia's unjust arrest and imprisonment is denying her the right to live freely.



Maryia has been arrested even though she has not committed any recognizable crime under international law.



The government has denied Maryia the right to freely express herself and to protest against the authorities. Before her arrest, she inspired many to join peaceful protests. She spread the message: "Love is stronger than fear".



HANDOUT**MATCHING RIGHTS CARDS****HUMAN RIGHTS CARDS****UDHR ARTICLE 25**

**RIGHT TO A STANDARD OF
LIVING ADEQUATE FOR YOUR
HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

**UDHR ARTICLE 5**


FREEDOM FROM TORTURE

**UDHR ARTICLE 10**


RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

**UDHR ARTICLE 20**


**FREEDOM TO JOIN
ASSOCIATIONS AND MEET
WITH OTHERS IN A PEACEFUL
WAY**

**MARYIA'S EXPERIENCE CARDS**

For more than a year, Maryia has been denied any communication with her family and lawyers, including phone calls, letters and visits. She is unwell and is not getting the healthcare she needs.




Maryia was placed in an isolation cell for more than 10 days, despite having serious health concerns. Maryia reportedly had to sleep directly on the floor during that period as there were no mattresses, pillows or bed linen. Warm clothes were not provided. Her cell was so cold that she could not sleep and had to walk constantly to keep warm.




Maryia did not receive a fair and public trial.

Maryia was found guilty and sentenced to 11 years in prison for “calls for actions aimed at causing harm to national security”, when all she did was advocate for change in a peaceful way.



Maryia was sentenced for participating in and leading peaceful protests. Maryia was often seen making heart-shaped signs with her hands as a symbol of peace and love at peaceful demonstrations.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL PROTEST

Peaceful protest is a dynamic and public way of exercising our human rights. Throughout history, protests have allowed individuals and groups to express dissent, opinions and ideas, expose injustice and abuse, and demand accountability from those in power. Peaceful protests cover a wide spectrum of activities, from letter writing and organizing petitions, to pickets, rallies, marches and strikes. They include colourful and noisy mass demonstrations, silent vigils, sit-ins, flash mobs and media stunts. They also include Twitter storms and online organizing to share similar slogans and messages, as well as hunger strikes, banner drops and street art. They can be individual or collective and can take place online or offline. All these and other forms of protest are protected under the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and sometimes other human rights as well.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Article 19 of the UDHR protects your right to hold your own opinions and to express them freely, without government interference. This includes the right to express views through public protests or through written materials, media broadcasts, the internet and works of art. We need a free flow of ideas to ensure that different opinions are taken into account and different ideas are aired. Limiting the right to freedom of expression undermines transparency and accountability and makes the fight for human rights even more difficult. Freedom of expression is important not just to society as a whole, but also to the individual. Our opinions and thoughts are a fundamental part of what makes us human and stopping people from expressing these is equivalent to cutting off a part of their personality!

The right to freedom of expression is not an unlimited right. Sometimes, governments have a duty to protect other people's rights or certain public interests which requires some expression to be prohibited or restricted. But the circumstances in which the authorities can restrict the right to freedom of expression are very narrow and must be considered as exceptional rather than the norm.

The right to freedom of expression is closely linked to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, which is the right of people to come together in a public place for a common expressive purpose, such as for meetings, strikes, processions, rallies and sit-ins. The right to peaceful assembly means that someone can gather together with others peacefully without fear of being arrested or harassed by the police. In fact, the authorities have a positive duty to facilitate peaceful assemblies, so the police may be required to take special measures to ensure the safety of the people assembling and the general public.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR), ARTICLE 19

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST IN BELARUS

Marya's story is about standing up against a repressive government and being at the forefront of the 2020 peaceful protests in opposition to the widely disputed results of the presidential election held in Belarus in August 2020.

Marya's belief in freedom of expression and human dignity inspired many Belarusian people to stand up for their rights. Following the disputed 2020 presidential election, tens of thousands of Belarusians peacefully took to the streets to protest using poems, songs and other creative expressions. Weekly peaceful protests continued across the country, both on the streets and within enterprises, theatres, universities and elsewhere. The police arrested thousands of peaceful protesters and artists who were performing during political events, violating their right to freedom of peaceful assembly. The police also arrested journalists and human rights defenders who were documenting what was taking place.

Below are two short illustrative examples from real life in Belarus:

“A woman is wearing red and white trousers; colours which are associated with the banned historical flag of Belarus. For wearing these colours, the police force her to spend a night in jail and she is fined.”

“A woman buys red and white flowers for her daughter's birthday party. Because these colours are associated with a banned historical flag, the woman receives a fine of \$350.”

Portraits of Belarusian political prisoners, May 2023.





MARYIA KALESNIKAVA'S STORY

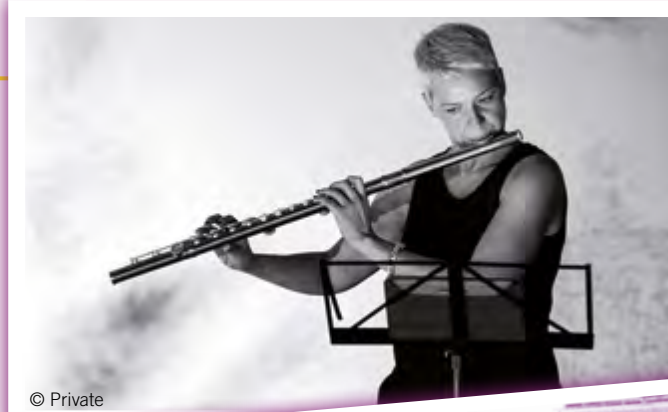
Maryia Kalesnikava has a dream for her country, in which Belarusians can enjoy human rights and feel free from oppression. Now, she is in prison for protesting peacefully and for believing in her dream.

Maryia was living in Germany as a professional musician but chose to return home to Belarus to create space for art and music. It was this passion, along with her dedication to human rights, that led her to join the opposition before the August 2020 presidential elections. The results of the election were strongly disputed, and afterwards many opposition figures had to flee the country. Maryia stayed, and suddenly found herself the main public opposition figure, standing on the frontline of peaceful protests, confronting police officers by making a heart-shaped symbol with her hands. Mariya told people that “love is stronger than fear”. She called for change and offered hope to many.

On 7 September 2020, Maryia was forcibly disappeared by the Belarusian authorities. She was dragged into a van by masked men. She escaped, but was soon arrested, detained and sentenced to 11 years in prison on charges including “undermining national security” and “extremism”.

Maryia is not the only one. More than 1,300 people are imprisoned in Belarus on politically motivated charges. These people are bloggers, political activists, human rights defenders, journalists, businesspeople, artists, students and peaceful protesters, locked up because they exercised their human rights.

Maryia is imprisoned in poor conditions, with limited access to the healthcare she needs and isolated from other inmates. Her family and friends have not heard from her for more than a year.



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© Nasha Niva



© ViktorBabaryka HQ (Photo: Pasha Kritchko)

Top and bottom: *Maryia Kalesnikava.*
Centre: *Police special forces at a protest in Belarus in 2020.*

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2024
Index: **POL 32/8284/2024**
Original language: **English**

All images © Amnesty International
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Cover photo: © Private

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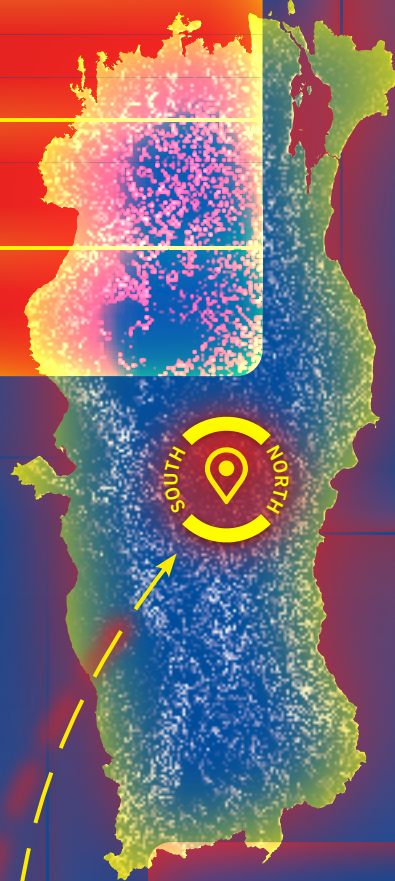
**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL** 

CONVICTED FOR DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Şebnem Korur
Fincancı,
Türkiye

Human Rights
Education
Activity



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

More than 20 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. In the years that followed, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to nearly 6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2023, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. In 2023 alone, more than 1.4 million people were engaged through human rights education activities. Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, by releasing activists from detention, securing justice for those whose rights have been abused and protecting people who advocate for change.

This year's campaign once again includes people from around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for them to receive justice. Through Write for Rights, each of the individuals will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities to demand that they end the injustice, we can create a more just and equal world.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals and others in a similar situation. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there.”

Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the context and group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity, delivering it in-person or online, and any limitations. When participants want to take action for an individual or group, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyse and question issues relating to the individuals' stories. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competencies and skills

FORM their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.



Letter writing with friends in Czechia for Write for Rights 2023.

© Valerie Miric

Read about the people we're fighting for: [amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R24

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: academy.amnesty.org/learn



YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ACQUITTED

Rita Karasartova is a human rights defender and an expert in civic governance. For more than a decade she has dedicated her life to providing independent legal advice, helping people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. Alongside 26 others, Rita was arrested for opposing a new border agreement giving control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. Charged with attempting to “violently overthrow the government”, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment, Rita and at least 21 other defendants were acquitted on 14 June 2024.

“I would like to express my huge, huge gratitude... Your timely actions – these letters, petitions, signatures, and the huge number of letters that went to the court, that went to the prosecutor’s office – it was all very powerful. In fact, it was very empowering to us all... Of course, the acquittal was totally unexpected. I don’t even know how to process it in my head. We had been playing with all sorts of scenarios, different outcomes in our heads, but we didn’t think we would all be acquitted!... I thank you all.”

Rita Karasartova
from Kyrgyzstan



© Private

“I feel so relieved, and I thank you for the amazing Write for Rights campaign. I am forever indebted. It is like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Reading all the letters and cards made me feel so loved and appreciated.”

Cecillia Chimhiri from Zimbabwe



OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS FREED

Opposition activists Cecillia Chimhiri, Joana Mamombe and Netsai Marova were abducted, tortured and imprisoned after attending a protest in Zimbabwe. They were charged with “communicating falsehoods” and “obstructing the course of justice”. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After being featured in Write for Rights 2022, Cecillia and Joana were acquitted by the High Court.



© Amnesty International Togo



Amnesty supporters in the Netherlands (far left) and Togo (left) at events for Write For Rights 2023.

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



Write for Rights event in Benin in 2023.



© UN Photo

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

KEY CONCEPTS

- Freedom of expression
- Human rights defenders
- Torture

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the vital role of human rights defenders through the story of Şebnem Korur Fincancı, a forensic medicine expert from Türkiye who fights against torture. Participants will explore the ethical and legal arguments against torture and take action by writing letters to support Şebnem.

AGE: 14+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the role and importance of human rights defenders.
- **explore** ethical and legal arguments against torture.
- **feel** empathy for those whose rights have been violated.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Şebnem Korur Fincancı.

MATERIALS

- **Handout: Şebnem's story** (page 11)
- **Background information** (page 10)
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

PREPARATION

- Read the background information and Şebnem's story.
- Optional: Print Şebnem's story and copies of the simplified UDHR for each participant.

MORE INFORMATION

- Learn more about human rights at the Amnesty Academy at www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/
- Read the guide: *Empower against torture: A series of human rights education workshops* at www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act40/1433/2015/en/

PRECAUTIONS

Before starting the activities, inform participants that the topics of torture and other human rights violations can be distressing. Explain that it's okay for participants to feel strong emotions and to take care of themselves. Create a safe, supportive environment where participants can express their thoughts and emotions. Encourage them to speak up if they are overwhelmed or need a break. Explain that participation is voluntary; they can opt out of discussions or activities if they feel uncomfortable. Avoid using graphic descriptions of torture, focusing instead on the human rights aspects and the importance of defending these rights. Ensure the discussion remains balanced, respectful and empathetic, avoiding sensationalism.

1. DISCUSSING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



Begin the activity by asking participants:

- **What do you think of when you hear "human rights defender"?**

Write the participants' responses on a flipchart or board.

After hearing from a few people, read out this definition which is based in international human rights standards:

"Human rights defenders are individuals who take non-violent actions to defend and promote human rights. They may work individually or with others. Their activities might focus on a specific area of human rights or on the rights of a specific group. However, they must accept the universality of human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This means they cannot deny some human rights or take actions that undermine the rights of others. A person will not be considered to be a human rights defender if they engage in or support hatred, discrimination or violence."



Continue the discussion by asking participants:

- **What role do human rights defenders play in our society?**
- **Do you know of any human rights defenders? Who are they, and what rights do they defend?**
- **Are there any risks to being a human rights defender?**
- **What do you admire about human rights defenders?**

Use the background information from page 10 to provide examples and bring the conversation to a close.

Explain that participants are going to look at the story of a human rights defender from Türkiye, Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı, who has dedicated her life to eradicating torture and defending human rights. Şebnem is an expert in forensic medicine – determining the cause of death or injury, particularly in criminal cases.

2. ŞEBNEM KORUR FİNCANCI'S STORY



Read the story of Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı (page 11) aloud or distribute copies for people to read individually. If participants are unfamiliar with the concepts, provide them the definition of torture from page 10.

After reading Şebnem's story, ask participants to share:

- **What comes to mind when reading Şebnem's story?**
- **Why do you think the Turkish government is harassing and intimidating Şebnem?**
- **Do you feel that people like Şebnem, who fight for human rights, should be protected? Why?**

3. STOP TORTURE!



Tell participants that there are international laws banning torture, with strong legal, political and ethical arguments supporting these bans. Explain that you will now read out some statements. Instruct participants to position themselves in the room according to whether they think the statements are true or false. Designate one side of the room for "True" and the opposite side for "False". Participants should position themselves in the middle if they are unsure or think the statement is partially true.

Read each statement clearly and give participants a moment to think about their response. Once participants are in position, ask some volunteers to explain their positions, then provide the correct answer and the explanation.

Statements:

1. **Some forms of torture are allowed under certain circumstances, like emergencies or matters of national security.**

False: International human rights laws, including the UN Convention against Torture (1984) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), prohibit torture under all circumstances, including during emergencies or to protect national security. There are no exceptions.

2. **Preventing people from sleeping (sleep deprivation) is a form of torture.**

True: Sleep deprivation is recognized as a form of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by the UN. When we think of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, we often think of things like stress positions, electric shocks and waterboarding, and these barbaric practices do happen routinely in many countries. But such abuses can also include things like inhumane prison conditions, solitary confinement and denial of medical treatment.

3. Torture helps the authorities to get fast, reliable and accurate information from people.

False: Victims of torture may provide false or misleading information simply to stop the pain, making the intelligence gathered through torture often unreliable. There are cases where people's convictions have been overturned when it was discovered that information had been extracted from them under torture.

4. Torture can lead to long-term psychological trauma for victims.

True: Torture often causes long-term psychological issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety.

5. In practice, torture is generally limited to issues around national security and counterterrorism.

False: It is a common misconception that torture is generally limited to issues around national security and counterterrorism. But Amnesty International's research shows that it could happen to anyone – petty criminals, people from ethnic minorities, protesters, student activists and people who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is most often poor and marginalized people who are beaten, humiliated or subjected to or threatened with rape or other sexual violence by police and other officials when there is no one to protect them or hear their cries for help.

To close this part and debrief, ask participants to reflect on the following questions:

- Why is Şebnem's work important?
- How do you think we can support human rights defenders like Şebnem?

4. TAKE ACTION

Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to demand justice for Şebnem Korur Fincancı. You can give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking action can be, or watch the "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.



Show participants the video of Şebnem Korur Fincancı which can be found here: www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).





WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Minister of Justice for Türkiye using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the minister something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell him what shocks you about the case of Şebnem.
- Tell him why you think it is important that governments respect and protect human rights.
- Demand that the authorities **stop misusing the criminal justice system to silence Şebnem and refrain from bringing any other charges against her for defending human rights.**

Minister of Justice

Kızılay
Milli Müdafı Cd. No: 5
06420 Çankaya
Ankara
Türkiye

Email: ozelkalem@adalet.gov.tr

Facebook: www.facebook.com/bmyilmaztunc/

X: [@yilmaztunc](https://twitter.com/yilmaztunc)

Instagram: [@yilmaztunc](https://www.instagram.com/yilmaztunc)

Hashtags: #ŞebnemKorurFincancı
#W4R24

Salutation: Dear Minister

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Show Şebnem that you support her in her fight to protect people's rights in Türkiye. Send her your message of solidarity and hope. Be creative! Post it to your social media, tagging Şebnem when you do. Then, post your message to the address to the right. Don't forget to follow Şebnem on X!

Şebnem speaks Turkish and English. Here are some example messages to include:

English: **I stand with you, Prof Şebnem Korur Fincancı. Defending human rights should never be a crime. Thank you for all your amazing work, we are in full solidarity with you.**

Turkish: **Sevgili Prof Şebnem Korur Fincancı, yanınızdayım. İnsan haklarını korumak hiçbir zaman suç değildir. Hak arayışında yaptığınız çok değerli çalışmalarınız için teşekkürler, dayanışma ile.**

Please avoid colours that the authorities associate with the Kurdish movement – red, gold and green together.

Prof Şebnem Korur Fincancı

c/o Türk Tabipleri Birliği
GMK Bulvarı
Şht. Daniş Tunalıgil Sk. No: 2/17-23
06570 Maltepe
Ankara
Türkiye

X: [@SKorurFincanci](https://twitter.com/SKorurFincanci)

Hashtags: #ŞebnemKorurFincancı
#W4R24

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders play a crucial role in society by advocating for and protecting the rights of individuals and communities. They work to expose human rights abuses, provide support to victims, and push for legislative and social changes to uphold human rights standards. Their efforts include documenting violations, providing legal assistance, educating the public and engaging with international human rights mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable.

Human rights defenders come from all walks of life. They are students, community leaders, journalists, lawyers, victims of abuses and their families, health professionals, teachers, trade unionists, whistleblowers, farmers, environmental activists and more. They challenge abuse of power by governments and corporations, protect the environment, defend minorities, oppose traditional barriers to the rights of women and LGBTI people and stand up against abusive labour conditions.

Because they often challenge powerful governments and non-state actors, human rights defenders face significant risks almost everywhere, including the risk of threats, harassment, imprisonment, violence and even death. Governments and other powerful entities often target them to silence dissent and maintain control. The dangers are particularly acute in repressive regimes where human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, are severely restricted. Despite facing severe risks, they continue to fight for the rights of marginalized and oppressed people. Their work often leads to significant social and legal changes, improving lives and advancing human dignity and freedom worldwide.

Governments have the ultimate responsibility to protect human rights defenders, to prevent and effectively address allegations of abuses committed against them, and to ensure that they can carry out their work in a safe and enabling environment, free from discrimination.

TORTURE

Torture is when somebody in an official capacity inflicts severe mental or physical pain or suffering on somebody else for a specific purpose. Sometimes the authorities torture a person to extract a confession for a crime, or to get information from them. Sometimes torture is simply used as a punishment that spreads fear in society. Torture methods vary. They can be of a physical nature, like beatings and electric shocks. They can be of a sexual nature, like rape or sexual humiliation. Or they can be of a psychological nature, like sleep deprivation or prolonged solitary confinement.

Under international law, torture and other forms of ill-treatment are always unlawful. They have been outlawed internationally for decades. But many countries around the world continue to torture people and have failed to make torture a criminal offence under their national laws. Even when torture is prohibited and criminalized, the authorities often fail to bring perpetrators to justice, establish the truth or ensure that victims receive full reparations. Between January 2009 and May 2013, Amnesty International received reports of torture in 141 countries, from every region of the world. Torture can never be justified. It is barbaric and inhumane and replaces the rule of law with terror. No one is safe when governments allow its use.

Şebnem Korur Fincancı beside the logo of the Turkish Medical Association.



ŞEBNEM KORUR FINCANCI'S STORY

At home, Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı enjoys spending time with her cats, Simone and Ulula, cooking and listening to music. Beethoven is her favourite composer.

To the world, Şebnem is an expert in forensic medicine, renowned for her work to eradicate torture. She has contributed to the development of a UN protocol on the investigation of torture, and a handbook on sexual violence for the World Health Organization. Until June 2024, she was the head of the Turkish Medical Association. Şebnem has also continually fought to protect the human rights of people in Türkiye, including their right to freedom of expression.

In a bid to silence her and stop her important work, for years the Turkish authorities have subjected Şebnem to baseless criminal investigations, detention and prosecutions. In January 2023 she was convicted for allegedly “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” after she called for an investigation into allegations that the Turkish military was using chemical weapons in Iraq. Şebnem is appealing against her conviction but could be imprisoned for almost two years if her appeal is unsuccessful.

The Turkish government is cracking down on people's freedom of expression and restricting the work of human rights defenders like Şebnem. But Şebnem refuses to give in to their intimidation. Undeterred by the hostility she faces, she says: “I have never had the habit of bowing to any authority to this day.”



© Fatoş Erdoğan



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© Turkish Medical Association

Top and bottom: *Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı.*
Centre: *Istanbul, Türkiye.*

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2024
Index: **POL 32/8288/2024**
Original language: **English**

All images © Amnesty International
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Cover photo: © Private

amnesty.org

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL** 

**'MY CHILDREN
DESERVE A FUTURE;
I FOUGHT FOR IT'**

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Joel Paredes,
Argentina

Human Rights
Education
Activity



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

More than 20 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. In the years that followed, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to nearly 6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2023, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. In 2023 alone, more than 1.4 million people were engaged through human rights education activities. Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, by releasing activists from detention, securing justice for those whose rights have been abused and protecting people who advocate for change.

This year's campaign once again includes people from around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for them to receive justice. Through Write for Rights, each of the individuals will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities to demand that they end the injustice, we can create a more just and equal world.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals and others in a similar situation. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there.”

Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the context and group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity, delivering it in-person or online, and any limitations. When participants want to take action for an individual or group, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyse and question issues relating to the individuals' stories. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competencies and skills

FORM their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.



Letter writing with friends in Czechia for Write for Rights 2023.

© Valerie Mirić

Read about the people we're fighting for: [amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R24

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: academy.amnesty.org/learn

YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ACQUITTED

Rita Karasartova is a human rights defender and an expert in civic governance. For more than a decade she has dedicated her life to providing independent legal advice, helping people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. Alongside 26 others, Rita was arrested for opposing a new border agreement giving control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. Charged with attempting to “violently overthrow the government”, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment, Rita and at least 21 other defendants were acquitted on 14 June 2024.

“I would like to express my huge, huge gratitude... Your timely actions – these letters, petitions, signatures, and the huge number of letters that went to the court, that went to the prosecutor’s office – it was all very powerful. In fact, it was very empowering to us all... Of course, the acquittal was totally unexpected. I don’t even know how to process it in my head. We had been playing with all sorts of scenarios, different outcomes in our heads, but we didn’t think we would all be acquitted!... I thank you all.”

Rita Karasartova
from Kyrgyzstan



© Private

“I feel so relieved, and I thank you for the amazing Write for Rights campaign. I am forever indebted. It is like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Reading all the letters and cards made me feel so loved and appreciated.”

Cecillia Chimhiri from Zimbabwe



OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS FREED

Opposition activists Cecillia Chimhiri, Joana Mamombe and Netsai Marova were abducted, tortured and imprisoned after attending a protest in Zimbabwe. They were charged with “communicating falsehoods” and “obstructing the course of justice”. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After being featured in Write for Rights 2022, Cecillia and Joana were acquitted by the High Court.



© Amnesty International Togo



Amnesty supporters in the Netherlands (far left) and Togo (left) at events for Write For Rights 2023.

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



Write for Rights event in Benin in 2023.



© UN Photo

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

KEY CONCEPTS

- Right to protest peacefully
- Excessive use of force by the police
- Access to justice

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Through the story of Joel Paredes, who was seriously injured by police during a protest, participants will learn about the right to peacefully protest as a tool to defend human rights and how excessive use of force by the police is a human rights violation. Participants will be encouraged to write a letter urging the authorities to bring to justice those found responsible for Joel's injuries, and to show solidarity with Joel.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the right to protest.
- **reflect** on the role of the police when policing protests and how their unlawful use of force can threaten human rights.
- **recognize** the power of empathy and solidarity with those whose rights have been violated.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** a letter in support of and showing solidarity with Joel Paredes.

AGE: 14+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

PREPARATION

- Print the handouts for each participant/group.
- Read the background information on pages 9–10 and Joel Paredes's story on page 11.
- Optional: Prepare access to YouTube to show the videos.

MORE INFORMATION

- News story: "Argentina: Violent repression and criminalization in response to protests in Jujuy" from www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/argentina-repression-criminalization-protests-jujuy/
- Learn more about human rights including the right to protest, policing and human rights at the Amnesty Academy: www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/

MATERIALS

- **Handout:** Joel Paredes's story (page 11)
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- **Background information:** Right to protest (page 9) and Human rights and the use of force (page 10)
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: YouTube video: "Dread Mar I - Así Fue (En Vivo)" from www.youtube.com/watch?v=csx53ZqoQqI
- Optional: YouTube video: "Survivor of police violence who lost an eye to a rubber bullet explains all" from www.youtube.com/watch?v=4I8V4Zm3KCg&t=139s
- Optional: "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

PRECAUTIONS

The YouTube video "Survivor of police violence who lost an eye to a rubber bullet explains all" is a real-life story which contains strong images of violence and weapons. Some people may find this distressing. Facilitators should be sensitive to these emotions and provide a safe space for participants to step away from the activity and/or offer support as needed.

1. EXPLORING THE RIGHT TO PROTEST AND THE ROLE OF THE POLICE IN PROTESTS



Ask participants in plenary:

- **Do you know what a protest is?**
- **What does it look like? How does it sound?**
- **What are the reasons that people protest?**
- **Do we have a right to protest?**
- **Why is the right to protest so important?**

Take answers from a few participants.

Hand out copies of the simplified UDHR (page 5) and explain that the right to protest is protected under the following rights in the UDHR:

- **Article 19: Freedom of expression:** Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

If this is the first time that participants are introduced to the UDHR, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what it is first, using the information starting on page 4.

- **Article 20: Freedom of assembly:** Everyone has the right to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way.

You can highlight key points from the Background information: The right to protest (page 9).

Ask participants to think about the role that the police should play in society. This can be done individually or in pairs.

- **Why do we have police?**
- **What do you think the police should do?**
- **How do you think police officers should act when policing a protest?**

Remind participants that, in most countries, the police have the following key roles:

- **Making sure that people obey the law (enforcing the law).**
- **Protecting people and property and keeping public order.**
- **Investigating crimes and making arrests.**

Optional: It is recommended to screen the 2:28-minute video “Survivor of police violence who lost an eye to a rubber bullet explains all” (see “Materials” on page 6 for the link). This video is based on a true story and calls for greater controls on law enforcement equipment. Warn participants that the video contains strong images of violence and weapons which some people may find distressing and allow individual participants to opt-out of watching it if they choose.

Sum up the discussion by highlighting other elements in the Background information: Human rights and the use of force (page 10). You can print this for participants, or just discuss it to strengthen their understanding of the role of police in protests.

2. JOEL PAREDES'S STORY



Ask participants to close their eyes, if they feel comfortable doing so, and to think about their hobbies.

Read the following paragraph aloud:

“What do you like to do in your free time? Visualize yourself engaging with your hobbies – what are you doing? Who are you with? Which body parts are you using? How are they moving? What do you see, how do you feel? You have your eyes closed now. Imagine if you couldn't use your eyes anymore? Would you still be able to fully participate in your hobby? What would you miss?”

Ask them to keep their eyes closed while you read out the passage below. Tell participants that it is a true story.

“Joel is a musician who plays the bombo drum. He decided to show solidarity with the rights of Indigenous Peoples by attending a protest with his friends, to which they brought their musical instruments. The police arrived, firing tear gas and rubber bullets directly at the heads of demonstrators. Joel was hit by a rubber bullet, leaving him permanently blind in his right eye.”

Ask the participants to open their eyes and do a quick shake-off to bring their attention back to the present moment and their surroundings. Give participants the opportunity to share any feelings or emotions.

Put the participants into pairs and hand out copies of Joel's story (page 11). Alternatively, you can read it out loud. Give the pairs 10 minutes to read the information and discuss the following questions:

Where participants are directed to close and open their eyes, facilitators should be aware of any participants with visual impairment and adapt the activity accordingly.



- What surprises you most about Joel's story?
- How has Joel's life changed as a result of the police's unlawful use of force?
- Has Joel's right to protest been respected?
- Do you know of other protests where police have used violence to stop people accessing their right to protest?
- What can be done to help Joel to achieve justice?

Bring participants back together and ask them to share some of their responses. Remark on the importance of solidarity from around the world to support Joel's fight for justice.

3. TAKE ACTION



Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to join Joel Paredes's fight for justice. You can give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch the "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions between groups. Encourage them to be creative. If time allows, you can play one of Joel's favourite songs in the background as a way to connect with him: Dread Mar I – Así Fue (En Vivo) from www.youtube.com/watch?v=csx53ZqoQqI

WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Attorney General of the Public Prosecutor's Office using the contact information on the right.

- Tell him something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell him what shocks you about the case of Joel Paredes.
- Tell him why you think it is important that governments respect and uphold the right to protest.
- Demand that **those found responsible for Joel Paredes's injuries and all other violations against protesters be brought to justice in accordance with international law and standards.**

Attorney General of the Public Prosecutor's Office

Sarmiento 427
4600 San Salvador de Jujuy
Argentina

Email: stello@mpajujuy.gob.ar

Instagram: [@mpajujuy](https://www.instagram.com/mpajujuy)

X: [@MpaJujuy](https://twitter.com/MpaJujuy)

Hashtags: #justiciaparaJoel

#justiceforJoel #W4R24

#ProtectTheProtest

Salutation: Dear Sir

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Send your messages of support to show Joel and his family that they are not alone and that you support them in their fight for justice.

Make your message visual. Choose words, postcards, drawings or any other resources that are respectful, not trivial or with explicit or graphic content.

Avoid anything related to Joel's eye, to avoid him feeling re-victimized. Please avoid using religious cards.

Be creative! Show Joel the power of your solidarity! Then send your messages to the address on the right.

Joel Paredes

c/o Amnesty International Argentina
Santos Dumont 3429, 2nd Floor
1427 Buenos Aires
Argentina

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Peaceful protest is a dynamic and public way of exercising our human rights. Throughout history, protests have allowed individuals and groups to express dissent, opinions and ideas, expose injustice and abuse, and demand accountability from those in power.

When people engage in protests, whether individually or collectively, they are exercising a variety of rights which can include the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Without the ability to freely express opinions, public assemblies are simply mass gatherings of people without a message. And without the ability to freely assemble, people's opinions may lack the force of numbers to have their message properly heard.

Other rights are also essential in enabling people to protest peacefully, including the rights to life, privacy, freedom of association, freedom from torture and other ill-treatment or punishment, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, for example.

WHEN GOVERNMENTS CRACK DOWN ON PROTESTS

Instead of addressing pressing concerns and promoting dialogue to find solutions to injustice, abuses and discrimination, governments often respond to protests by stigmatizing and cracking down on peaceful protesters. Governments often impose restrictions on protests based on national security or public order. But respect for human rights is part of national security and public order, and the right to protest is protected under international human rights law.

There are further barriers to protest: people who face inequality and discrimination – whether based on race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, disability, occupation, or social, economic, migratory or other status – are more likely to be affected by restrictions and repression, and less able to participate in protests. Yet, many advances in human rights around the world have been due to the courage of people who dared to fight for a more inclusive and equal society despite the risks and challenges they faced. It is therefore crucial that everyone can protest safely and without discrimination.

Joel Paredes



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE USE OF FORCE

In order to protect people and keep public order, police officers are permitted to use force against others, but they must always do so in accordance with the law and human rights standards. This is particularly important where the use of force carries a threat to someone's life or risks causing serious injury.

STANDARDS ON THE USE OF FORCE:

- The use of force must be strictly necessary: it must be used only when there is no alternative and with the lowest level of force needed to achieve a legitimate objective.
 - The force must be proportionate to the seriousness of the offence (for example, police are not permitted to use lethal force to protect property).
 - Where use of force by the police has resulted in injury or death, a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation must be carried out.
 - Police officers must be held accountable if they misuse their powers and they must face due process of law.
 - Law enforcement agencies must create clear instructions for police officers about situations where the use of force is appropriate and lawful.
- If some protesters engage in violent actions, police should ensure those who remain peaceful can continue protesting.
 - Acts of violence by a small minority do not justify the dispersal of those who remain peaceful.
 - Law enforcement authorities should, as far as possible, use non-violent means before resorting to force, and, in cases where the use of force is unavoidable, limit the use of force to the minimum necessary in accordance with the principles of necessity and proportionality.
 - The decision to disperse a protest must be a last resort, when all other less restrictive means have proven to be unsuccessful.
 - The use of tear gas or water cannon to disperse a protest is only permitted in response to widespread violence, where more targeted means have failed to contain the violence, and if people can leave the scene. Police officers must warn people that they will be used and allow people to disperse.
 - Under no circumstances may tear gas grenades be fired directly at a person. Repeated and prolonged exposure to tear gas should be avoided.
 - Firearms should NEVER be used to disperse a crowd.

POLICING PROTESTS

Governments have an obligation to ensure that everyone can enjoy the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, including attending protests. There are clear international guidelines for police conduct during protests. It is the role of police to facilitate peaceful protests and ensure that everyone can exercise their rights peacefully and without fear of reprisals. If tensions arise, the police have a duty to de-escalate them, taking into account these principles:

A mural in Purmamarca, Jujuy, by Emilio Ramon Haro Galli, memorializing protests in Jujuy.





JOEL PAREDES'S STORY

Joel Paredes is a 29-year-old ceramicist living in Jujuy province in northern Argentina. In June 2023 the local government made changes to Jujuy's constitution including restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly as well as introducing measures that may damage the environment and risk violating Indigenous Peoples' land rights. The changes were approved without consulting with Indigenous Peoples or the wider population.

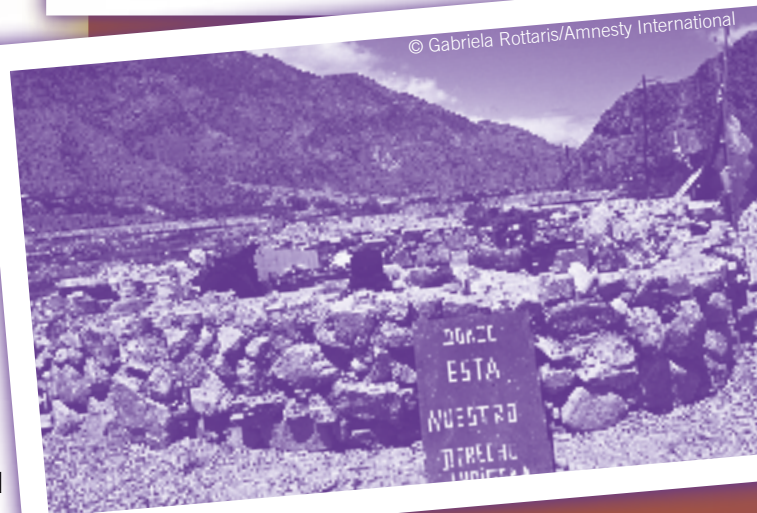
Jujuy is a province rich in lithium, a metal known as "white gold" due to its high demand for the production of batteries. Argentina's authorities want to expand lithium exports. But people who live on the land, like Joel and his family, have serious doubts.

Although not Indigenous himself, Joel sympathized greatly and was concerned for the future of his children who would grow up on the land. Joel joined an evening protest alongside hundreds of other peaceful demonstrators, where he played a drum with his band while the city council discussed the changes in a nearby building. For Joel: "Our musical instruments are our weapons."

In the early hours, the police arrived at the square and started recklessly firing rubber bullets into the crowd. Joel was hit in his right eye. The injury required surgery, but doctors could not save his sight and Joel is now permanently blind in his right eye. Joel is also left with debilitating nerve pain that affects his daily life. No one has been held accountable for what happened to Joel and the other protesters.



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© Gabriela Rottaris/Amnesty International

From the top: Joel Paredes; Argentina (the inscription reads: Where is our indigenous right).

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2024
Index: **POL 32/8283/2024**
Original language: **English**

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**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL** 

ELEVEN YEARS IN PRISON FOR SUPPORTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Manahel
al-Otaibi,
Saudi
Arabia

Human Rights
Education
Activity





WRITE FOR RIGHTS

WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

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This year's campaign once again includes people from around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for them to receive justice. Through Write for Rights, each of the individuals will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities to demand that they end the injustice, we can create a more just and equal world.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals and others in a similar situation. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

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Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

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Letter writing with friends in Czechia for Write for Rights 2023.

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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ACQUITTED

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© Amnesty International Togo



Amnesty supporters in the Netherlands (far left) and Togo (left) at events for Write For Rights 2023.



ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

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Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

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Write for Rights event in Benin in 2023.



© UN Photo

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

KEY CONCEPTS

- Freedom of expression
- Gender-based discrimination
- Unfair trial
- Women's rights defenders

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the right to freedom of expression and how it intersects with gender-based discrimination and woman's rights activism through the story of Manahel al-Otaibi, a women's rights defender in Saudi Arabia. Participants will analyse human rights violations and take action in support of Manahel al-Otaibi.

AGE: 12+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the right to freedom of expression and how it relates to choosing one's clothing.
- **learn** about gender-based discrimination and its impact on women's rights.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Manahel al-Otaibi.

PREPARATION

- Print the handouts and copies of the simplified UDHR for each participant/group.
- Read the background information on page 10 and Manahel's story on page 11.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about human rights including the right to freedom of expression at the Amnesty Academy: www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/

MATERIALS

- **Handout: Matching cards** (page 9)
- **Handout: Manahel's story** (page 11)
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Video of Manahel al-Otaibi from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos
- Optional: "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/

1. EXPRESS YOURSELF!

Distribute paper and pens. Ask participants to draw their favourite items to wear – it can be clothing, shoes, accessories or any type of apparel. It can be something they already wear, or items they would like to wear to express themselves and their identity.

Let participants share their drawings with a partner and discuss:

- **What item(s) did you draw and why?**
- **How does (or would) wearing this make you feel?**
- **How much do other people influence what you wear?**

After a few minutes, invite participants to stick their drawings on the wall. Briefly discuss in plenary:

- **How much does society expect people to adhere to specific dress codes based on gender?**

As a facilitator, pick some of the most common items. Draw a big red cross on a large piece of paper, stick it on the wall or board and group these items under it. Announce that they are now forbidden items. Ask the group:

- **How do you feel, knowing that I am specifically forbidding these items?**
- **Is it fair for me to decide what is and what is not acceptable?**
- **Would you still wear them? What if wearing these items would risk imprisonment?**
- **Are there differences in what people are expected to wear based on certain traditional, historical, religious and/or cultural attitudes in our community? Why or why not?**

Share reflections on societal expectations and norms regarding dress. Discuss the implications of gender-based discrimination in dress codes.



2. MANAHEL AL-OTAIBI'S STORY

Introduce Manahel to the participants. Explain that Manahel al-Otaibi is a fitness instructor and a brave, outspoken advocate for women's rights in Saudi Arabia. In November 2022, she was arrested for tweeting about women's rights and posting photos of herself at a shopping mall to Snapchat. In the photos, she was not wearing the traditional long-sleeved loose robe known as an *abaya*. Manahel has been sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Read Manahel al-Otaibi's story (page 11) aloud or distribute copies and read it together. Collect a few initial reactions to her story from participants. Encourage them to reflect on the previous discussions from step one.

3. MATCHING RIGHTS

Split the participants into small groups. Hand out a set of the matching cards (page 9) to each of the groups. Explain that they will match what happened to Manahel to the relevant human right from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Bring participants back together to share their answers.

To finalize the activity, ask:

- What needs to happen for Manahel to receive justice?

4. TAKE ACTION

Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to demand the release of Manahel al-Otaibi. You can give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch the "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

 10 MINUTES

 15 MINUTES

If this is the first time that participants are introduced to the UDHR, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what it is first, using the information starting on page 4.

 15 MINUTES

Show participants the video of Manahel al-Otaibi which can be found here: www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).





WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to Saudi Arabia's Minister of Justice using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the minister what shocks you about the case of Manahel.
- Tell them why you think it is important that governments respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression.
- Tell the minister to **immediately and unconditionally release Manahel al-Otaibi and drop all charges against her.**

Minister of Justice

PO box 7775
11472
Riyadh
Saudi Arabia

Email: minister-office@moj.gov.sa
and 1950@moj.gov.sa

X: @MojKsa

Hashtags: #FreeManahel #W4R24

Salutation: Your Excellency

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Show Manahel she is not alone. Send her your message of solidarity and hope. Draw dumbbells or the “we can do it” pose which Manahel replicated in the photo below. Be creative!

Post your drawing to your social media, tagging Manahel when you do. Don't forget to follow her on X! Then, send your message to the address to the right.

Manahel al-Otaibi

c/o Saudi Arabia Team
Amnesty International
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom

X: @ManahelAl_otibi

Hashtags: #FreeManahel #W4R24



Manahel replicating the “we can do it” pose.

HANDOUT**MATCHING CARDS****UDHR ARTICLE 1****FREEDOM AND
EQUALITY IN
DIGNITY**

Under the laws of her country, Manahel is treated as a criminal and “terrorist” rather than being respected as a human being with equal rights.

**UDHR ARTICLE 2****NON-
DISCRIMINATION**

Manahel is being imprisoned for not wearing women’s traditional clothing. These practices do not apply to men.

**UDHR ARTICLE 3****RIGHT TO LIFE,
LIBERTY AND
SECURITY OF
PERSON**

Manahel’s arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without just cause violate her right to live freely and securely.

**UDHR ARTICLE 5****RIGHT TO BE
FREE FROM
TORTURE AND
DEGRADING
TREATMENT**

Manahel said she was beaten by a fellow prisoner, held in solitary confinement, and left with a broken leg without medical treatment.

**UDHR ARTICLE 9****PROTECTION
FROM ARBITRARY
ARREST AND
DETENTION**

Manahel has been imprisoned without just cause and she has not received a fair trial.

**UDHR ARTICLE 18****FREEDOM
OF BELIEF,
INCLUDING
RELIGIOUS
BELIEF**

Manahel has been denied her right to choose what she believes in and to not wear traditional dress.

**UDHR ARTICLE 19****FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION
AND RIGHT
TO SPREAD
INFORMATION**

Manahel was initially charged with violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law due to her tweets supporting women’s rights.

**UDHR ARTICLE 25****RIGHT TO HEALTH**

Manahel was denied medical treatment in prison for her broken leg.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Everyone has the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. This also includes the right not to hold any religious belief and the right to choose whether to manifest one's religion or belief through wearing specific symbols or dress.

Frequently, dress codes are underpinned by religious interpretations, cultural norms and stereotypical gender roles.

Governments have an obligation to respect, protect and ensure the rights of every individual to personal autonomy and to express their beliefs or personal convictions or identity. Governments should allow every person to make that choice free of discrimination or coercion. This means that governments must not impose compulsory requirements that women dress or do not dress in a certain way, and they must protect women from being coerced to dress in specific ways by family members, the community, religious groups or leaders, or anyone else. This applies whether women are being compelled to wear a specific item like a headscarf or are being prohibited by law from wearing it.

The case of Manahel al-Otaibi highlights these issues starkly. Manahel chose to express herself by advocating for women's rights and freedoms and choosing not to wear the traditional *abaya*. For this, and for her women's rights activism, she was arrested and sentenced to 11 years in prison for terrorism-related offences. Her treatment by the Saudi authorities constitutes a violation of her human rights. She is being punished for exercising her freedom of expression and personal autonomy in choosing her attire.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Since 2018, Saudi authorities have arbitrarily detained women's rights activists who campaigned for the end of the male guardianship system and for the right of women to drive in Saudi Arabia. Women's rights activists reported facing sexual harassment, torture and other ill-treatment during interrogation. Those released from detention are under travel bans and face other restrictions on their human rights including the right to freedom of expression.

In March 2022, Saudi Arabia's first Family Law was issued. The law perpetuates the male guardianship system and entrenches discrimination against women in most aspects of family life including marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.

Saudi Arabia's enforcement of dress codes for women, such as wearing of the *abaya*, violates the human rights of women and girls. In 2019, as part of a drive to promote tourism, the authorities announced a relaxation of dress codes for women visiting the country from overseas. However, female citizens and residents face legal uncertainty for dressing freely in public. Compelling women to wear specific attire through threats, social pressure, legal penalties or imprisonment infringes upon their dignity and autonomy. This enforcement can amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, which is prohibited under international law. When such acts cause severe mental or physical pain or suffering, they can constitute torture.

Manahel al-Otaibi's case underscores the importance of protecting the rights to freedom of expression and personal autonomy, ensuring that women human rights defenders are not prosecuted, and that no one is subjected to coercion or discrimination in their choice of attire.

Saudi authorities have adopted a zero-tolerance policy for any criticism. They have closed all human rights groups, wiping out independent civil society in the country. People are being sentenced to harsh prison terms solely for peacefully exercising their human rights. Some have even been sentenced to death.

“*Saudi Arabia is like a kingdom for men, only and exclusively, a regime built solely for their own benefit.*”

Fawzia al-Otaibi, sister of Manahel al-Otaibi



MANAHEL'S STORY

In recent years, Saudi Arabia's authorities have claimed that they are advancing women's rights. Manahel al-Otaibi believed these promises and felt freer to express her views and wear what she liked. Now, facing 11 years behind bars, these promises are utterly hollow.

Before her arrest, Manahel was a fitness instructor and a brave and outspoken advocate for women's rights, using social media to call for greater freedoms for women in her country. Manahel was arrested on 16 November 2022. She was charged with violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law for her tweets supporting women's rights and her posts on Snapchat which included photos of Manahel not wearing an *abaya*, a traditional robe, in public.

Her case was referred to the country's counterterrorism court, the Specialized Criminal Court, notorious for its grossly unfair trials and harsh sentences. On 9 January 2024, Manahel was given an 11-year prison sentence for "terrorist offences" for her online expression. The hearing was held in secret and the results were only revealed weeks later.

In November 2023, Manahel told her family that she had been beaten by a fellow prisoner. As a result, she was cut off from the outside world, prevented from communicating with anyone. In April 2024, Manahel was able to call her family for the first time in months. Sounding distressed, she told them she was being held in solitary confinement and had again been brutally beaten, leaving her with a broken leg and no medical treatment.



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From the top: Manahel al-Otaibi; A view of Saudi Arabia.

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2024
Index: **POL 32/8287/2024**
Original language: **English**

All images © Amnesty International
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Cover photo: © Private

amnesty.org

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 

'I DREAM OF A WORLD
WHERE NO ONE IS LEFT
BEHIND'

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Kyung Seok Park,
South Korea



Human Rights
Education
Activity



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THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

KEY CONCEPTS

- Rights of people with disabilities
- Discrimination
- Peaceful protest
- Rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about challenges faced by people with disabilities, the importance of ensuring the rights of people with disabilities, and activism through Kyung Seok Park's story. The activity also explores police abuses against peaceful protesters, highlighting how excessive force undermines activists' rights and impedes the progress of social justice movements, encouraging reflection on these issues.

AGE: 14+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the rights of people with disabilities and their importance.
- **identify** forms of discrimination and violations of human rights faced by people with disabilities.
- **recognize** the impact of police repression on peaceful protests.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Kyung Seok Park.

PREPARATION

- Print the handouts for each participant/group.
- Read the background information on page 10 and Kyung Seok Park's story on page 11.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about human rights including the right to protest at the Amnesty Academy: www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/

MATERIALS

- **Handout: CRPD** (page 9)
- **Handout: Kyung Seok Park's story** (page 11)
- **Large sheets of paper and marker pens**
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: Videos of Kyung Seok Park and "Write for Rights: Take action" from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

PRECAUTIONS

This activity discusses sensitive topics related to discrimination, police abuses and the exclusion and marginalization of people with disabilities. There are many forms of disabilities which may be visible or invisible. The discussion may evoke strong emotional responses for participants with lived experience of these issues. Facilitators should provide a safe space for participants to express their feelings and should offer support as needed.

1. RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



Begin with a brief discussion of the rights of people with disabilities and why they are important. Use questions to engage participants:

- **What do you know about the challenges faced by people with disabilities?**
- **Do you think that people with disabilities can exercise their human rights to the same extent as other people?**
- **What about their right to access public transport, buildings such as schools, and public spaces?**

Ask participants to think about their normal day. Ask them to write down what they would normally do today. Now ask them to imagine they have a disability. (Bear in mind that some participants may already have a disability, which may be invisible.) What challenges would they face going about their daily activities? Put participants into pairs and ask them to share their thoughts.

Share in plenary the various challenges that were identified. Write the challenges on a flipchart. You may use these later in step three.

Ask by a show of hands how many people have heard of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Explain that this is one of various international human rights treaties and that it sets out specific rights intended to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Distribute the CRPD handout from page 9.

2. KYUNG SEOK PARK'S STORY

 15 MINUTES

Distribute handouts of Kyung Seok Park's story (page 11). Read the story together, highlighting key points about his life, his accident and his transition into activism. Discuss the following:

- What motivated Kyung Seok to become an activist?
- How has he faced discrimination?
- How have the authorities reacted to Kyung Seok and other activists' protests?
- What do you find impressive about Kyung Seok's actions?

Explain that Amnesty International is documenting and reporting widespread police abuses against peaceful protesters in many countries around the world. Ask:

- How does police repression of peaceful activists affect the movement for the rights of people with disabilities?

Take answers from a few participants and discuss in relation to Kyung Seok's story. Encourage participants to consider the following points: **the impact of police abuses on the lives of activists, how such abuses can deter others from joining or supporting their activism, and how public outrage can urge governments to respect their human rights.**

3. WHAT DOES DISABILITY INCLUSION LOOK LIKE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

 20 MINUTES

Divide participants into small groups and provide each group with large sheets of paper and marker pens. Ask them to focus on a particular area of public life in their community, such as school, joining the workforce, independent living or public transportation. Each group should consider what an inclusive society looks like and what is needed to ensure full accessibility to people with disabilities in these areas.

Ask participants to list what would be needed for an inclusive society. Participants can choose to present their ideas as an illustration or in another creative format. You may want to address some of the challenges identified in step one. Refer to the CRPD handout on page 9 for more information that participants can use for this activity.

Allow each group to present their ideas, explaining how they address the needs of people with disabilities and uphold their rights.

4. TAKE ACTION

 15 MINUTES

Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to demand justice for Kyung Seok Park. You can give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch the "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

Show participants the video of Kyung Seok Park which can be found here: www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).

WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Mayor of Seoul using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the mayor something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell them what shocks you about the story of Kyung Seok Park.
- Tell them why you think it is important that governments respect and uphold the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- Urge the mayor to **ensure the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by stopping the use of unlawful force against Kyung Seok Park and SADD activists, dropping all litigation against them, and ending the media smear campaign** so activists may continue campaigning for a world where people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of life.

Mayor of Seoul

6F, Seoul Metropolitan Government
110 Sejong-daero
Jung-gu
Seoul 04524
Republic of Korea

Email: seoulcity@seoul.go.kr

Facebook: www.facebook.com/seoul.kr

X: [@seoulmania](https://twitter.com/seoulmania)

Instagram: [@seoul_official](https://www.instagram.com/seoul_official)

Hashtags:

#RidingSeoulMetroWithPark

#LeaveNoOneBehind #W4R24

#ProtectTheProtest

Salutation: Dear Mayor of Seoul

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Show Kyung Seok Park that you support his activism. Write or draw messages of strength and hope to show Kyung Seok Park and SADD activists that they are valued and respected.

Then, mail your message to the address to the right.

Kyung Seok Park

c/o Solidarity Against Disability
Discrimination
5F, 25, Dongsung-gil
Jongno-gu
Seoul 03086
Republic of Korea

Instagram: [@sadd420](https://www.instagram.com/sadd420)

X: [@sadd0420S](https://twitter.com/sadd0420S)

Hashtags:

#RidingSeoulMetroWithPark,

#LeaveNoOneBehind, #W4R24

#ProtectTheProtest



HANDOUT

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006, is a landmark international treaty. It aims to promote, protect and ensure that all persons with disabilities can fully enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with others. This Convention changed the way people view and support the rights of persons with disabilities, moving from an approach based on providing assistance to one based on human rights and dignity.

The CRPD enshrines several important human rights, including:

- **Accessibility:** To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, making sure that physical environments, transportation, information and communication are accessible.
- **Non-discrimination:** Ensuring equal treatment under the law, without discrimination based on disability, and ensuring the provision of reasonable accommodations. This includes, among others, the rights to health, education, work, life, free expression, marriage, family life and deciding to have children.
- **Independent living and full inclusion and participation in the community:** Supporting the right to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.
- **Personal mobility:** Ensuring people with disabilities can move around as independently as possible. This includes facilitating affordable personal mobility in the manner and time that persons with disabilities choose.
- **Education:** Providing access to inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities where persons with disabilities live.

- **Health:** Providing access to the same range, quality and standard of health care available to others in the community, including services specifically needed because of a person's disability.
- **Employment:** Promoting the right to work on an equal basis with others.
- **Participation in political and public life:** Ensuring the right to participate in political and public affairs, including by forming and joining non-governmental organizations.
- **Participation in cultural life:** Making sure persons with disabilities can enjoy culture in accessible formats. This includes access to places including theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services.
- **Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse:** Protecting against all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse. This includes having laws and policies in place for authorities to identify, investigate and prosecute such instances.

Kyung Seok Park surrounded by police and Seoul Metro employees during a protest. He is joined by Congresswoman Hye-Yeong Jang, showing her support for the protest.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF DISABILITY

As many as one in 10 people around the world lives with a disability. Discrimination on the basis of disability is a pervasive issue that denies individuals their human rights.

People with disabilities often face barriers to education, employment and healthcare, and are subject to social stigmas and exclusion from community life. In many societies, people with disabilities are ostracized and treated as objects of pity or fear. This form of discrimination perpetuates inequality and reinforces negative stereotypes, limiting opportunities and participation in society.

Ensuring accessibility, promoting inclusive policies and raising awareness are essential steps to combating this injustice.

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Peaceful protest is a dynamic and public way of exercising our human rights. Throughout history, protests have allowed individuals and groups to express dissent, opinions and ideas, expose injustice and abuse, and demand accountability from those in power.

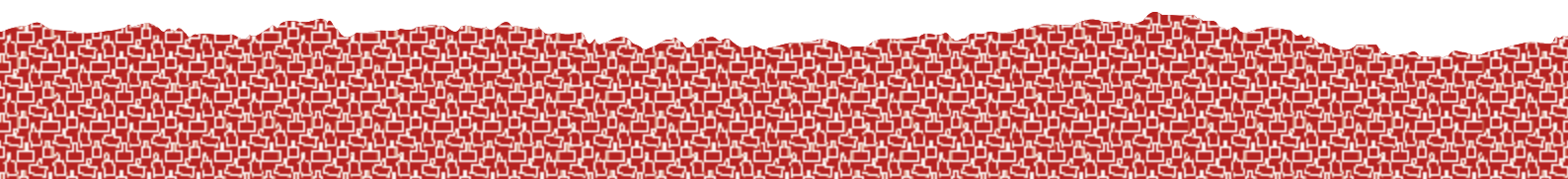
When people engage in protests, whether individually or collectively, they are exercising a variety of rights which can include the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Without the ability to freely express opinions, public assemblies are simply mass gatherings of people without a message. And without the ability to freely assemble, people's opinions may lack the force of numbers to have their message properly heard.

Other rights are also essential in enabling people to protest peacefully, including the rights to life, privacy, freedom of association, freedom from torture and other ill-treatment or punishment, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, for example.

WHEN GOVERNMENTS CRACK DOWN ON PROTESTS

Instead of addressing pressing concerns and promoting dialogue to find solutions to injustice, abuses and discrimination, governments often respond to protests by stigmatizing and cracking down on peaceful protesters. Governments often impose restrictions on protests based on national security or public order. But respect for human rights is part of national security and public order, and the right to protest is protected under international human rights law.

There are further barriers to protest: people who face inequality and discrimination – whether based on race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, disability, occupation, or social, economic, migratory or other status – are more likely to be affected by undue restrictions and repression, and less able to participate in protests. Yet, many advances in human rights around the world have been due to the courage of people who dared to fight for a more inclusive and equal society despite the risks and challenges they faced. It is therefore crucial that everyone can protest safely and without discrimination.



KYUNG SEOK PARK'S STORY

Before Kyung Seok Park developed paraplegia following a hang-gliding accident in August 1983, he never thought about the lives of people with disabilities. He was 22 years old and busy studying at university, playing guitar and having fun with friends. After his accident, he soon found daily life for people with disabilities in South Korea was unacceptably difficult, even dangerous. His life as an activist began.

Representing Solidarity Against Disability Discrimination (SADD), a movement campaigning for the rights of people with disabilities, Kyung Seok focuses his activism on public transportation. Without measures to eliminate obstacles and barriers to access public transport, people with disabilities are cut off from being able to participate fully in all aspects of life – including travelling to work or school and living independently. For example, numerous wheelchair users in the capital, Seoul, have been killed or injured using unsafe wheelchair lifts at train and subway stations.

To demand an increase in the public budget for the rights of people with disabilities, in 2021 Kyung Seok and other SADD activists began organizing peaceful protests during which many wheelchair users simultaneously boarded and disembarked subway trains during busy commuting hours. Authorities in Seoul reacted negatively, including with violence. The protests have been repressed and activists forcibly dragged out of stations by police. Politicians have conducted smear campaigns, painting disability activists as a public nuisance. Seoul Metropolitan Government has filed multiple “blockade lawsuits” against peaceful protesters, further attempting to quash their activism. Nevertheless, the actions led to elevators being installed in 95% of Seoul’s subway stations in 2023.

Despite being almost strangled by police and Seoul Metro staff during a peaceful protest, and facing multiple lawsuits because of his activism, Kyung Seok continues to fight, declaring: “We refuse to wait any longer. We demand a world where no one is left behind.”



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© SADD

From the top: Kyung Seok Park; Solidarity Against Disability Discrimination (SADD) activists block a bus in April 2021 in Dodam-dong, Sejong City, South Korea.

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2024
Index: **POL 32/8286/2024**
Original language: **English**

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Cover photo: © Amnesty
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