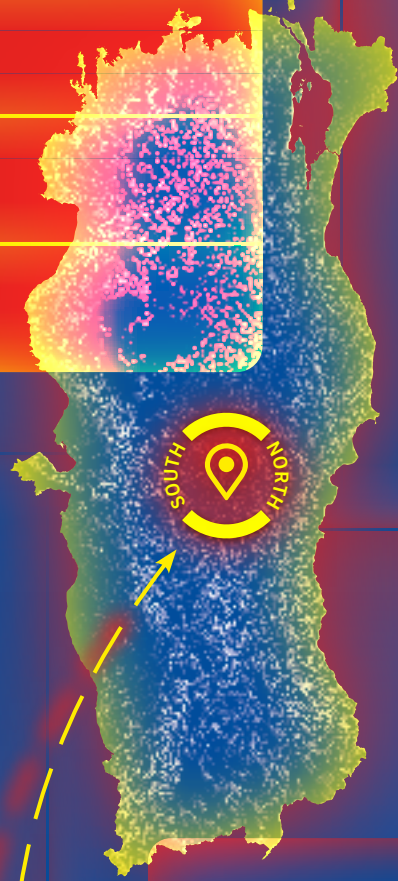


CONVICTED FOR DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

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 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.



© 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

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.”



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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