

PROTECTING OUR PLANET, PROTECTING OURSELVES

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Climate Justice and Environmental Rights

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.

Nearly 25 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon to support individuals at risk of human rights violations. What started as a small event has since evolved into the world's largest human rights campaign: Write for Rights.

In 2001, 2,326 letters were written to people around the world. By 2024, that number had soared to more than 4.6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions taken in more than 200 countries and territories. Across the globe, people have proven that geography is no barrier to solidarity, and that words have the power to inspire hope and spark change. In 2024 alone, almost 1 million people were engaged through human rights education activities like this one.

Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 115 people over the years, by freeing 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 supports individuals at risk 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 demand justice for them. Through Write for Rights, they will receive thousands of personalized messages of solidarity from across the globe, reminding them that they, and their struggles, are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities, we can pressure those in power to help build a more just and equal world.

Year after year, individuals featured in the campaign tell us how deeply these actions matter. Many describe the strength they draw from knowing that so many people care and support them. Often, your letters lead to real change: charges are dropped, people are released from detention, and authorities introduce new laws or policies to protect human rights.

“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 settings: online or offline, in classrooms, community groups, families or activist networks. As a facilitator, adapt the activity to your group's context. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size and age range 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 in support of an individual at risk, discuss how to do so safely.

The activities are 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' and groups' stories. This helps participants to:

BUILD key competencies and skills

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

TAKE OWNERSHIP of their learning, and shape discussions around their interests, abilities and concerns

ENGAGE emotionally and develop values and personal commitment.



Petitions and postcards in support of Manahel Al-Otaibi during Write for Rights 2024.

Read about the people we're fighting for:
amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/

Contact the Amnesty team in your country:
amnesty.org/en/countries/

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R25

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/

Amnesty International offers free online human rights education courses: academy.amnesty.org/learn and quizzes: <https://share.google/XbBVTSyhr9UNR4rq>

YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

RESETTLED IN SAFETY

In 2023, as a result of his human rights work, Rohingya activist Maung Sawyeddollah faced serious security risks at the refugee camp where he lived in Bangladesh. In August 2024, he was granted an exit visa from Bangladesh and a student visa to attend university in the USA, which is likely thanks to the huge publicity created by Write for Rights 2023.

“Through the campaign, I found myself receiving an outpouring of motivation, support, encouragement and solidarity from individuals and groups across the globe. The global community’s response was heartening, as people from diverse backgrounds united in the fight for justice and human rights”

Maung Sawyeddollah



© Munir Uz Zaman/AFP via Getty Images

SPARED FROM EXECUTION

Rocky Myers, a Black man with an intellectual disability, spent three decades on death row in Alabama, USA, for murder. Rocky was convicted following testimonies blighted by inconsistencies. He was sentenced to death against the jury’s wishes, a practice abolished in Alabama in 2017. Rocky featured in Write for Rights 2023, leading to a huge global campaign calling on the Governor of Alabama to grant him clemency and commute his death sentence. In February 2025, this was granted. Rocky’s fight for justice is not over as he remains under life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, but the threat of execution has ended.

“Not only did this campaign bring awareness to his case, but it was done in such a way that honoured Rocky as a person, father and grandfather. I know the outpouring of support meant the world to Rocky, and to know that so many people felt called to action is truly inspiring”

Miriam Bankston, member of Rocky Myers’s legal team



© Private

FREED FROM PRISON

In September 2020, Dorgelesse Nguessan was arrested and later sentenced to five years in prison for taking part in peaceful demonstrations in Cameroon. Her story featured in Write for Rights 2022 and, in January 2025, Dorgelesse was released and reunited with her family.

“You reached out to us at the point when we most needed it. My son was sick, my mother was sick. My being in prison had had such an impact on my mum, she was weakened by it. This campaign gave her strength. It encouraged all of us. I don’t know how to thank Amnesty enough”

Dorgelesse Nguessan



© Private

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the 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, treating others fairly and having the ability to make choices about your own life. Human rights are universal – they belong to everyone, everywhere.

They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – each right is equally important and they are interconnected.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a powerful framework for national, regional and international legislation

designed to improve lives across the world. Human rights are laws for governments. Human rights are not optional privileges or luxuries to be granted only when convenient. They create binding obligations for governments and public officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all people, both within their borders and beyond.



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.

As its name suggests, the UDHR is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that it will 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 on the basis of its principles. These laws and agreements provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to demand that governments end the abuses experienced by the individuals featured in our Write for Rights campaign.



Amnesty activists in Togo during Write for Rights 2024.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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

ACTIVITY

CLIMATE JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

KEY CONCEPTS

- Environmental and climate justice
- Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment
- Environmental human rights defenders
- Sacrifice zones
- Marginalized communities
- Grassroots activism

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

This activity introduces participants to the connection between environmental protection, human-induced climate change and human rights. Using real-life stories of people and communities from five countries, it explores the unequal effects of climate change and environmental harm, highlights the courage of environmental human rights defenders, and inspires participants to take action through Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.

AGE: 12+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes plus additional time for the Take Action section.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **explore** the intersection between human rights and the protection of our planet and environment.
- **recognize** threats to environmental human rights defenders.
- **understand** how climate and environmental injustice deepen inequalities.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with environmental human rights defenders.

MATERIALS

- **Responsibility cards** (page 11)
- **Handout:** Human rights and the environment (pages 12-13)
- **Story cards and take action cards** (pages 17-22)
- **Background information:** Right to a healthy environment (pages 14-16)
- Paper, pens and envelopes (if sending letters)
- Optional: videos from [amnesty.org/en/w4r-videos](https://www.amnesty.org/en/w4r-videos)
- Optional: Template letters from [amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/)

PREPARATION

- Read the story cards and select which cases to work on.
- Print the handouts for each participant/group.
- Read the background information.
- Depending on the size, level of knowledge and learning needs of your group, you may wish to adjust how much time is given to each part of the activity, or adapt specific instructions. Plan your timing carefully.

PRECAUTIONS

Two of the stories included in this activity involve distressing events that may affect participants. One tells of the murder of environmental human rights defender Juan López from Honduras. Another describes the loss of a newborn child due to extreme climate displacement and poor living conditions in Madagascar. These topics can be upsetting or emotionally challenging. Facilitators are encouraged to create space for care and support throughout the activity. Prepare participants beforehand, and consider inviting anyone who feels uncomfortable to choose a different story to work on. Encourage respect, empathy and reflection in all discussions.

1. WARM-UP: CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT CROSSROADS

Designate or place a sign in each corner of the room to represent one of four options: Stay, Move, Fight for justice, I am unsure.

Tell participants: *"You'll hear a few, short, real-life situations based on the stories we'll explore today. Imagine it's happening to you. After each one, move to the corner that best reflects what you think you would do."*

Note for facilitators: please adapt the exercise to ensure inclusion of all learners if mobility is a consideration.

Read out the four scenarios, one at a time. After each one, ask participants to move to the corner that best represents what they would do, explaining each option:



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.

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

- **STAY** *"I would stay and live with the effects, even if they are harmful or unfair."*
- **MOVE** *"I would leave to find a safer life, even if it meant losing my home, culture or community."*
- **FIGHT FOR JUSTICE** *"I would speak out, organize or resist, even if doing so is difficult or dangerous."*
- **I AM UNSURE** *"None of these options feels right to me, each choice feels unfair, unsafe or impossible."*

SCENARIOS:

1. You live in a rural area and depend on river water to drink. The river has become so polluted from a nearby factory that your community no longer has safe drinking water. What will you do?
2. Your government has given a company permission to build a gas or oil pipeline, or a wind turbine, on your land or in your garden, without asking you. What will you do?
3. Industrial pollution is poisoning the air that you and your family breathes and is making you ill. What will you do?
4. Climate change is causing a drought in your region, and you can no longer grow enough food to feed your family. You cannot afford to buy extra food and nobody is coming to help. What will you do?

After each scenario, call on a few volunteers to explain their choice by asking:

- **Why did you choose that option?**
- **Was that a difficult decision?**

At the end, ask for one or two volunteers to share how this exercise made them feel. Did their choice change from one scenario to the next? What influenced that? Were there any scenarios where none of the options felt fair?

Conclude by saying:

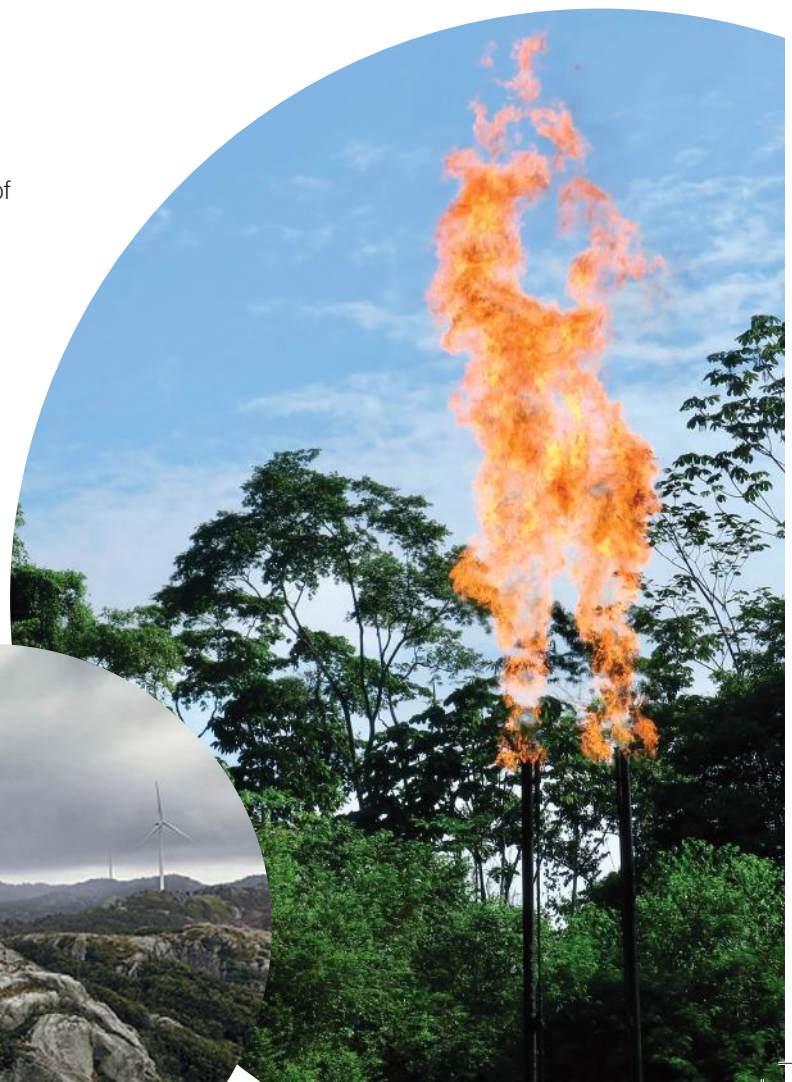
"Many people don't get to freely choose. They are pushed to move or have to stay because of poverty, violence, unfair policies or discrimination. Others stay because the land is more than just a place to live. It's their history, their culture, their identity. Leaving would mean losing part of who they are. Some risk everything to fight for justice, for themselves, for their families, for future generations. That's what the stories we'll hear today are really about."

Routine gas flaring in the Ecuadorian Amazon, associated with oil extraction, seriously contaminates the environment and affects the health of local communities.

© Iván Martínez / Amnesty International

Wind farm on a Norwegian cliff top, on the Sámi's ancestral territory.

© James O'Neil



2. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Divide the participants in smaller groups or pairs. Give each group a set of responsibility cards (printed from page 11). You do not need to use all nine responsibility cards. Depending on your group size or the stories with which you will work in Part 3, select responsibility cards that reflect the key themes you want to highlight. This can help keep the discussion focused and manageable.

Tell participants: *“Each card shows an action linked to the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, based on the previous scenarios. Your task is to sort the responsibility cards in two categories: 1) primarily a government’s responsibility; and 2) primarily a company’s responsibility. For some cards, you might feel that governments and companies share responsibility to protect and respect this human right. That might be true, but here we want to discuss which one carries the primary responsibility and why. Don’t worry about finding perfect answers. The goal is to talk through your reasoning as a group.”*

If participants struggle to choose between government and company, remind them that many responsibilities are shared. An important question is: who should act first, or who has the most power to prevent harm in this scenario?

Allow groups 10 minutes to discuss and sort the cards, then bring participants back together. Ask a few volunteers to share:

- Which cards were easy to place? Why?
- Which cards sparked the most debate?
- Did you notice how often responsibilities overlap? Why is that?

End by telling participants: *“Everyone has the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Both governments and companies have responsibilities to protect and respect people’s human rights and the environment. But too often, they fail to act. Next, we’ll see what happens when these duties are ignored, through the stories of five people and communities around the world.”*

If you want more detail to close this part, see the background information on pages 14-16 for a fuller explanation of governmental and corporate responsibilities.

**20 MINUTES**

Mother Nature Cambodia activists demonstrate in Phnom Penh, 2024.
© LICADHO

The Inversiones Los Pinares mining project in Honduras, which has been opposed by local communities as the site has carved into a nature reserve and polluted rivers.





25 MINUTES

3. STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Again divide participants into smaller groups and give each group one story card (from pages 17-22) and a copy of the human rights and the environment handout (pages 12-13). Ask them to read and discuss the story based on the following questions.

- **What has happened here?**
- **Who is responsible for what happened?**
- **Which human rights do you think are being violated or are at risk?**
- **What should the government do to protect the people involved?**

After 15 minutes, bring participants back together. Invite each group to briefly share a short summary of the story and two or three human rights that are being put at risk.

As each group presents, record the rights mentioned on a flipchart or visual aid. Optionally, invite participants to mark these articles on their copies of the handout to visualize the different human rights at stake across the cases. As a debrief, ask participants:

- **What stood out to you or surprised you about the stories?**
- **Why do you think these stories matter to us, even if they happened far away?**

If needed, guide the participants towards these key insights:

- **Each story is about protecting the environment, but the human rights at stake are wide-ranging. Each story involves more than one right being affected, showing how deeply human rights and environmental harm are connected.**
- **Although these stories come from different countries (Madagascar, Norway, Honduras, Ecuador and Cambodia), they're all part of one global story. Climate change and environmental destruction don't stop at country borders.**
- **Human-induced climate change and environmental harm deepen inequality. Those least responsible for environmental destruction often pay the highest price. This is what is meant by climate and environmental injustice.**

Conclude by saying:

"We all share one planet. When people speak up to protect water, forests, air and land, they are defending something that we all share. Many of these defenders take big risks to demand climate and environmental justice. That's why their fight matters to us. When we support them, we're speaking up for justice, safety and dignity for everyone. Now that we have seen what is at stake, let's join millions around the world in taking action to support these defenders."

Southern Madagascar is experiencing its worst drought in 40 years.

© Pierrot Men for Amnesty International



**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

4. TAKE ACTION

Tell participants about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign and explain that Amnesty is calling on people to write letters to the individuals in the stories, and also to the authorities responsible for protecting, respecting and fulfilling their human rights. Explain that the people on the story cards have all been included in this year's campaign. You can give examples from previous years' campaigns (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch this one-minute story from Moses Akatugba who was freed from death row thanks to Write for Rights:

https://youtu.be/8cU6EPY5r_c

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.

**15 MINUTES**

WRITE A LETTER

Ask participants to choose one of the people or groups whose stories they have learned about, and give them a copy of the take action card from pages 17-22 for that person or group. 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 story.**
- **Say why they think it is important that governments respect human rights.**

If people wish to share their finished letters with the group, or express their feelings at the end of the activity, provide an opportunity for them to do so.

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 featured.

Send your messages of friendship and hope to encourage the defenders to keep up their fight for justice and show them that they are not alone. Be creative and tell them a little bit about yourself to make this a personal letter.

Learn more about other activities in the Write for Rights campaign at amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/



Clockwise from top:
Amnesty activists in
Nepal, Canada, Bulgaria,
Luxembourg, Zimbabwe,
Poland and Taiwan
take part in Write for
Rights 2024.



HANDOUT**RESPONSIBILITY CARDS**

Making sure everyone has access to clean air and safe water



Helping families who have had to leave home because of drought



Making sure people can speak out and protest safely without fear



Making sure people's voices are heard and taken into account before going ahead with any project that could affect them



Paying fair compensation to people harmed by pollution or environmental destruction



Ensuring Indigenous Peoples are fully informed and can give or withhold consent to projects affecting their land, culture or lives



Tracking down those who pollute rivers, sea, air or land and stopping further harm



Following court orders to clean up environmental damage caused by their operations



Avoiding creating pollution that contaminates rivers, sea, air or soil



HANDOUT

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental harm, including human-induced climate change, doesn't only damage nature. It often violates people's rights. Some of the human rights connected to protecting land, water and the climate are listed below.

These rights are found in human rights documents including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS

THE RIGHT TO LIFE (UDHR ARTICLE 3)

Violated when pollution or extreme weather threaten survival; or when environmental defenders face death threats and killings.

THE RIGHT TO ACCESS JUSTICE (UDHR ARTICLE 8)

Violated when people cannot challenge environmental harm or seek remedies (like compensation or official action) for their rights being violated.

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM FROM ARBITRARY ARREST (UDHR ARTICLE 9)

Violated when defenders or activists are unfairly arrested, detained without justifiable reason, or punished for peacefully protesting or exposing harm.

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING ACCESS TO INFORMATION (UDHR ARTICLE 19)

Violated when attacks on environmental defenders create fear and discourage others from speaking out, or when people are denied access to vital environmental information.

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST PEACEFULLY (UDHR ARTICLE 20)

Violated when people are silenced, arrested or attacked for protecting the environment.

THE RIGHT TO TAKE PART IN GOVERNMENT DECISIONS (UDHR ARTICLE 21)

Violated when communities are excluded from choices about projects that affect their land, water or air, or from participating in environmental decisions.

THE RIGHT TO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING (UDHR ARTICLE 25)

Violated when toxic air, water or soil causes illness.

THE RIGHTS TO FOOD, WATER AND HOUSING (UDHR ARTICLE 25)

Violated when droughts, floods, wildfires or pollution destroy crops, clean water sources, or homes.

THE RIGHT TO CULTURE AND IDENTITY (UDHR ARTICLE 27)

Particularly important for Indigenous Peoples, whose cultural survival depends on their land.

THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT (UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 76/300)

Recognized in 2022 as a universal human right.

HANDOUT

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Indigenous Peoples have extra protections because of their deep connection to their ancestral lands and the many injustices they face:

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

THE RIGHT TO FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT (FPIC) (UNDRIP)

Governments and companies must inform Indigenous Peoples, consult them in good faith, and get their consent before starting projects that affect their lands, resources or culture. This is included in many rights that Indigenous Peoples have. For example, FPIC is included in Indigenous Peoples' rights to:

**PRACTISE AND PROTECT CULTURAL TRADITIONS
(UNDRIP ARTICLE 11)**

The right to keep and pass on cultural heritage and traditions, including sacred sites and knowledge systems.

**CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT
(UNDRIP ARTICLE 29)**

Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain a sustainable environment, and governments must prevent harmful activities or hazardous materials from damaging their lands, resources and communities.

**CONTROL DEVELOPMENT ON INDIGENOUS LANDS
(UNDRIP ARTICLE 32)**

Indigenous Peoples have the right to decide on and approve any project affecting their lands, territories or resources, particularly those involving natural resource exploitation.

**CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND
LINGUISTIC RIGHTS
(ICCPR ARTICLE 27)**

Indigenous Peoples and other minorities must not be denied their right to practise their religion, use their language, and enjoy their traditional culture and way of life.

The Čorgaš reindeer herding community in northern Norway are Indigenous Sámi pastoralists. They are experiencing the consequences of climate change on their livelihood.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

While the idea of a right to a healthy environment had been discussed for many years, it was a major victory when, in 2022, the United Nations General Assembly formally recognized it as a universal human right. This right includes access to clean air, a safe and stable climate, safe water and adequate sanitation, healthy and sustainably produced food, non-toxic environments in which to live, work, study and play, and thriving biodiversity and ecosystems. It also requires protection of other rights, known as procedural rights, such as public participation and access to information and justice.

This recognition comes in response to what the United Nations has called a triple planetary crisis – climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution – each of which is increasingly affecting people's human rights around the world.

The right to a healthy environment is closely linked to other, long-established rights, such as the rights to life, health, housing, food, water, culture and participation. Environmental harm, whether caused by pollution, climate inaction or land grabs, often makes it harder or even impossible for people to enjoy these fundamental rights.

ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Around the world, environmental human rights defenders, including Indigenous leaders, youth activists and community organizers, are fighting to protect land, water, air and the climate. They speak out against pollution, deforestation and government inaction. In doing so, they defend not only nature, but also the rights to health, clean water, food, housing, culture, participation, and life itself, for their communities, future generations and the future of life on Earth.

But many face serious risks. They are threatened, arrested or even killed for speaking up for their rights and their environment. Indigenous Peoples often face land grabs, exclusion from decision-making, and violations of their collective rights. People displaced in the context of climate change are frequently ignored, unsupported or left without protection. Environmental human rights defenders, especially young people and women, are increasingly criminalized, harassed or silenced.

Despite these dangers, they continue their work with courage and determination. Supporting them is essential, both for human rights and for the future of the planet.

Below left: Sand mining near Tamok lake, Cambodia, 2022.
© MNC

Below right: Children and young people in Ecuador, known as Guerreras por la Amazonía (GxA), calling for the protection of the Ecuadorian Amazon against the gas flares that pollute their communities and contribute to the climate crisis.
© UDAPT



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UNEQUAL IMPACT: WHO BEARS THE BRUNT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HARM?

Not all communities are affected equally by environmental destruction, including human-induced climate change. Indigenous Peoples, rural and low-income communities and other marginalized groups on the frontline of the climate crisis are often most affected, despite contributing the least to the problem. They are also often least included in decision making. The same is true for fenceline communities. These are communities living in “sacrifice zones” – environments that have been systematically and knowingly polluted by human actions.

For Indigenous Peoples especially, protecting the environment is about survival – as individuals and also as a group with an identity, culture and ancestral lands. Excluding them from decisions, or using their land without consent, violates their collective rights and is a clear case of environmental injustice.

One of the strongest protections for Indigenous Peoples is the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). FPIC means that governments and companies must properly inform Indigenous Peoples, consult them in good faith, and obtain their consent before any project that affects their lands or resources can go ahead. This is not a courtesy; it is a legal obligation. Yet, in many cases, FPIC is ignored, leading to land grabs, displacement and destruction of sacred sites.

Indigenous Peoples and other frontline and fenceline communities are often among the first to be affected by drought, floods, pollution and displacement. Due to political and economic marginalization, these communities often have limited power to resist. Their rights to information and participation are frequently ignored. They are disproportionately harmed by fossil fuel extraction, mining (including of minerals needed for the transition to renewable energy), deforestation and other extractive industries, especially when companies act irresponsibly and governments fail to protect them.

Above right: Drought in southern Madagascar is pushing people to the brink of famine.

© Pierrot MEN

Right: Environmental activist Juan López was murdered in September 2024 in Tocoa, Honduras.

© CMDBCPT



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DUTIES OF GOVERNMENTS AND COMPANIES

The right to a healthy environment includes rights that help people to speak up and hold governments or companies accountable, such as access to information, public participation and access to justice.

Governments are duty-bearers. This means they are legally obliged to prevent environmental harm, regulate businesses and protect people's rights. They must:

- Make and enforce laws
- Consult affected communities, especially Indigenous Peoples through FPIC
- Provide warnings, aid and protection during environmental crises like droughts and floods
- Take actions to help people adapt to climate change to minimize its harmful effects, including by making infrastructure and services more resilient
- Uphold court rulings protecting communities
- Provide remedies, including compensation, for environmental harms caused by the state.

Companies have the responsibility to respect rights. They must:

- Take early measures to ensure their operations, products and services do not harm people or the environment
- Consult meaningfully with and take action to prevent or minimize harm to affected communities
- Fix harm if they cause or contribute to, for example, pollution or displacement, and provide adequate remedy to those affected.

Even when not directly breaking a country's laws, companies can violate human rights if they act irresponsibly and do not follow international human rights law and standards. For example, if a company dumps waste where it is legal according to local laws, but this contributes to poisoning a nearby village's water source, people's right to safe water is violated. Their right to health is possibly also harmed and the company should repair the harm for which it is responsible.

So, states have a responsibility to protect human rights. However, many are failing to do this, especially when it comes to company operations – whether because of a lack of capacity, dependence on the company as an investor or outright corruption, for example. State inaction can violate rights just as much as direct repression. And even where states fail to protect human rights, companies are still responsible for their actions.

Clockwise from top: A gas flaring area in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

© Iván Martínez / Amnesty International

Mother Nature Cambodia activists demonstrate in Phnom Penh, 2024.

© LICADHO

Drought in southern Madagascar, commonly referred to as Le Grand Sud (the Deep South).

© Pierrot MEN



READ OUR STORIES

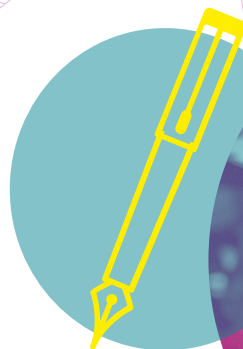
The stories below are of people connected by their environmental activism. These stories, from Cambodia, Honduras, Ecuador, Norway and Madagascar show how people living on the front lines of environmental destruction are fighting to protect the human and environmental rights of their communities, often at great personal risk. Your support and solidarity matters.

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.

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



CONVICTED FOR PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Chandaravuth Ly, Keoraksmei Phuon, Kunthea Long, Leanghy Yim, Ratha Sun and Ratha Thun share a love of coffee, books and hiking. Above all, they share a deep love for nature. With their campaign group, Mother Nature Cambodia, they have courageously defended the environment from the harmful actions of companies and the government.

In 2015, the group successfully halted the development of a hydroelectric dam which would have resulted in massive deforestation. In 2016, they were behind a ban on sand exports, protecting coastal areas from environmental degradation.

Their commitment to the environment has inspired young people throughout the country. But their activism has come at a high cost. The authorities have repeatedly targeted the group

with arrests and prosecutions. In 2020, three of the activists were arrested for peacefully demonstrating against the infilling of a lake. A year later, three more activists were arrested while investigating the pollution of a river.

In June 2024, the activists were sentenced to between six and eight years in prison. Their crime? Protecting the environment they love so dearly. Ratha Sun fled Cambodia to continue their work, but the remaining five activists are enduring harsh prison conditions.

Demand that the five detained activists are immediately released and all convictions against Mother Nature Cambodia activists are quashed.

Mother Nature Cambodia

📍 Cambodia

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



STORY CARD



© Private



Write for Rights 2024
in Taiwan.

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

TAKE ACTION

WRITE TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF CAMBODIA

Demand that the five detained activists are immediately and unconditionally released, and all convictions against Mother Nature Cambodia activists are quashed.

ADDRESS: Prime Minister of Cambodia
c/o Cambodia embassy or consulate in your country,
or a country near you
(Take photos of your letters and post on social media
before sending to an embassy or consulate.)

SALUTATION: Dear Prime Minister
EMAIL: ocm@cambodia.gov.kh
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/p/Hun-Manet-100069511484329/
X: @Dr_Hunmanet_PM
INSTAGRAM: dr.hunmanetofcambodia
HASHTAGS: #FreeMotherNatureCambodia, #FreeOurFriends,
#W4R25

SHOW THE MOTHER NATURE CAMBODIA ACTIVISTS THAT YOU'RE WITH THEM

Send your messages of solidarity to show the group that you support them in their fight to protect the environment. You could draw rivers, forests and animals to accompany your messages.

ADDRESS: Amnesty International
Canada francophone
Maison du développement durable
50 Ste Catherine West Street, office 500
Montréal (Québec) H2X 3V4
Canada

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/mothernaturecambodia/
X: @CambodiaMother
INSTAGRAM: mothernaturecambodia
HASHTAGS: #FreeMotherNatureCambodia, #FreeOurFriends,
#W4R25

MOTHER NATURE
CAMBODIA

'FIGHTING TO PROTECT OUR AMAZON, AND YOUR FUTURE'

"We are not just activists; we are daughters of the earth, of our communities; we are the warriors of the forest that refuses to die. We are the Amazon that resists the impacts of the oil industry, and for which our communities and our planet are burning."

The Guerreras por la Amazonía (Warriors for the Amazon) are a group of activists aged 10 to 20 years. They are fighting alongside the Union of People Affected by Texaco's Oil Operations (UDAPT) and the Eliminen los Mecheros, Enciendan la Vida (Remove the Flares, Ignite Life) collective, to protect their communities from the toxic fumes and physical devastation caused by gas flares. Used in the process of extracting oil, gas flares are one of the largest contributors to the climate crisis.

With the support of UDAPT, the Guerreras por la Amazonía joined a lawsuit against the Ecuadorian state in 2020. And won. In 2021, a landmark ruling required the government to eliminate the use of gas flares. Nevertheless, the "fire monsters" continue to burn.

Instead of being celebrated for their bravery, the young defenders face stigma and violent intimidation. Rather than investigating the threats against them, the Ecuadorian authorities told the group that they will only provide them with protection if they stop their activism.

Call on Ecuador to eliminate gas flares and protect climate defenders.

Guerreras por la Amazonía
Ecuador

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

STORY CARD



© UDAPT

DEFENDER OF RIVERS AND FORESTS MURDERED

Juan López was a loving father and husband. A spiritual leader, he practised his faith by serving his community, always supporting the most vulnerable. He loved chatting with friends over coffee, dancing and spending time by the sea with his family. Friends described him as a dreamer.

Since 2015, Juan tirelessly defended his local environment in northern Honduras from mining and energy projects which have threatened local rivers, forests and the Carlos Escaleras Mejía National Park. Local communities fear that the projects put the surrounding ecosystem and water quality at serious risk.

Juan and fellow activists founded the Tocoa Municipal Committee for the Defence of Common and Public Goods to peacefully

challenge the legality of the projects. But their efforts have been met with harassment, threats and criminalization. Many committee members have been arrested and imprisoned. Some have been killed.

On 14 September 2024, Juan was shot dead in his car by a masked gunman as he left church. The alleged shooter and two alleged accomplices have been charged with murder and are being held in pretrial detention. Those who ordered Juan's murder have not been held accountable.

Demand justice for Juan López.

Juan López
Honduras

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

STORY CARD



© Private

WRITE TO THE PRESIDENT

Demand the Ecuadorian authorities uphold the ruling to eliminate gas flares and ensure the safety of climate defenders.

ADDRESS: President of Ecuador
Palacio de Carondelet
García Moreno N10-43 entre
Chile y Espejo, Quito 170401
Ecuador

SALUTATION: Dear President
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/DanielNoboaOk
X: @DanielNoboaOk
INSTAGRAM: danielnobaok
TIKTOK: danielnobaok
HASHTAGS: #EliminaLaMecha, #EnciendeLaVida, #TurnOnLife, #W4R25

SHOW THE GUERRERAS POR LA AMAZONÍA, UDAPT AND THEIR COMMUNITIES THAT YOU'RE WITH THEM

Send your messages of support to the young climate defenders, letting them know their fight is inspiring action around the world to protect the planet.

ADDRESS: Guerreras por la Amazonía
c/o UDAPT
Av. Venezuela y Progreso
Lago Agrio, 210150
Ecuador

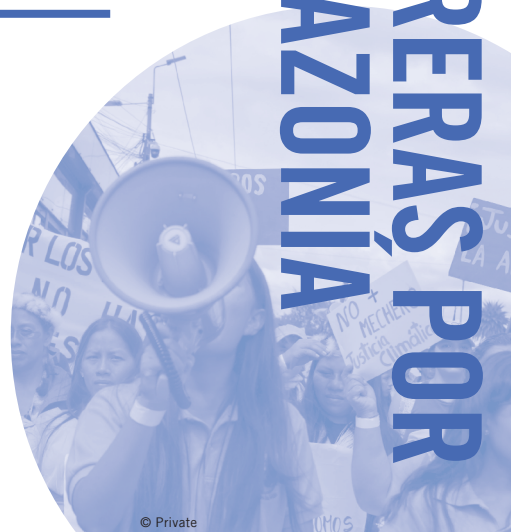
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/GuerrerasxAmazonia
X: @GuerrerasxAM
INSTAGRAM: guerrerasamazonia
HASHTAGS: #EliminaLaMecha, #EnciendeLaVida, #RemoveTheWick, #IgniteLife, #W4R25

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

TAKE ACTION

GUERRERAS POR
LA AMAZONÍA



© Private

WRITE TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Demand that they ensure a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the killing of Juan López to identify all those responsible for the crime, including those who ordered the murder, and to bring them to justice in fair trials.

ADDRESS: Attorney General
Public Prosecutor's Office
Avenida República Dominicana
Colonia Lomas del Guijarro
Tegucigalpa M.D.C
Honduras

SALUTATION: To the attorney general
EMAIL: fiscaliageneralhnd@gmail.com / mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com
X: @MP_Honduras / @johelzelaya
HASHTAGS: #JusticiaParaJuanLópez, #W4R25

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

TAKE ACTION

JUAN
LÓPEZ

SHOW JUAN'S FAMILY AND COMMUNITY THAT THE WORLD IS WITH THEM

Send messages of solidarity to show Juan's family and community that you support them in their fight for justice. Rivers and nature were so important to Juan – you could include drawings of these alongside your messages.

ADDRESS: Family and community of Juan López
c/o Amnesty International Americas Regional Office
Central America Team
Calle Luz Saviñón 519, Colonia del Valle
Benito Juárez, 03100 Mexico City
Mexico

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/people/Comité-Municipal-en-Defensa-de-los-Bienes-Comunes-y-Públicos/100082713284780/
X: @guapinolre
HASHTAGS: #JusticiaParaJuanLópez, #W4R25



DISPLACED BY DROUGHTS AND FACING STARVATION

In 2021, Damisoa and his family were forced to leave their home in the Androy region, southern Madagascar. Droughts worsened by climate change meant there wasn't enough food to survive.

After a challenging four-month, 1,500km journey, they reached Boeny in the northwest, hoping for a better life. But conditions remained harsh. In 2023, they were allocated a tiny 5m² hut at a resettlement site. Each rainy season the nearby Kamoro River swells, encircling the site with often fast, crocodile-infested waters. This makes it dangerous for residents to leave. The site's land is barren, and access to food, clean water, and healthcare is limited. In early 2025, Damisoa's newborn niece died after her mother, weakened by hunger and thirst, could no longer breastfeed.

As the government-appointed site manager, Damisoa spends much of his time advocating for the site's residents who are living in degrading conditions. However, his pleas have gone unanswered.

People displaced by famine and now living in Boeny, including Damisoa and his fellow residents, urgently need humanitarian assistance. But aid is currently almost exclusively concentrated in drought-stricken southern Madagascar.

Demand that the government takes urgent steps to address the hunger, homelessness, poor healthcare and other hardships faced by Damisoa and others displaced by drought across Madagascar.

Damisoa
Madagascar

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

STORY CARD



FIGHTING TO PROTECT THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS AND CULTURE

Ellinor Guttorm Utsi is an Indigenous Sámi woman, and a passionate leader fighting to protect her community's ancient reindeer-herding way of life in northern Norway. As a spokesperson, she speaks out for her family and her people who have followed seasonal migration routes across the Arctic for generations. They rely on summer grazing lands in Čorgaš, lands now under urgent threat.

Reindeer herding is central to the Sámi food system, which depends on migratory grazing across the Arctic landscape to produce sustainable food, clothing and crafts. Ellinor leads efforts to defend her community's rights to land and culture, highlighting the ongoing struggle of Indigenous Peoples caught between climate change, land rights and renewable energy development.

In 2023, several hundred wind turbines were suddenly proposed

across Sámi territory, with many planned directly on Ellinor's summer grazing lands. These huge projects would bring hundreds of turbines, roads and power lines that would break up the land, disrupt reindeer migration and destroy a way of life deeply connected to nature.

Despite fierce opposition, Norwegian authorities are rushing approvals. Ellinor is tirelessly working to ensure Sámi voices are heard and their rights respected, but time is running out.

Call on Norway to listen to Ellinor and the Sámi People, and help them protect their land, livelihoods and culture.

Ellinor Guttorm Utsi
Norway

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

STORY CARD



WRITE TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF RISK AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Call on the authorities to take urgent steps to guarantee the human rights of people displaced and now living in Boeny and across Madagascar. Ask them to actively seek the support of humanitarian agencies and other relevant actors to do this.

ADDRESS: Director General
National Office of Risk
and Disaster Management
Avaratra Antanimora Route Mausolée
Antananarivo 101
Madagascar

SALUTATION: Dear Director General
EMAIL: bngrc.gov.mg/contact &
elackandriakaja@yahoo.fr
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/BNGRCMID
X: @BngrcMada
INSTAGRAM: [bngrc_madagascar](https://www.instagram.com/bngrc_madagascar)
HASHTAGS: #W4R25

SHOW DAMISOA AND HIS COMMUNITY THAT THE WORLD IS WITH THEM

Send a message of support to Damisoa and his community. Given the language barrier, sending drawings would be great. You could draw plants and flowers, since Damisoa is closely connected to nature through his work.

ADDRESS: Damisoa
c/o Lot 84bis secteur 5 Manjarisoa
401 Mahajanga I
Boeny
Madagascar

HASHTAGS: #W4R25

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

TAKE ACTION

DAMISOA

WRITE TO THE PRIME MINISTER

Demand that the rights of the Sámi reindeer-herding communities are protected by ensuring industrial wind-power projects that threaten their lands and way of life do not proceed without the free, prior and informed consent of the affected Sámi.

ADDRESS: Prime Minister of Norway
Office of the Prime Minister
PO box 8001 Dep
0030 Oslo
Norway

SALUTATION: Dear Prime Minister
EMAIL: postmottak@smk.dep.no
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/regjeringen norge
X: @Regjeringen
INSTAGRAM: [regjeringen](https://www.instagram.com/regjeringen)
HASHTAGS: #ProtectSámiRights, #W4R25

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

TAKE ACTION

ELLINOR
GUTTORM UTSI

SHOW ELLINOR, HER COMMUNITY AND ALL SÁMI REINDEER HERDERS THAT YOU STAND WITH THEM

Send your messages of support to amplify their voices and defend their culture, land and future.

ADDRESS: Ellinor Guttorm Utsi
c/o Amnesty International Norway
PO box 702 Sentrum
0106 Oslo
Norway

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/ellinor.utsi
INSTAGRAM: [davvielle](https://www.instagram.com/davvielle)
HASHTAGS: #ProtectSámiRights, #W4R25

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.”

Above: Amnesty activists in Zimbabwe work on Pedro's case. Right: Ana Maria Santos Cruz, with a portrait of her son Pedro Henrique at the Passo Staircase, Salvador.



Ana Maria Santos Cruz
Brazil



ABOUT

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people that 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 accountable for their actions. We investigate and expose abuses wherever they occur. By amplifying the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and act in solidarity with activists on the frontlines. We also support people to claim their rights through education and training.

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

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS TO ONE PERSON,
IT MATTERS TO US ALL.**



Amnesty supporters and members take part in Write for Rights 2024 in the Netherlands.

© Amnesty International 2025

Except where otherwise noted, content in this document is licensed under a Creative Commons (attribution, non-commercial, no derivatives, international 4.0) licence.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>

For more information please visit the permissions page on our website: www.amnesty.org

Where material is attributed to a copyright owner other than Amnesty International this material is not subject to the Creative Commons licence.

First published in 2025
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2025
Index: **POL 32/9525/2025**
Original language: **English**

All images © Amnesty International
unless otherwise stated.

Front cover photos: © Biel Calderon
© Marieke Wijntjes
Back cover photo: © Marieke Wijntjes

amnesty.org

Layout design: Off Colour Design
Editorial support: Saphia Fleury

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

