

ice &
fire



Bringing Amnesty's campaign for Afghan women to life



How Amnesty supporters can stage a dramatic performance of ***Even If We Lose Our Lives***, personal stories of women fighting for human rights in Afghanistan

TWO-PART RESOURCE
– A powerful **SCRIPT**
– **GUIDE:** Practical advice on putting on a production

A guide to staging a performance of *Even If We Lose Our Lives*

As part of Amnesty International UK's campaign on women's rights in Afghanistan, we've teamed up with ice&fire – a renowned human rights theatre company – to develop a powerful script *Even If We Lose Our Lives*. It tells the stories of three Afghan women human rights defenders.

Afghan women are too often portrayed as faceless, passive victims who are powerless to change the grave human rights abuses they are regularly affected by. But this ignores the countless Afghan women who are fearlessly working to promote women's rights and support their communities.

Afghan women human rights defenders – teachers, doctors, policewomen, civil society activists – are truly on the frontline fighting for peace and security in their country, and they do so in extremely dangerous circumstances. It is their stories we want heard.

This script is based on the actual accounts of three women – Parween, whose teenage son was kidnapped and killed because she runs a girls' school, Dr D, a gynaecologist whose son was injured in a bomb blast, and Manizha, who runs the largest Afghan organisation working on violence against women and girls at great personal cost. We hope *Even If We Lose Our Lives* can contribute to more action protecting them and the rights they fight for.

We're asking Amnesty International groups and supporters to hold 'reading' events all over the country. We hope the raw honesty of these narratives will help you inspire members of your local community to take action in support of Afghan women.

■ This pack will help you prepare for your reading event. For further guidance, watch clips from the launch event we held with ice&fire actors at amnesty.org.uk/women

Support Afghan women

'I've received threatening letters and calls, and my brother was killed by a grenade. I've had to move. I don't feel safe. The shadow of that fear follows me all the time,' says gynaecologist Dr D.

Every day across Afghanistan, brave women journalists, teachers, health workers and politicians put their life on the line to defend human rights. Their struggles for peace, education and security in their country are too often met with violence and attacks – the narratives in this script testify to that.

With the US-led military force scheduled to withdraw by the end of 2014, there is a real danger that women's rights will be rolled back, as the Afghan government tries to reach a settlement with the Taliban and other armed groups. Already violence is on the rise in Afghanistan, and it often goes unpunished. Without women's safe contribution there can be no meaningful peace.

The UK government must act now to ensure the human rights and safety of Afghan women are protected and supported.



■ JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN

For more information visit
www.amnesty.org.uk/afghanistan
www.amnesty.org.uk/actions

How to organise your script reading

THE SCRIPT

Read the script and decide on length of reading. Download the script for free from www.amnesty.org.uk/women

The full script runs at about 45 minutes. If you don't want the whole performance:

1. ice&fire will adapt scripts if there is limited time or offer a shorter, more focused version to highlight a particular issue. Give them a call to talk it through.
2. You can pick out key moments, or one person's testimony. Because they are true stories, please avoid changing the words.

RECRUIT YOUR PERFORMERS

The full script requires three actors who each take on the role of one of the women:

Parween – headteacher at a girls' school

Dr D – gynaecologist

Manizha – head of the largest Afghan organisation working on violence against women and girls

They will also double up speaking the parts of **Actor 1, 2** and **3**.

You will also need a **director**.

TIPS: Approach people comfortable with public speaking, collaborate with your local community arts centre, amateur dramatics group or school/university drama society for help.

ice&fire offer Actors for Human Rights, a network of over 600 professional actors dedicated to drawing attention to human rights. They respond to requests from groups who plan to host a larger public event (80+ audience). Actors will only require travel expenses and a meal in exchange for their time.

MORE INFORMATION:

Christine Bacon, actors@iceandfire.co.uk,
020 7377 5299, iceandfire.co.uk/outreach

BOOK A VENUE

This does not require a traditional performance venue. Think about a church, lecture hall, village hall, conference room, arts centre – many of these can be sourced for free. The actors will be seated for most of the reading so a raised 'stage area' isn't vital – you can use stools to raise the actors above the audience. If using chairs, ensure they don't have arm rests so that the performers are clearly visible and can interact. If the venue is large, use microphones. Performers will need to hold the script, so lapel mikes or mikes on adjustable stands are ideal.

SET A REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

Rehearse at least once before the performance, ideally at the venue, working section by section. Consolidate the notes and suggestions from the rehearsal and sit with the scripts alone before the performance begins. It's helpful to have access to the venue at least three hours before. Provide food and drinks for the actors.

PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS

Acting: The actors are not 'playing characters' in the traditional sense. The staging of the piece is static so energy and dynamism has to be achieved largely through the way the script is delivered vocally. It is important that any movements or gestures are not superfluous so ask your performers to only make gestures which are deliberate or necessary.

Eye contact: Encourage actors to look out to the audience whenever possible, eg at the end of a sentence or during an appropriate pause. The more familiar actors are with the script, the easier this will be! Remember to leave the lights up to facilitate eye contact.

Accents: This is not a play that can be cast for type easily. Actors should simply use their own accents.

Costumes: There is no need to obtain 'costumes' for the reading. Performers should wear something they feel comfortable in. Avoid anything too sloppy or distracting.

INTRODUCE THE SCRIPT READING

ice&fire scripts are unique and lend themselves to powerful monologue performances. It's worth pointing out to your audience that the event will not be a 'typical' play, the aim is to give the voices of real people a platform to tell their stories. On that note, it is very important that you highlight to the audience that the views and opinions expressed in this script are those of the Afghan women interviewed and do not necessarily reflect the views of the writer or the official policy or position of Amnesty International.



Making the most of the event

INVITE YOUR MP AND OTHER VIPS

Write a personalised letter to invite your local MP and MEP (www.findyourmp.parliament.uk for contact details). Refer to any previous contact you may have had with them. MPs have notoriously busy schedules so include in your letter:

- the purpose of the event, why it is so important and what action you will encourage the audience to take;
- suggest that they pop-in at the beginning or the end of the event if they aren't able to attend the whole reading;
- request a photo opportunity and offer to send the photo to local media or provide a press release for them to use.

If your MP isn't able to attend, request a separate meeting to discuss the issues the event raised. Ensure you know what Amnesty is calling for and what you will ask them to do to support the campaign. Please email parliament@amnesty.co.uk for extra information.

Also consider inviting other VIPs including the Mayor, local councillor, high profile activists, local journalists.

MEDIA COVERAGE

It's a good idea to give yourselves a 4-6 week head start to let everyone know about the performance, and follow up with phone calls closer to the performance.

Contact local and/or student media and the arts press. Send a press release including all the relevant details (date, start time, venue name and address, booking/ticket details) and, if possible, a high res picture of the cast in action. Ask for details of your event to be included in the What's On section – and don't forget to encourage journalists themselves to attend.

Amnesty can help with questions and advice with media, and interview possibilities. We also have press release templates and contact details for local media outlets.

Contact Amnesty International's Press Officer Harriet Garland harriet.garland@amnesty.org.uk or 020 7033 1549.

TAKE ACTION

After hearing the testimonies of Parween, Dr D and Manizha, the audience should feel really inspired. Please encourage them to take part in a simple action for women's rights in Afghanistan. Be clear that their action can make a real difference. For the latest action please contact: activism@amnesty.org.uk for local groups or student@amnesty.org.uk for student/youth groups.

SHOULD WE CHARGE ADMISSION?

Yes! This is an excellent opportunity to raise money for Amnesty. However, if you're worried about excluding people by charging an entrance fee, ask for a donation on the door. In our experience, if you suggest a £10 donation people will donate that amount or more if they can.

You could also raise additional funds by selling refreshments, holding a raffle or having collection tins on hand during any breaks in the performance.

For Amnesty fundraising materials, stickers, banners and action campaign materials, and to discuss other ideas, please contact our Supporter Care team on 020 7033 1777 or SCT@amnesty.org.uk.

AFTER THE EVENT

Let us know if you have held an event. How successful was it, how many people came, did your MP attend and who took action? Hearing about the incredible work you do helps us ensure we are supporting you in the best way.

Please contact: activism@amnesty.org.uk for local groups or student@amnesty.org.uk for student/youth groups.

ice&fire's contact details

Christine Bacon

Email: actors@iceandfire.co.uk

Phone: 020 7377 5299

More information about Actors for Human Rights

www.iceandfire.co.uk/outreach

