Activity 10
Taking action for human rights
Part 2 Junior Urgent Action

Aim: To develop the skills necessary for pupils to participate in taking effective action for human rights through letter writing. Time: 1-2 hours. Age: 7+. What you need: Junior Urgent Action sample sheet (on the CD, one per pupil); paper and pencils; card, colouring pens and tissue paper (Extension/homework Forget-me-not activity); Positive impact of messages (on the CD, for the teacher, Extension/homework activity).

Teacher notes
Every month Amnesty International UK sends out free monthly Junior Urgent Actions (JUAs) to teachers, specifically designed for children aged 7 to 11 to stand up for human rights through letter-writing.

Junior Urgent Actions ask for appeals on behalf of someone in need, sometimes another young person. They are written in a language children can understand. The teacher receives a copy of the original case sheet, along with a map and background of the relevant country, discussion questions and ‘how-to’ letter-writing guide. All graphic details of ill treatment or torture are edited out, and the cases are not political.

The aim is for children to help victims from every corner of the world by writing to in-country government officials and urging their intervention. Already young people have written on behalf of victims of human rights violations in over 50 different countries, including street children ill-treated by police in Brazil and child soldiers in Uganda.

Greetings cards
Once a year, between November and January, many schools also take part in the young people’s version of Amnesty International’s Greetings Card Campaign (suitable for age 8+). Children compose and mail their own messages of support and cards or letters of solidarity to prisoners of conscience and their families and to people who have been attacked or threatened for defending human rights. Background notes, letter writing guidance, ideas for creative actions and other information are supplied on each case. Visit www.amnesty.org.uk/gcc

Important information
Please note that all cases featured in Junior Urgent Actions and the Greetings Card Campaign are time sensitive; Amnesty researchers identify the best time to take action for individuals at risk, and the most appropriate type of action to take. Our actions often need to change – or to stop completely – in response to changes in the individual’s circumstances. Sending letters after an action has been closed could sometimes be counter-productive. The JUA included in this pack has now closed. It is included as a sample only and provides an opportunity for children to develop and practise key skills to enable them to take action for human rights. Please do not send the letters that your pupils write. Instead, explain that they are practising standing up for human rights and use their work to make a display in your school to show what can be done to defend human rights.

To find out the latest information regarding the Serrano Cruz sisters (the case featured in the JUA sample sheet on the CD) please visit: www.amnesty.org.uk/serranocruz. To find out how to join Amnesty’s Junior Urgent Action scheme, email student@amnesty.org.uk. To find current cases for Junior Urgent Action visit www.amnesty.org.uk/primary
Activity 10

What to do
Tell the class that they are going to practice defending human rights.

Explain what Amnesty International’s Junior Urgent Action network is, making it clear that letters, cards and support can make governments and people across the world pay attention when people are treated unfairly. A card can also make someone feel less alone and give them hope. That is why letter writing is so important.

Hand out a copy of the Junior Urgent Action sample sheet to each pupil as an example, pausing to discuss the key questions as a class or in pairs.

Ask the children to compose and write their own letter of appeal to the government official in El Salvador about this human rights case. Use the guidance provided on the ‘Take action’ part of the Junior Urgent Action sample sheet. Provide sentence stems or a writing frame where necessary.

Appeal letters should be carefully, neatly and politely written in the child’s own words. It may be a good idea to get the class to write their own draft, followed by a final copy after a spelling check, perhaps accompanied by a drawing or decoration. Children may want to say something about themselves or their area or some connection with the country they are writing to or the case they are writing about. We suggest that they should sign it with their first name only and give the school as an address.

It is often useful for groups of children to compare letters. These are appeals, so the letter should clearly explain what the problem is and ask for something to be done by the official. Always ask for a reply.

The correct name and address of the official should be written on the bottom of the page on the left. The name of the person in the case should appear as a heading to the letter in CAPITAL LETTERS.

Explain that this is just practice and their letters will not be sent off but used to create a display to show others what can be done to defend human rights.

Extension/homework
- Students can create their own greetings cards and send a message of support to the Serrano Cruz family. They could also complete the creative Forget-me-not activity. See the Junior Urgent Action sample sheet for more details. Again, explain that this is just practice.
- You can update the class on the Serrano Cruz case (see www.amnesty.org.uk/serranocruz) and share the Positive impact of messages (on the CD).
- Your class can complete a current Junior Urgent Action or the Greetings Card Campaign. For details email student@amnesty.org.uk

Source: Our World Our Rights, Activity 30.