
Amnesty International

YOUTH GROUP ACTION



Campaign: General Election

February 2015

GENERAL ELECTION 2015:

Will you stand for human rights?



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We hope you will feel inspired to take action on all of our campaigns but remind you that all actions are optional.

This mailing is also available to download at

www.amnesty.org.uk/youth

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

IN BRIEF:

7th May 2015 is the General Election in the UK. We want to ensure the next UK government and parliament are supportive of human rights and work to protect them in the UK and internationally. A general election is a good opportunity to engage with politicians in your local area and to build a relationship with whoever is elected.

Even if you aren't yet old enough to vote it is important to raise the issues you care about with politicians - you are future voters after all!

We are asking you to:

- Sign or design your own pledge card to support human rights.
- After the election, send these pledge cards to your newly elected MP to show support for human rights in their constituency.

Join the General Election campaign

In the run up to the election politicians will be engaging with their constituents (you) a lot more than they normally do and all the main political parties will have candidates canvassing for votes in your constituency. We are looking to use this opportunity to show all candidates, and through them their political party, that Amnesty is a movement of passionate and committed members who care about how the next government and parliament acts on human rights.

When our voice is heard by those in power we can achieve incredible progress on human rights. In the last parliament we secured UK support for a global Arms Trade Treaty, a commitment to resettle some vulnerable Syrian Refugees and greater protection for women fleeing domestic violence.

Key issues

However, our human rights are under attack at home and abroad. In the UK, plans to scrap the Human Rights Act are threatening our fundamental freedoms. And despite a global ban, three quarters of the world's governments still use torture – yet continue to deny it. These are two key issues we hope to raise with parliamentary candidates. Tell them that you stand for human rights!

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TAKE ACTION 1 – Sign the Fight for Rights pledge

We have launched an activist pledge. As politicians stand for election, Amnesty is asking ‘what will you stand for?’ The idea is for you and your group to take the pledge and engage others in your school or college in the campaign. Collect these up and then once a MP is elected, either send them the cards or arrange to meet them and hand the pledges over showing support for human rights in their constituency.

The pledge is a great way of showing not only the people interested in becoming your next local MP but also your school and community that there is a want to protect human rights within your local area and for humanity globally. You’ll see there is a third line for you to add your own personal pledge about an additional human rights issue you believe in.



You can order pledge cards from our mailing house. See the **Resources** section for details.

What to do:

- Sign the pledge cards and get others to do so.
- Send us photos of your group taking the pledges.
- Send your pledge cards and photos to your newly elected MP after the election. Even better organise a meeting with your MP. If you plan to do this, get in touch. We can help you prepare for your meeting.

Creative action

- Feel free to create your own pledge cards if you prefer.
- If you do this we would love to see them so please send us photos!
- Send your photos to: anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk

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TAKE ACTION 2 – Telling your PPC’s about the pledges

If you have more time you could also let all your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPC’s) know about your pledges *before the election*. Write to the candidates outlining that you have taken the pledge and asking them what they will do on these issues and what human rights issue they care about. You could perhaps include a group photo with all of the pledge cards you’ve made. We’ve included a list of websites that will help you find your PPCs. If you do have contact with your PPCs please could you let us know by filling in the feedback form in the **Extras** section of this mailing.

Important Note on political neutrality:

At Amnesty we work independently and impartially to promote respect for human rights. This means Amnesty is a non-party political organisation. We campaign for political change on human rights issues but we do not side with one party over another. When representing Amnesty please be aware of this and maintain political neutrality. We will work with all MPs that are willing to engage with us. This also means that you need to engage with all PPC’s standing for election in your constituency!

Is your school running a mock election?

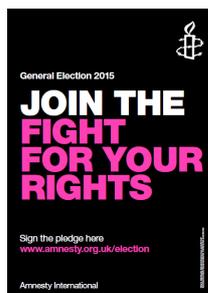
Can you use this opportunity to raise the profile of human rights and Amnesty at the same time?

Can you get people to sign pledge cards at the event?

Resources

Order your resources by contacting TFS on 01788 545553 and quote the following codes.

- Pledge cards - GE001
- Posters - GE002
- Placards - GE003



Poster



Placard

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A note on the Lobbying Act

In January 2014, a new piece of legislation came into force. Officially it's known as the Transparency of Lobbying, non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014. Most importantly, it shouldn't stop you campaigning on any issues, including those related to an election. You don't need to change your planned campaigning over this period.

When campaigning during the General Election we ask you to maintain a detailed record of all your expenditure on public activities and keep all receipts that are more than £200 in value. Please provide us with your receipts and records at the end of each month, starting end of November 2014. You can scan or photograph them and email lobbyfeedback@amnesty.org.uk, or you can post them to: Laura Trevelyan, Amnesty International UK, Human Rights Action Centre, 25 New Inn Yard, London, EC2A 3EA.

If you receive donations – including goods or services of £500 or more in value and these are specifically for regulated campaign activity, then you will need to record the donor contact details and tell us straight away so that we can ensure that this is treated correctly under the new law. If you are planning on printing your own materials to use publicly on the General Election/work with PCCs, please talk to us first. This is because they may need to carry what is known as an 'imprint', stating the publisher and promoter. This is a simple procedure.

For more information see - <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/comply-lobbying-act-guide-local-groups>

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Extras 1: Finding your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

There is not currently a website listing all PPCs for each constituency (this may change nearer the election so try searching online). If you can't find anything then all the political parties have candidates listed on their websites (not all parties have candidates in all seats but make sure you check all that apply for you area). You may have independent candidates so if you hear about any make sure to engage with them also.

All political parties that currently have MPs in Westminster are listed below.

National parties

- Labour Party <http://www2.labour.org.uk/candidates>
- Conservative Party https://www.conservatives.com/OurTeam/Prospective_Parliamentary_Candidates
- Liberal Democrat Party http://www.libdems.org.uk/general_election_candidates
- The Green Party www.greenparty.org.uk
- UK Independence Party <http://www.ukip.org/regions>
- Respect - <http://www.respectparty.org/general-election-2015/>

Scotland

- Scottish Green Party <http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/people/>
- Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) www.snp.org

Wales

- Plaid Cymru <http://www.partyofwales.org/who-we-are/>

Northern Ireland

- Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) www.mydup.com
- Sinn Féin www.sinnfein.ie
- Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) www.uup.org
- Social Democrat and Labour Party (SDLP) www.sdlp.ie
- Alliance – www.allianceparty.org
- Green Party NI www.greenpartyni.org
- Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) www.tuv.org.uk

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Extras 2: Feedback form

Please return to anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk

Amnesty group and contact (name and email)	
Group twitter handle	
Constituency	
Candidates' names and political party	
Where met (meeting, other hustings, bumped into them on the street...) If sent a letter and received a reply please enclose copies.	
Does the candidate support the Human Rights Act? What did they say about it?	
Did the candidate agree to work towards stopping torture if elected? What did they say about it?	
Did the candidate raise any other human rights issues they are interested in?	
Anything else	

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Extras 3: Stand up to Stop Torture

Torture is abhorrent, barbaric and inhumane. It can never be justified. It is wrong, self-defeating and poisons the rule of law, replacing it with terror. For more than 50 years, Amnesty International has been fighting to stamp out torture. Torture is banned under International law, but all over the world people continue to be tortured. Together we can stop it.

Over the last five years, Amnesty International has reported on **torture and other forms of ill-treatment in at least 141 countries** from every region of the world. The secretive nature of torture means the true number is likely to be higher still.

Torture prevention is currently a priority for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The FCO's Torture Prevention Strategy includes a campaign to press countries to sign up to international agreements such as United Nations Convention against Torture.

There is **no guarantee that our government will prioritise this issue.** We need to get as much support from Prospective Parliamentary Candidates as possible to ensure this issue is a priority for the next UK government.

What is torture?

Electric shocks. Beatings. Rape and sexual violence. Humiliation. Mock executions. Burning. Sleep deprivation. Water torture. Long hours in contorted positions. Use of pincers, drugs, and dogs. The very words sound like the stuff of nightmares. But every day and across every region of the world, these unimaginable horrors are the reality for countless men, women and children.

How can we Stop Torture?

Torture and other ill-treatment are prohibited always, everywhere and against anyone. All governments must ensure protective mechanisms to prevent and punish torture. Without these safeguards, such as access to a lawyer, independent medical examinations or access for independent experts to visit a detention centre, **torture thrives.**

The Stop Torture campaign seeks to create improvements on torture across the world but focuses on five countries in particular, where torture is a major concern; Nigeria, Mexico, the Philippines, Morocco and Uzbekistan.

Inquiry into alleged UK involvement in torture

The release of the US report on CIA torture reveals how they used torture against detainees. But we still don't know how deeply the UK was involved. The UK government needs to properly investigate the truth.

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UK government's ability to deliver on the Torture Prevention Strategy is linked to whether it delivers on its commitment to an adequate investigation into allegations of UK complicity in torture and other abuses. We continue to urge the UK government to establish a human rights compliant inquiry on alleged UK involvement in human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment of detainees held overseas.

Justice for Moses and Miriam

In Nigeria, police and military personnel use torture as a matter of routine. Police arrested and tortured Moses Akatugba in 2005 when he only 16 years old. Moses said police beat him, shot him in the hand, and hung him by his limbs. Moses states he only signed a confession agreeing he was involved in a robbery because of the torture. In November 2013, after waiting eight years for a verdict, Moses was sentenced to death. His allegations of torture were never investigated.

Miriam Lopez Vargas, a 31 year-old mother of four, was abducted from her hometown of Ensenada, Mexico, by two soldiers in plainclothes, and taken to a military barracks. She was held there for a week and tortured to force her to confess that she was involved in drug-related offences. Three years have passed, but none of her torturers have been brought to justice. In Mexico the government argues that torture is the exception rather than the norm, but in reality abuse by police and security forces is widespread and goes unpunished.

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Extras 4: The Human Rights Act - Briefing sheet

The Human Rights Act (HRA) brings human rights home. It protects us from abuse by the state. If you are lucky, you might never be directly aware of the protection it gives you, which means it is doing its job and your rights have been protected. But negative press coverage of human rights and calls for the HRA to be scrapped, has placed this key protection at risk. We must stand up for human rights and protect the HRA.

The HRA is an excellent example of human rights protection and has had a positive impact for many individuals and for UK society generally, in a number of ways. For example a couple who used the HRA to challenge a decision which would have separated them after 65 years together.

The HRA brings human rights into all state decisions improving government and public authority actions and policies. If someone feels their rights are not being respected, they can challenge the government in court. But in the vast majority of HRA cases, the issue is settled out of court i.e. the government/public authority comes to an agreement about how to respect the individual's rights and this can have a positive impact on policies affecting hundreds or even thousands of people.

The HRA brings human rights home – it allows people to turn to UK courts and UK judges if they feel their rights are not being respected by the government. It gives us power to challenge the decisions made by politicians and Local Authorities here in the UK.

It might not seem exciting, but the HRA is a brilliant piece of law, cleverly designed to suit and support the UK democratic system. Often attacked, rarely championed, and surrounded by myths and misconceptions, the HRA is vitally important. In 1215, the signing of the Magna Carta signalled a commitment to writing human rights into UK law. On its 800 year anniversary the need for such written protection in the form of the HRA is as strong as ever.

How does the Human Rights Act (HRA) work?

The Human Rights Act 'incorporates' into English law most of the rights in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Convention was created from the ashes of the Second World War and it was inspired by the desire to protect individuals against those abuses happening again. It drew on a lot of British ideas; in fact, British experts drafted most of it and the UK was the first state to sign up to it in 1951.

What unifies the rights in the act (for example protection from torture, the right to a free trial) is that they are all considered fundamental in a civilised society. They are all rights which you have because you are a human being, not because the government believes you have 'earned' them by behaving a certain way and not because you happen to have been born in the UK. **Human rights are for everyone.**

If an individual feels a public authority is not respecting their rights they could challenge this in the courts using the HRA.

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The Human Rights Act at work

There have been Human Rights Act cases in the Courts leading to positive system changes on issues such as dignity for the elderly and others receiving care at home; support for a young girl with learning disabilities to get to and from school; improved procedures to avoid disabled individuals falling into a gap between social services and housing departments; protecting people who have been victims of trafficking and an end to blanket Do Not Resuscitate orders in hospitals. Individuals have been able to use the Act to protect themselves in numerous ways, in and out of Court. Here are a few examples:

Keeping couples together: A husband and wife had lived together for over 65 years. He was unable to walk unaided and relied on his wife to help him move around. She was blind and used her husband as her eyes. They were separated after he fell ill and was moved into a residential care home. She asked to come with him but was told by the local authority that she did not fit the criteria. After relying on their family rights, the authority agreed to reverse its decision and offered the wife a subsidised place so that she could join her husband in the care home.

Keeping families together: A woman left her partner after discovering that he had been abusing their children. She and the children were placed in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation but were regularly moved. Eventually, the woman was informed by social workers that the children would be removed from her because she was unable to provide stability and was having difficulty getting them to school. The woman challenged the decision citing her and the children's right to respect for private and family life, and the children's right to education; the department decided not to remove the children.