

Amnesty International

How to write a press release



News coverage

Local and regional news coverage of grassroots action is important for Amnesty's work in the UK. One of the strengths of Amnesty is that ordinary people can effect change by writing letters, lobbying and publicising what is happening in the world.

More people than you think read local or regional papers when compared with national ones. For example, whilst the readership of the Independent is around 270,000, that of the Manchester Evening News is 547,000 and the Sheffield Star is 246,000.

So how do you go about getting news coverage? – Writing a press release is the standard way of informing journalists of important events and meetings.

Presentation tips

Write your press release on headed paper. That way, as soon as a journalist opens the envelope, s/he will know who it comes from. Contact the Press Office at Amnesty for a supply of special "press release" headed paper.

Always type your press releases. If possible they should be one and a half line/double spaced, since this makes them easier to read and leaves space for journalists to make changes to the copy directly on paper.

Put a contact name at the top and bottom of the press release, together with both day/evening/mobile telephone numbers.

Always date your press release, so that a journalist knows how "newsy" it is. If a journalist can use the information immediately, then put "For immediate Release" at the top of it. If you do not want the



information published before a certain date (if it will adversely affect your event, for example) then put "Embargoed until 0900 hours GMT on (date)" on it.

An ideal press release covers one/one and half sides of A4 paper.

Type the heading in capitals and underline it.

Do not write very long paragraphs or very long sentences.

Always spell check and double check for grammatical errors when you have finished.

What to include

Make sure that you start with a headline, which is both informative and catchy (but don't be too clever, or clichéd). Often this is the only part of a press release which a journalist will read – they will use the headline to decide whether to read on.

Amnesty International

How to write a press release



The first paragraph of a press release should always include the “5 Ws”, so that journalists can get a quick idea of what it’s about without having to read all the way through:

1. What is happening?
2. Who is doing it?
3. Where it is happening?
4. When it is happening?
5. Why it is happening?

The remaining paragraphs should expand on the basic information provided in the first paragraph.

Always include a punchy quote by an Amnesty International spokesperson. This helps to give the story a more personal feel, and you will notice that newspaper articles always try to include a quote from somebody.



Do not use the press release as a means to express an opinion – always be factual, objective and balanced. (Use Amnesty materials as a source of background information and to make sure it reflects Amnesty’s policy if you are speaking in Amnesty’s name.)

Remember that the aim of a press release is to get media coverage for your event, so don’t cram it full of detailed or unnecessary information.

Always stress the local angle – make it clear to the journalist why your event is something that locals will be interested in.

If there is a “photo opportunity” state this at the bottom of the press release, with dates, times and contact numbers.

Where to send it

Always try and find out the name of the editor you will be sending the press release to, so that you are sending it to a person rather than a title.

Local press

Send the press release to the News Editor (if there is an unusual speaker, the press release can also be sent to the Features Editor for a feature story or profile of the event).

Local radio

Send the press release to the News Editor/Programme Organiser.

Local TV

Send the press release to the News Editor (only if you think it is very photogenic or a strong story).

Amnesty International

How to write a press release



When to send it

Most local papers go to print on Monday/Tuesday, and are in the shops on Thursday/Friday.

If you want the journalist to come to your event, send it to them the previous week, so they have time to put it in the paper's diary.

If you want the paper to include the press release in order to advertise your event, send your press release to arrive on their desks on the previous Thursday/Friday.

For radio and TV, send the press release to arrive two days before the event.

Always follow up your press release with a phone call the day after it arrives on the editor's desk. Make sure that you are familiar with the format of the newspaper/programme schedule before you do this; so that you know where/when your item is likely to appear. When you enquire if they will be covering your event, remember to stress the local angle.

If you have any ideas on writing a press release which we could add to this leaflet then please contact:

Education and Student Team
Human Rights Action Centre
17-25 New Inn Yard
London
EC2A 3EA
Tel: 020 7033 1596
Email: student@amnesty.org.uk

EXAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Name and address of contact at the top and the bottom, with day and evening telephone numbers.

Anytown University Amnesty International Group
Paul Smith
1 Crown Gardens
Anytown XX1 3XX
07788899900 (Mobile)
(01123) 333677 (Home)

Embargo date (if wanted), so that journalists know when they can print the story.

Embargoed until: 0900 hours GMT on [insert date here]

PRESS RELEASE

Write a clear heading, so that journalists know what the press release will be about.

ANYTOWN UNIVERSITY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GROUP ORGANISES 'WRITE-A-THON' ON PALACE PIER

The 5 "Ws" – what, when, why, where, who – are covered in the first paragraph.

On Sunday, 10 November between 12 – 4 pm, the Anytown University Amnesty International Group will be holding a 'write-a-thon' on the Palace Pier, asking for the release of two Nigerian students, who are being held in Port Harcourt Prison, Nigeria.

The rest of the press release gives more detailed information.

At the write-a-thon, the Amnesty International student group will be asking the public to write letters to the Nigerian authorities asking for the release of 17-year-old Samuel Mbere Ture and 21-old Israel Nwinyere. The two students have been detained without trial since mid-1994 and Amnesty International considers them to be 'prisoners of conscience' – imprisoned solely for their non-violently held beliefs. Amnesty International also fears that the students could be unfairly tried, sentenced to death and executed without right of appeal to a higher court.

The 'write-a-thon' is being held on the anniversary of the execution of writer and environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiva, and eight other Ogoni activists. Following an unfair trial, they were sentenced to death in connection with the murder of 4 Ogoni leaders. Their executions prompted an international outcry.

Press release is easily readable, typed in double line spacing.

EXAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

A "quote" from a group member is included, as often journalists like to have a 'personal comment' to give the story more life.

The 'write-a-thon' will be one of a number of events which the Anytown Amnesty student group are organising as part of a month-long campaign against human rights abuses in Nigeria. Katie Smith, a spokesperson for the group said:

"In Nigeria at the moment people are being executed and imprisoned for crimes they have not committed. We very much hope that people of Anytown will join us in trying to stop this happening."

Date and time of 'write-a-thon': Sunday, 10 November, 12-4 pm.

Place: Palace Pier (+ address)

For further information: please contact Paul Smith on 07788899900 (Mobile)

(01123) 333677 (Home) Email: psmith@anytown.ac.uk

Amnesty international: working worldwide for the release of prisoners of conscience, fair trials for political prisoners and an end to torture, extra-judicial executions, "disappearances" and the death penalty

Date, time and place of event repeated at the bottom.

Short version of Amnesty International's mandate.