



# Amnesty International

## Q&A

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### WHAT IS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND HOW DID IT BEGIN?

One man believed that ordinary people have the power to bring about extraordinary change.

In 1961 lawyer Peter Benenson read about two Portuguese students, jailed for raising their glasses in a toast to freedom. (Portugal was under a dictatorship at the time and people weren't able to speak freely.) Outraged, he wrote a newspaper appeal, calling for people to join an international campaign to fight for fairness and justice, for freedom of speech and for the release of anyone imprisoned just for their ideas. His new movement would press governments to respect the basic human rights of their citizens. Thousands of people wrote in offering their help; Amnesty International was born.

Today that movement has more than 3 million supporters and activists around the world. It is the largest human rights organisation in the world.

### WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

Human rights are the fundamental freedoms that belong to all of us. They are listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drawn up in 1948 by the United Nations. They include our rights to life, to equality, to marriage, to travel, to education, health and housing, to property and privacy, to freedom of opinion, belief and expression, to a fair legal system, to participate in government and politics, and to be protected from cruel and unfair treatment.

### WHAT IS THE SITUATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AROUND THE WORLD TODAY?

- **Refugees and displaced people:** By the end of 2011, 42.5 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide (*UNHCR*)
- **Death penalty:** In 2011, 21 countries carried out state executions and at least 680 people were executed worldwide (excluding China) (*Amnesty International*)
- **Torture:** In 2010, Amnesty International documented specific cases of torture and other ill-treatment in 98 countries
- **Maternal health:** In 2011, 360,000 women died in pregnancy or childbirth (*WHO*)
- **Informal settlements:** Almost a billion people live in slums worldwide (*Amnesty International*)



‘Just to know that the ‘outside’ world had not forgotten me and was continuing to work for my release was an immense source of encouragement during those dark days.’

**THICH QUANG DO, BUDDHIST MONK FROM VIET NAM**

## WHAT IS AMNESTY DOING TO CHANGE THIS SITUATION?

**1. We find out what’s really happening:** Amnesty’s researchers travel worldwide investigating abuses, interviewing victims, observing trials, meeting prisoners, and talking to government officials. We check out all our information before we publish it.

**2. We campaign for change:** We work across the world to change the laws and policies that allow human rights abuses to happen. We put pressure on governments and companies to improve their human rights records and to accept responsibility when human rights abuses occur.

Current Amnesty campaigns:

- **Women’s Rights**
- **Poverty and Human Rights**
- **Control Arms**
- **Demanding change in the Middle East and North Africa region**
- **End the Death Penalty**
- **Respect the Rights of Refugees**
- **End human rights abuses in the ‘War on Terror’**

**3. We work for individuals who are at risk:** We send appeals to the authorities on behalf of victims of human rights abuse, such as people jailed for their ideas or identity, and those working to defend human rights in dangerous conditions. We also send messages of support to the individuals concerned.

**4. Education work:** Amnesty wants everyone to know what their human rights are so we can claim them for ourselves and defend the rights of others. Amnesty raises awareness of human rights in the media, online, and through the arts and entertainment. Amnesty’s education materials, films, school speakers and teacher training programmes help get the human rights message across to young people.

## DOES AMNESTY REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes! In more than a third of the Urgent Action cases Amnesty works on, we hear of some improvement – torture is stopped, someone listed as ‘disappeared’ is found, a prisoner avoids execution.

The people we campaign for often tell us that Amnesty gave them hope when everything else seemed desperate. And although we may not win every fight for justice, we believe that it is better to try than to do nothing.

In 1977 Amnesty International won the Nobel Peace Prize for defending human rights from government abuse.

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

### Join or start a student group

We have more than 100 groups in universities across the UK. They show an amazing amount of creativity and enthusiasm in their campaigning and fundraising, making a big impact on campus and also in the wider community. They also have a lot of fun.

Visit [www.amnesty.org.uk/student](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/student)

### Become a member of Amnesty – and get an exclusive t-shirt

We know student finances are tight so here’s a special offer for you. For just £7.50 a year you can become a member of Amnesty. We will keep you up to date with all our work by email and through the Amnesty Magazine. And you’ll also get an exclusive FREE T-shirt!

Visit [www.amnesty.org.uk/studentjoin](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/studentjoin)

### Student Raise-Off

Every year, universities compete to raise the most money for Amnesty in our fundraising contest, the Student Raise-Off. From jail breaks to Jamnesty gig nights, speed dating to sponsored events, there’s plenty of scope for you to get creative.

To register visit [www.amnesty.org.uk/raiseoff](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/raiseoff)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: [STUDENT@AMNESTY.ORG.UK](mailto:STUDENT@AMNESTY.ORG.UK)**

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