



Amnesty International

WRITING LETTERS A BRIEF GUIDE

PROTECT THE HUMAN





WRITING LETTERS

A BRIEF GUIDE

From the very beginning of Amnesty International in 1961, people have written letters on behalf of victims of human rights abuses.

Today, hundreds of thousands of ordinary people throughout the world challenge cruelty and injustice by taking a few minutes to write a letter.

IT'S VERY EASY!

Your letters don't have to be long or detailed, and you don't need to be an expert in human rights law or a particular country. We always include clear advice on the key points to make and details of whom you should write to. If you do have knowledge of a country or a case, you may want to write a more detailed letter, but all types of letters are valuable.

Remember that your letter or email, combined with thousands of others from all over the world, can lead to dramatic improvements. Putting pressure on officials can result in torture being stopped, access granted to doctors or lawyers, death sentence being commuted, disappearances investigated, prisoners released, and better human rights policies introduced.

IT WORKS!

'We are beyond happy. We have waited for this moment for five and a half years and want to thank everyone who worked toward this joyful day.'

REBIYA KADEER'S DAUGHTER, AKIDA ROUZI, ON HER MOTHER'S RELEASE (APRIL 2005)

PHOTO Thanks to people like you, Rebiya Kadeer was reunited with her family after more than four years in a Chinese prison for championing minority rights.

GENERAL TIPS:

Always follow our instructions closely
Keep letters factual and polite, don't be offensive

Be positive, assume the reader is open to a reasoned argument

Write in a style that is natural to you
Don't discuss politics or ideology, keep to the human rights issue

Write in English unless you can get an accurate translation

Give full details of the individual or situation

You can write as a member of AI or as an individual

Make a clear request and conclude by asking for a response

GUIDELINES

PREPARATION

Read the information about the case carefully to find out what we are asking you to say. Typing or clear handwriting are equally good – the important thing is to get the letter written and sent off.

ADDRESS AND POSTAGE

We always tell you who to write to, and how to address officials. The Post Office provides a free information leaflet on postage, and you can find this out at www.royalmail.com. Make sure your own address is clear, as you would like a reply!

START YOUR LETTER WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THE CASE

Write the name of the case or situation in capitals and underlined, along with dates or places where incidents occurred. You can write as an individual or as a member of Amnesty International:
'On behalf of Amnesty International I am writing about..'
'I am writing to express my concern about..'

MAKE YOUR REQUEST

After a brief explanation of the case or situation make your request clearly. Our researchers have been very careful to make the correct request for each case, so please follow the instructions exactly.
'Please use your authority to ensure the prompt release of xx because according to AI

reports she is a newspaper journalist, going about her work and has not committed any offence'

'Please ensure that xxxxx is given adequate access to medical and legal advice'

'In order to prevent further abuses, we are asking your government to sign up to the Optional Protocol on..'

END YOUR LETTER POSITIVELY

Try to include a phrase that encourages a reply.
'Please confirm what measures you are taking to..'
'I look forward to hearing from you about what progress..'

Yours sincerely, or yours respectfully are both appropriate endings. Make sure your name is clearly legible, sign and print it.

EMAILS

Sometimes we give you the email address to write to. Make sure you put a clear request in the subject line, so at least this message gets through even if the email gets deleted.

Stop the execution of Carlos Manchez Investigate the killings in Jonestown

Follow the same principles as for letter writing – keep the message simple and brief. Sometimes your email will bounce back – this may happen because officials close down the address, or it gets overloaded by all our messages. If this keeps happening, write a letter or fax if you can.

ADDRESSING OFFICIALS

There are no hard and fast rules about how to address all officials internationally. Amnesty International's instructions often give an appropriate form of address or 'salutation'. If you are not sure about what form of address to use do not let this put you off writing.

Monarchs
Heads of state, Presidents
Prime Ministers
Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Local authorities and prison governors
Judges
Military officials
Members of Parliament in UK/EU

Your Majesty
Your Excellency
Dear Prime Minister
Dear Ambassador or High Commissioner
Dear Mrs / Mr
Dear Sir / Madam
Your Honour
Dear Admiral / General / Captain
Dear Mr / Ms / Mrs or Dear Jane Helpful



42 Main Street
Somewhereton
United Kingdom

Date

Dear Prime Minister

Give the full name
of the case

• Re: Name

Follow the directions
given to you

I am writing about the case of (name) who was arrested on (date) in (place). I understand that he is in poor health, and has been held without charge for several months. Please use your influence to ensure that he receives medical treatment and that he is charged with an internationally recognisable criminal offence and promptly brought to court or released.

Make a clear
request

• Please could you let me know what medical treatment (name) has received and when, and tell me when he will be charged?

Ask for a reply

• I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Yours respectfully

Print your name
clearly

• Brenda Jones

SendSave as a DraftSpell CheckCancel

From: [Add Mail Account]

Insert addresses or enter nicknames (separated by commas)

To: President Jonas

Cc: Bcc:

Subject: Stop the Execution of Carlos Manchez

Please use your influence to commute the sentence of Carlos Manchez, scheduled for April 4.

I am extremely concerned that the state is continuing to seek his execution despite serious doubts about the reliability of his conviction.

John Smith, Aberdeen, Scotland

SAMPLE EMAIL

WHAT NEXT?

YOU MAY HEAR NOTHING

Sometimes you get a reply, but your letter may get no response at all. Do not despair. Someone has read your letter, and if it is one of hundreds or thousands of others from around the world, it will have had an impact.

IF YOU GET A REPLY

Send a copy of the reply to AI, with a letter explaining where you heard about the case and we will pass it on to the relevant person who will decide what further action, if any, is needed. Normally the instructions will include information about who to send replies to, but if you are unsure send it to the Activism address below.

UPDATES

It isn't always possible to follow up every case, but whenever we can, we will give you further information on the subject.

WRITING TO THE NEWSPAPERS OR TO YOUR MP

Sometimes we ask you to write to your local paper or MP – we always give you full instructions, but you will find out more about how to do this by reading *Lobbying: A brief guide*.

MAKING AN EVEN BIGGER IMPACT

You can make a bigger impact if you ask your local mayor, police chief, MP or football team to write or sign a letter, especially if you can get local press coverage for this.

If you are a member of a local group, there is a training workshop that will help you plan ways of increasing the impact of letter writing. Contact Activism at the address below.



PHOTO MPs Clare Short and John Hemming sign cards at the West Midlands groups stall at St Martin's in the Bullring, Birmingham. This was in support of Amnesty's Greetings Card Campaign 2005.

ANY OTHER QUESTIONS?

CAN I WRITE DIRECTLY TO THE INDIVIDUAL?

Most letters are addressed to officials, and not to prisoners or victims of human rights abuses. Prisoners may only be allowed a limited number of letters and their families should have priority. You can write directly to individuals as part of our Greetings Card Campaign.

IS IT RISKY TO SIGN MY LETTERS AND GIVE MY ADDRESS? WILL THAT COUNTRY REFUSE TO LET ME VISIT IT IN THE FUTURE?

We have no record of this happening. Thousand of AI members sign their letters without experiencing any problems. However if you have business or other close links with a country and have concerns, then chose another case to write about. If you are writing as a member of the Urgent Action Network you can “opt out” of certain countries. As a general rule, people don’t write on cases from their own country, this helps to maintain Amnesty’s impartiality.

WHAT’S MOST EFFECTIVE, A PERSONALISED LETTER OR LOTS OF PHOTOCOPIED LETTERS?

All kinds of letters can be effective. If you are mass-producing a standard letter, make sure that all the signatures can be easily read, and that there is a clear address for any replies. If you can send letters separately or in small amounts, please do. If it’s too costly, put them all in the same envelope.

**Activism Team, Amnesty International UK
Human Rights Action Centre
17-25 New Inn Yard
London EC2A 3EA
Tel 020 7033 1675
email activism@amnesty.org.uk**

IT WORKS!

I have boxes and boxes of appeals sent on our behalf by Urgent Action letter writers... I have no doubt that those letters saved our lives.

COLOMBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ASTRID MANRIQUE AND YOLIMA QUINTERO



Write more and you’ll affect them more. From my experience in government and in prison I can tell you that these letters work.

ANWAR IBRAHIM (FORMER PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA)

Amnesty International is a movement of ordinary people from across the world standing up for humanity and human rights. Our purpose is to protect individuals wherever justice, fairness freedom and truth are denied.

For further information, please contact
Amnesty International UK
Activism Team
17-25 New Inn Yard,
London EC2A 3EA
Telephone 020 7033 1675
email: activism@amnesty.org.uk

www.amnesty.org.uk

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