



# 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 2.7 million members across 70 countries. 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?

Amnesty International researchers reported these abuses of human rights abuses in 2008:

- Torture in over **a third** of the countries in the world.
- Over **2000** executions.
- Unfair trials in more than **50** countries.
- **A quarter of a million** people imprisoned without trial.
- **1 in 3** women beaten or forced into sex during their lifetime.
- **One billion** people living in slums.



‘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:

- **Demand Dignity.** Stop the human rights abuses that drive and deepen poverty
- **Stop Violence Against Women**
- **Control the Arms Trade**
- **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 youth group

There are over 650 Amnesty International youth groups across the UK, mainly based in schools. They organise events, assemblies and gigs, lobby MPs, write letters, make films, raise funds, organise creative publicity stunts, and have a lot of fun.

### Become an individual member

If you are over 14 you can join Amnesty as an individual member for just £5 a year. Members get a free Amnesty T-shirt, a magazine every two months, information about events, and ideas for taking action. You become part of a truly global human rights movement.

### Take Urgent Actions

Some of our cases demand immediate attention – an enforced disappearance, a case of torture, or an impending execution for example. Just one quick appeal letter may help save someone’s life. 11-18 year olds can join the Youth Urgent Action Network. 7-11 year olds, with adult help, can take part in Junior Urgent Actions.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION  
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