



AN INTRODUCTION TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Level 1: Becoming an activist

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**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**





Amnesty International rally, United Kingdom 1978. © Amnesty International

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BEFORE WE BEGIN

If you would like to learn more about joining our movement, head to our [Get Active](#) page.

You can sign up to join a webinar where you'll find out everything you need to know to get more involved.

We can also read our guide on an Introduction to Activism at Amnesty International.

If you have any questions please get in touch with us at activism@amnesty.org.au.



Protest in support of Raif Badawi, Italy 2015. © Amnesty International

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our introduction to Amnesty International and Human Rights. In this module you'll learn about what rights we all share and how we can protect them together. You'll also learn about Amnesty International as a movement, our story and what we fight for. How people from all walks of life around the world have held the powerful to account for several decades. All so we can live in a world where everyone enjoys their human rights. It's the very beginning of a broader journey to become a human rights activist.

But before we get into that let's start with the basics.

What are Human Rights?

Human Rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every one of us. They guarantee that we all receive equal and fair treatment. They are about dignity, mutual respect and compassion regardless of nationality, religion or beliefs. Human rights are also about having the personal freedom to make choices about our own lives. When we promote and defend human rights all of our lives are better and the world becomes better off too.

The concept of human rights traces back thousands of years. But, the modern global human rights movement as we know it today was formed in the aftermath of World War 2. The atrocities of the war led to a widespread determination to make sure they would never happen again. It wasn't only the war that was causing human suffering though, abuses of people's rights were happening everywhere. Because of this, the global population was becoming more vocal about the need for change. This led to the formation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. The time had come to agree on definitions for our most fundamental rights. Also for governments around the world to work together and make a commitment to protecting those rights.

In 1948 the UN adopted the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR). It was a significant milestone in the recognition and protection of human rights. Never before had our rights been so articulated and respected at this scale.

These are the 30 articles of the UDHR which outline just some of our basic rights.

1 All human beings are born free and equal	Everyone is equal regardless of race, colour, gender and sexuality, language, religion, politics or where they are born	3 Everyone has the right to a life lived in freedom and safety	Everyone has the right to be free from slavery	5 Everyone has the right to be free from torture
Everyone has the right to be recognised before the law	7 We are all equal before the law	Everyone has the right to seek justice if their rights are violated	9 Everyone has the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile	10 Everyone has the right to a fair trial
11 Everyone has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty	Everyone has the right to privacy and freedom from attacks on their reputation	13 Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and to be free to leave and return to their own country	14 Everyone has the right to seek asylum from persecution	15 Everyone has the right to a nationality
Everyone has the right to marry and have a family	17 Everyone has the right to own property	Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	19 Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression	Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association
Everyone has the right to take part in government and to have equal access to public service	Everyone has the right to social security	23 Everyone has the right to work, to equal pay, to protection against unemployment and the right to form and join trade unions	24 Everyone has the right to rest and leisure	Everyone has the right to a decent standard of living, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and social services
26 Everyone has the right to education	27 Everyone has the right to participate in and enjoy culture, art and science	Everyone has the right to a social and international order when the rights in this Declaration can be fully realised	29 We have a duty to other people and we should protect their rights and freedom	30 Nobody can take away these rights and freedoms from us

What is Amnesty International?

Amnesty International is one of the world's largest and most respected human rights organisations. Our research allows us to campaign against abuses of human rights around the world. Across the globe we bring human rights violators to justice. We change oppressive laws and free people jailed for voicing their opinions. We're independent of any political ideology, economic interest or religion. Amnesty supporters like yourself completely fund our vital work. We are a movement of people who demand dignity, freedom, justice and equality for all.

Since our founding in 1961, our movement has comprised everyday people. People that will not stand by and allow others to disregard our inalienable rights. Who will not remain silent when there is suffering caused by unjust systems. Amnesty's first campaign was the global "Appeal for Amnesty" in 1961. Those activists collected and distributed information about prisoners of conscience around the world.

We have since grown into a global human rights movement. Millions of people in over 150 countries and territories join our campaigns.



Marathon to support victims of torture, Togo. © Amnesty International



UDHR 50th anniversary celebration, Nepal 1998. © Amnesty International

We now celebrate the ratification of the UDHR on December 10th as World Human Rights Day. Following the UDHR the global human rights movement had a solid foundation to build on. It's important to note that the UDHR was not in itself legally binding. It was more a symbol of an intent to do the right thing, a set of principles for nations to live up to. But it did pave the way for other legal mechanisms where our rights would become protected under law.

Some of these include:

- 1966 - [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#)
- 1966 - [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#)
- 1987 - [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#)
- 1989 - [Convention of the Rights of the Child](#)
- 2006 - [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- 2007 - [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

Because of mechanisms like these our rights are more protected than at any time in history. Getting to this stage has taken a lot of work and world leaders can't get all the thanks. It takes an active civil society to put pressure on world leaders to get results like this. If it hadn't been for this we may not have these rights today. That is where organisations like Amnesty International come in.

Over the last several decades Amnesty has broadened our scope and mission. In the early days we only sought the release of political prisoners. We've now expanded on this to campaign to uphold all human rights. From abolishing the death penalty to protecting sexual and reproductive rights. Combatting discrimination to defending refugees and migrants' rights. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom and dignity are under threat.

Thanks to the people in our movement we've achieved countless successes. Thousands of prisoners of conscience released and powerful governments & corporations held accountable.

We're successful because we empower people to become advocates for human rights. We develop and support anyone that wants to fight back against injustice. We remain a community for those that will not remain silent or turn a blind eye.

Each of us has the power to create a society based on justice and equality. When we work together we are more powerful than any individual that gets in our way. Change is possible, we see it all the time. As dark as the world can be it becomes better each day because of the vigilance and courage of our movement.



Protest, United Kingdom 2014 © Amnesty International

What is our theory of change?

So, we have a lot of people, but how do we turn that people power into lasting change? Well, first of all, we learn the facts. We're out there in the field learning first hand what human rights abuses are taking place. From systemic issues to individual cases we gather as much information as we can. We use this to inform the rest of the world about what abuses have been, or are still taking place.

We then release this research for the world to see. We then call on those that have the power to bring about change to do something about it. We provide solutions to the problem, recommendations on what the right thing is to do.

Finally, our most vital stage. We encourage people around the world to take action through activism and campaigns. This involves a wide range of activities. Anything from petitioning decision makers, holding events, public stunts and raising awareness. We build the support of the community to generate pressure. We then use that pressure on those decision makers who otherwise may not do the right thing. Amnesty is one of the few that does all three and on a large scale. It makes us a powerful force that can achieve widespread change.



Does this approach work?

So, this all sounds good in theory, but you might be wondering if this actually works. Amnesty has a proud history of winning many campaigns both large and small. From major global shifts in human rights law to lots of change at a local level. In this next section we're going to highlight a few of those wins for you.

GLOBAL WINS

Campaign to Stop Torture

Amnesty launches its first campaign against torture in 1972. 12 years later, the UN votes to combat torture worldwide with the Convention against Torture in 1984.



Campaign to abolish the Death Penalty

Amnesty launches its first campaign against the death penalty in 1980. When we started in 1961, only nine countries had abolished state executions. By 2018, that figure had risen to 106, with around two thirds of the world abolitionist in practice. The majority of the world's executions are now carried out by a handful of nations.

Campaign for an International Criminal Court

In 1993 Amnesty campaigns for an International Criminal Court (ICC) to bring those responsible for genocides and war crimes to justice. The ICC is finally established in 2002.



Campaign for an Arms Trade Treaty

After 20 years of pressure from Amnesty supporters, a life-saving global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) comes into force on 24 December 2014. It will help stop the flow of weapons fueling atrocities around the world.

INDIVIDUAL WINS



TANER RELEASED AFTER OVER A YEAR BEHIND BARS

In August 2018, Taner Kilic was released after more than a year behind bars. More than one million people from over 194 countries demanded Taner's freedom, including 20,000 Australians.



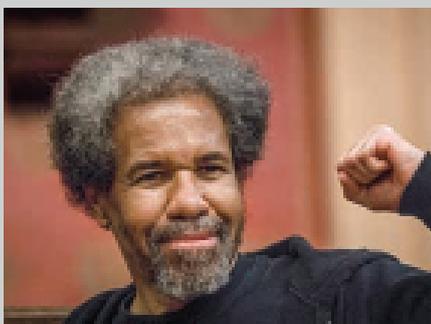
JUSTICE FOR TORTURE VICTIM JERRYME

Jerryme Corre spent years in prison after being tortured into confessing to a crime he didn't commit. Amnesty staff in the Philippines handed over a petition with 70,000 signatures to the Philippine National Police in 2015. In March 2016, a police officer was convicted of Jerryme's torture.



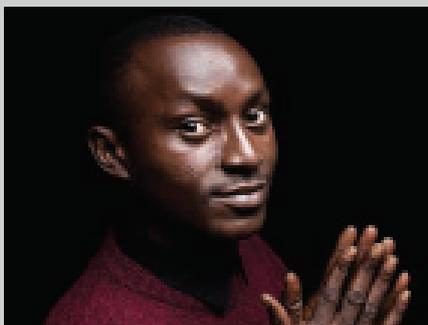
DIGNITY FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN NORWAY

2016 marked the end of Jeanette Solstad Remø's fight to be recognised as a woman, without compromising her dignity and human rights. Norway passed a new law giving transgender people access to legal gender recognition through a quick, accessible and transparent procedure. Thousands of people supported Jeanette's campaign, leading to a historic change that has done away with Norway's shameful legacy of invasive procedures.



ALBERT WOODFOX FINALLY FREE IN THE USA

Albert Woodfox spent over 43 years in solitary confinement - believed to be the longest anyone has survived in solitary in the USA. In W4R 2015 more than 240,000 action-takers called for Albert's release. Albert Woodfox was finally released in 2016!



MOSES' LIFE SPARED IN NIGERIA

After 10 years in jail and more than 800,000 messages from activists around the world, Moses Akatugba's life was spared in June 2015. Falsely accused of stealing three mobile phones, he was tortured and wrongfully sentenced to death when he was just 16.



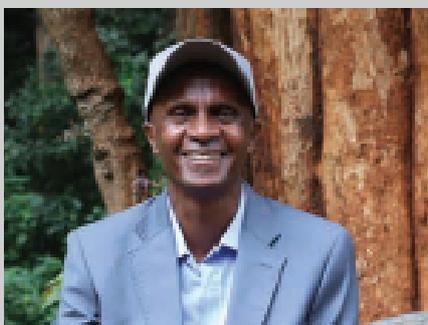
TEODORA DEL CARMEN VASQUEZ IS FINALLY FREE

Teodora was released from prison in El Salvador on 15 February 2018. Teodora suffered a stillbirth and was sentenced to 30 years for 'aggravated homicide' under strict anti-abortion laws. She spent over a decade behind bars. Amnesty International Australia supporters and activists took around 30,000 actions for Teodora in 2015.



DISABILITY RIGHTS PROTECTED IN KYRGYZSTAN

In March 2019 Kyrgyzstan ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2018 Amnesty supporters joined with Gulzar to call on the Kyrgyzstan Government to ratify the Convention.



JOURNALIST ESKINDER RELEASED IN ETHIOPIA

In 2011 Eskinder was arrested and sentenced to 18 years in prison. He was released as part of a presidential pardon in 2018. In 2013 activists all around the world took action to secure his release.

Amnesty supporters stand in solidarity with people facing human rights abuses, put pressure on the authorities to stop human rights abuses and help change people's lives for the better.

What's next?

Now that you have had a read through this guide here are some suggestions on what you can do next.

1. Check out our module on an [Introduction to Activism at Amnesty International](#). It goes into more details about what an activist does and how it works.
2. Go to our [Get Active](#) page and sign up to become an activist. If you want you can attend a webinar which will go through this information. It will give you an opportunity to speak with someone at Amnesty International as well as others interested in getting involved.
3. If you're not looking to become an activist there are some other options. You can [become a member](#) of Amnesty International and have a say in what we campaign on.
4. You can also [become a financial supporter](#) by giving a one off or regular donation.

We hope that this gives you a better understanding of what human rights are. Also how Amnesty International works to defend them. We invite you to learn more about how activism works at Amnesty through out next module. Together we can create a world where we advocate for and protect human rights.

If you have any questions you can get in touch with us at activism@amnesty.org.au. **Thank you for your time!**



Standing in solidarity with Taner Kilic, United Kingdom 2018 © Amnesty International