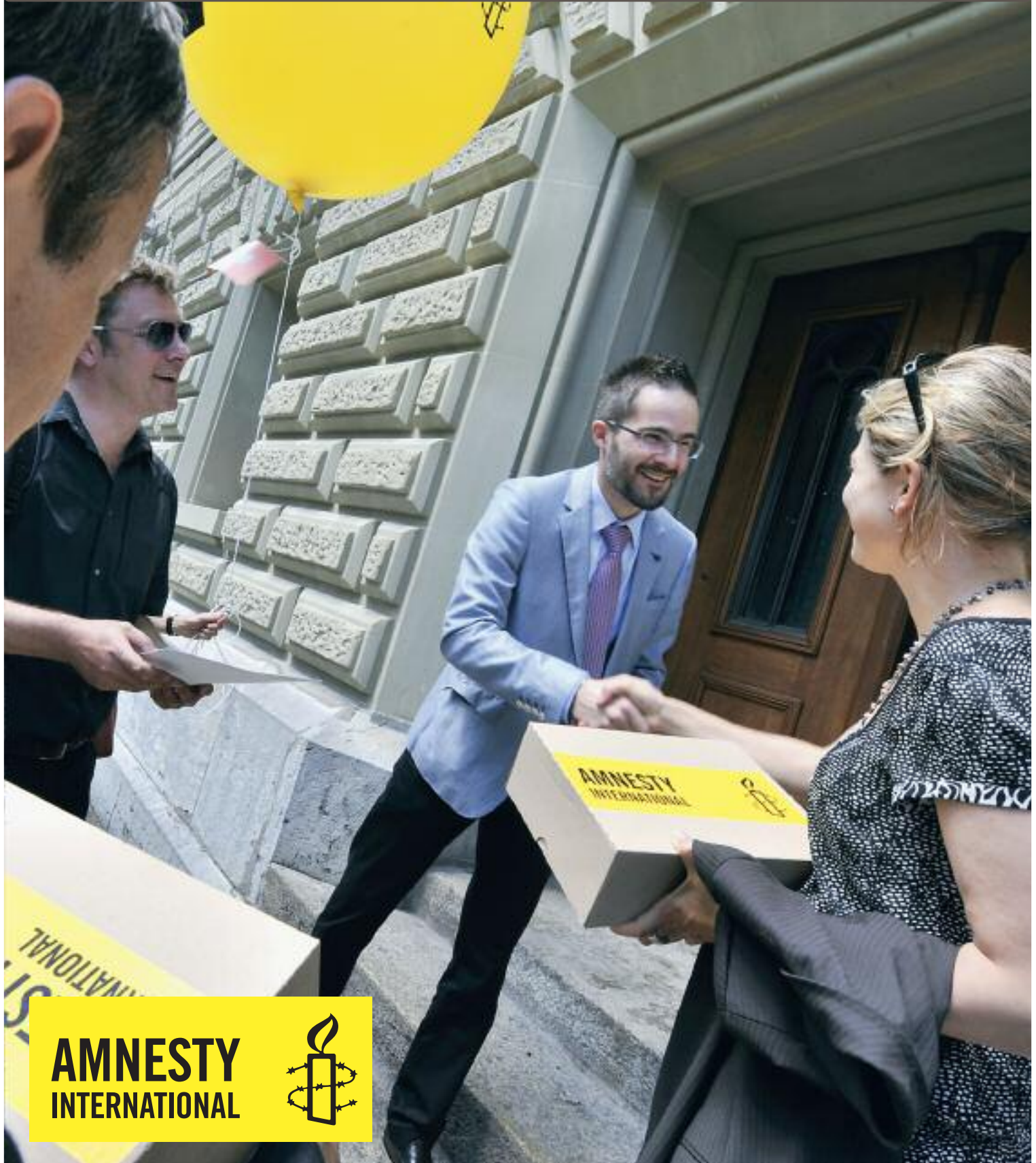


Influencing decision-makers

A guide to effective advocacy



AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL





Politicians operate in a unique environment, where public policy meets popularism, so any engagement needs to be strategic to be effective.

Louise Allen, government relations manager, Amnesty International Australia

This guide provides the essential tools and tips for engaging effectively with Australian political representatives.

A critical part of grassroots campaigning is communicating with decision-makers who can make change. Often, these people are our elected representatives and have the power to develop and reform policy through parliament.

Whether you're a newcomer to advocacy work or a seasoned lobbyist, this handy guide is your map of the political landscape, providing useful tips on how to prepare your advocacy work and what to expect.

Cover: Amnesty activists and staff hand over a petition calling for an Arms Trade Treaty to the Swiss Government. Berne, Switzerland, 27 June 2012. © Valérie Chételat

Left: Former comfort woman Gil Won Ok at Parliament House in Canberra as a butterfly is created above her head. © Brian Shin

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GETTING STARTED

We need to hear voices raising human rights issues everywhere – in the media, in parliament and in the community.

Effective advocacy skills are an important tool for communicating strategically with key decision-makers. Advocacy is not difficult but it does require preparation, research and good judgment. At times it can be challenging but it is also very rewarding when you help to instigate change. Like anything, practice makes perfect!

WHY LOCAL ADVOCACY MATTERS

While Amnesty International's government relations team is able to foster good relationships with MPs and Senators to promote a culture of human rights protection in Federal Parliament, we would like your help to foster local relationships. Amnesty International groups and supporters can make a really positive contribution to the local advocacy process.

Politicians often already know what Amnesty International thinks, but they don't know what you think. We strongly encourage our supporters, either individually or through local groups, to engage with their local politicians. It is important for politicians to know human rights are supported both in parliament and in the community.

WHO ARE POLITICIANS?

In Australia there are three tiers of government – local, state and federal. Politicians are people who are elected to represent their community in parliament, such as the Queensland Parliament or the Parliament of Australia.

Different levels of government have responsibility for different issues. For example, State Governments deal with hospitals, roads and schools. The Federal Government deals with issues such as foreign policy, immigration and trade.

The Federal Parliament deals with a lot of the issues Amnesty International campaigns on, such as refugees, international treaties and events in other countries.

Your Federal Member of Parliament (MP) can be found at www.aec.gov.au by simply typing in your postcode and locating your electorate. It doesn't matter if you didn't vote for them, or if you're a member of another party – they are your elected representative.

And don't forget about Senators – they represent a whole State or Territory but they still have strong ties to their local community and have equally strong voices in their political party rooms. Some Senators have ministerial responsibilities while the rest sit on a wide range of committees that inquire into legislation and other issues.

Senators can be lobbied if the issue has relevance to them. You can find your State or Territory's Senators at www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/index.htm

WHAT DO POLITICIANS DO?

MPs and Senators develop and reform government policy. They usually belong to political parties where they also help shape party policy. They raise issues of concern in the parliament and through the media.

If they are also a Minister they will have additional responsibilities for a specific portfolio (eg defence, immigration, health).

All MPs are elected officials, so they also spend time talking to their local community members and going to local events. It is their responsibility to meet with their constituents, listen to their concerns and raise them in parliament.

Politicians are always trying to get a good sense of public opinion in their electorate. They have a number of ways for tracking public opinion in their electorate, including polling. However, one of the most powerful and direct ways to provide feedback to a politician is to communicate with them yourself, through an email, a phone call or even better, a hand-written letter or face-to-face meeting.

Make sure you talk to the right person about the right issue.

It is no use talking to a state MP about a federal issue!

A vigil for Van Tuong Nguyen, created by artist Jorge Pujol. Parliament House, Canberra, 2005. © Bob Givens



ENGAGING WITH POLITICIANS

There are two main reasons to engage with a politician:

- They are a key decision-maker and can influence government policy.
- They are a representative of your community who can voice your concerns.

Parliamentarians play an important role in highlighting human rights abuses around the world and promoting international human rights standards in parliament. They can also be really good advocates within their party by speaking out about policies and legislation that concern their constituents.

HOW DO YOU ENGAGE A POLITICIAN?

The most effective way to engage a politician is to build an ongoing relationship with them. Building a relationship is important because the more the politician sees you as an active member of their community, the more they will listen to what you have to say.

A word of caution: No matter how you choose to interact with your local politicians, remember to always be polite – yes, always! Put yourself in their shoes – how would you react to certain language and tone? Would you respond positively if you received an abusive letter or phone call from someone you have never met?

Timing

Judging how and when to communicate is critical to maintaining an effective relationship. Experts talk about having ‘political capital’ and knowing how to build it up and when to use it – think of it like credits. Providing MPs with helpful information or inviting them to local events can build up your political capital. You can spend it when you ask the MP to do something for you, like supporting your campaign or hosting your event.

You definitely don’t want to waste your ‘political capital’ by asking a politician to meet when you don’t really have anything to meet about. If you can communicate something well in a letter, don’t ask for a meeting. Use your judgment to decide whether an event is appropriate for an MP to attend.

INFORMAL ADVOCACY

There are a number of ways to engage with your MP. Many of them are informal and can form part of your general involvement in the community. Here are a few ideas for engaging your MP in an informal way:

- Invite your MP/Senator to your events – film nights, trivia nights, rallies, stalls.
- Send a photo of your local event to your MP/Senator.
- Attend events hosted by your MP/Senator and introduce yourself as a member of the local Amnesty International group – eg local community events, fetes and sausage sizzles.

Introducing yourself

It is fine to introduce yourself at an event, providing you don’t interrupt something else they’re doing. Do not corner them at an event and then start talking heatedly for ages about your issue. Just introduce yourself, tell them who you are and what you do, and say you’d like to give their office a ring sometime. You can ask them for the appropriate person to contact.

TIP

Do not drop by their office regularly or unannounced. It will only irritate and may damage your relationship. Save your ‘political capital’ for something big or something you feel strongly about.

Amnesty International’s former parliamentary group co-convenor and government relations manager, delivering a petition calling on the release of political prisoners to the Burmese embassy, Canberra. © AI.





CALLING A POLITICIAN

MPs rely on communications with their office as one way of knowing the level of concern or support an issue has in their electorate. If they get no calls or correspondence, they assume it's not a big deal in their area. It only takes a few phone calls for them to notice new trends. All you need to do is leave a message.

It is really easy:

- Call the electorate office of your local MP (www.aph.gov.au/house/members/mi-alpha.asp) or Senator (www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/homepages/index.asp)
- State your name and where you're from and ask to leave a message for your local member.
- Give the context for why you are calling.
- Clearly state your message for the politician.
- Thank them for passing on the message and hang up.

Examples:

Good morning, My name is Irene Ambrarro and I live in Mount Patrick. I'm just calling to leave a message with Ms Goldie. I'm really concerned about the current rhetoric surrounding asylum seekers and refugees. Can you please let her know that I have called, that I want to see a more compassionate approach for asylum seekers coming to Australia and I would like Ms Goldie to pass on my message to her parliamentary colleagues? Thank you very much, I hope you have a lovely day.

Hi, I'm Chris Lee, a teacher from Allanwood, I heard a story on the radio this morning that really disturbed me. It said that most Australians don't care about human rights. I was just ringing as I wanted to let Mr Partridge know that I indeed really care about human rights and want Mr Partridge to care about human rights as well. Thanks.

A word of caution: Calling only works if the offices believe the calls are genuine – be careful not to call too often. If you have left a message, why not get your friends to leave a message as well? Or call your Senator if you have already called your local MP.

WRITING TO A POLITICIAN

Politicians receive many letters from industry groups and various organisations wanting their attention and asking them to do something. Who they really want to hear from is you – a local voter. When either emailing or writing, make it clear that you are a member of their electorate.

Politicians appreciate the fact that you have taken the time to personally write or email them to outline your views and concerns. To them it shows them that you think enough about a particular issue to let them know about it.

LETTER WRITING TIPS

Be professional and polite. Make sure you use their full and correct name and title. State who you are and the reason you are writing to them. Mention that you are a local Amnesty International supporter and a concerned local member of the public.

Be short and concise. Try to keep your letter to one or two pages. Tell them how you feel about a particular human rights issue and don't be afraid to recount some of your own experiences if you like. They will pay more attention to a personal letter than a form or template.

Ask for action. It's good practice to always include an action that you would like your MP to take – for example, raise your concerns with their parliamentary colleagues, speak out in favour of the issue you're writing to them about or support a particular piece of legislation.

Feedback from political offices tells us that a hand-written letter has more impact than an email or template letter.

MEETING WITH YOUR MP

Don't request a meeting with an MP unless you have a clear objective or request. Always contact your community organiser before you make contact with your MP's office so they can update you on any relevant developments and help you prepare.

Federal MPs generally have an office in the electorate and an office at parliament in Canberra. State MPs will have one or even two electorate offices.

PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING

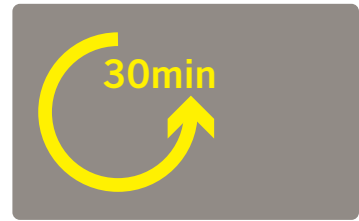
Know your purpose. You should have three key things you want to say and at least one key thing you want to ask for. Write them down – this will force you to really look at what you are saying and help you sharpen your messages.

Be prepared. Know the facts, hone your messaging, create a meeting plan, and prepare any materials. Give yourself plenty of time – remember, the meeting is your chance to have a positive influence on your MP.

Background preparation is important but don't expect to know everything. You just need enough information to be able to present your case clearly and factually.

Research your issue and your MP to help you build a strategy. This is important as it may provide an indication of where they stand on certain issues and help you to find common ground to start the conversation. It is always easier to talk about non-controversial issues first up.

- Start off with some internet research on the person you are meeting – go to the 'about' section of their webpage.
- Read their biography at www.aph.gov.au/house/members/mi-alpha.asp
- Try to get a picture of who they are, what issues they have spoken about recently, what they've been busy with, and what their background is.
- Read their first speech in parliament to see what matters to them (see www.aph.gov.au).
- Read their latest speeches and media releases.
- See if they have ever spoken about the issue you're campaigning on.
- Check out their party's position on your issue.



Don't forget to follow your MP on Facebook and Twitter.

Looking your MP in the eye and calmly explaining your point of view is an extremely powerful way to be a part of the political process in Australia.

**Tamara Lions, government relations advisor,
Amnesty International**



TIP

It is never appropriate to contact an MP's personal email or phone (unless they give it to you), or to visit their home. They are public figures but they are entitled to a personal life too.

Tapora Isorua (left), a lawyer and human rights activist and Sarah Garap, a women's rights activist from Papua New Guinea, visit New York to report to the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). © Tim Bell/AI



WRITING A MEETING REQUEST

Outline in a one-page email or letter what your issues of concern are and why you are requesting a meeting. Ask for an opportunity to discuss these issues further with your MP and suggest times that would be suitable for a meeting.

When considering a meeting time, keep in mind that politicians travel to Canberra when parliament is 'sitting' (ie in session). The rest of the time they will usually be back in their electorates. The parliamentary sitting schedule for 2012 is available at www.aph.gov.au/house/info/sittings/2012/index.htm.

Follow up your meeting request with a phone call a few days later. Sometimes this may take several phone calls. Ask if your letter arrived and try to develop a rapport with the office staff. Always be courteous and understanding of the time constraints on your local MP and staff.

Your MP may not be available for a meeting and may instead offer a meeting with a member of staff working on the issue. You should definitely go ahead with this meeting.

Be prepared for your meeting to be changed or cancelled at short notice and try not to be surprised or offended – it happens to everyone!

DURING THE MEETING

Know your issue. Be well-briefed on the key points. Quoting from Amnesty International material will add a certain credibility and legitimacy to your briefing.

Honesty is the best policy. If you're asked a question in the meeting that you do not know the answer to, simply say that you will get back to them on this issue in writing (and make sure you do).

Focus on facts. Base your views on facts and do not become too emotional. Try to anticipate your MP's questions and arguments so that you can have counter-arguments and facts ready. Be open to counter-argument but don't become hostile. If you are using Amnesty International's information, let your MP know that this is your source of information.

When speaking as a concerned member of your community you don't need to be an expert. For example, when speaking about the homelands campaign, you just need to know four simple facts:

- People living on homelands maintain a spiritual and economic connection to their land. They can engage in many economic activities such as art, eco-tourism, natural resource management and 'caring for country' programs.
- A health study by the Medical Journal of Australia found that despite the steady rise of obesity and diabetes amongst Aboriginal Peoples nationally, people living on the Utopia homelands were significantly healthier than other Aboriginal Peoples.
- Twenty-one 'growth towns' in the Northern Territory are currently set to receive resources, services and infrastructure. This policy leaves behind 500 traditional homelands and other smaller Aboriginal communities – about 30 per cent of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.
- With investment, homelands can remain vibrant and healthy communities.

Acknowledge the staff. An MP's staff can be your allies. They are the ones you will most likely speak with in the future, who will brief the MP on your issue and who will decide whether you have a next meeting.

In some cases, you may meet with the staff rather than the MP. Be friendly and positive from the moment you walk into the office. It is likely that a staff member will also sit in on your meeting with the MP.

Be realistic, persuasive and brief. Your aim is to make it easy for them to help with your issue. Be polite and keep to the point. You may have only 20 minutes so make the most of your time by being focused without appearing pushy. Acknowledge any help they have given to your issue in the past.

Be positive and professional. It is OK to smile and laugh. Do not get agitated or frustrated, even if the politician does not see your point of view. Be grateful for their time and courteous to all staff members.

EXAMPLE MEETING PLAN (30 MINS)

Make the most of your meeting with a politician and put together a meeting plan. This will help you clarify your purpose and keep you on message during the meeting.

Time	What to talk about
2 min	Introduce yourself: who you are, where you live, what you do, why you care about the issue and why you support Amnesty International.
2 min	Outline the purpose of the meeting. For example, to brief them on the homelands campaign and to communicate what the community has been saying.
5 min	Talk about your (and/or Amnesty International's) recent activities in the electorate.
5 min	Talk about what the local community has been saying. Ask them what their impressions of the electorate are on the particular issue you're discussing.
5 min	Tell the MP what you would like them to do (clearly and politely).
5 min	Ask them whether they are happy for Amnesty International to keep them/their advisors/staff updated on local activities. Ask if they would like to be invited to X event.
2 min	Thank them for their time. Thank their staff on the way out for helping to set up the meeting.

Remember, your meeting may not turn out like you planned. It may be cut short or you may not be able to say everything you wanted.

An Amnesty International volunteer delivers 17,500 signatures to the headquarters of Shell during Shell's annual shareholders meeting. The Hague, Netherlands, May 2010.
© Jorn van Eck/AI



AFTER THE MEETING

Follow up. Remember to try and build a relationship with your MP. Send a card or letter the next day to thank them for their time. Provide any material or answers you said you would address as a priority and remind them of any commitment they made in the meeting.

Lastly, provide **feedback** to Amnesty International on the outcome of the meeting. Feedback is very important as it paints a picture of how our campaigns are going. It helps us get the right messages out there and effectively target different communities.

Here are a few example questions you could ask your MP that give us great feedback:

- How much of a concern are asylum seekers for the electorate?
- What is the general perception of asylum seekers in the electorate?
- What is contributing to the perceptions that people have of asylum seekers? The media? Our campaign?
- Where is the concern coming from, which parts of the community?



TAKING A STRATEGIC APPROACH

It is best to approach an MP primarily as a concerned member of their electorate rather than a member of Amnesty International. You can mention that you are a member of Amnesty International but your voice as a member of their electorate is more important to them.

As a concerned member of the electorate you are:

- A person who may vote for the MP in the next election
- Someone the MP is elected to represent.
- Someone who the MP can relate to as living in the electorate.
- Someone who has friends in the electorate who may also share the same views.

USING AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IN YOUR ADVOCACY

Please keep Amnesty International's values in mind when lobbying on behalf of our members. It is important to keep in mind the purpose for which the organisation was founded, the values and principles that sustain it and the approach that has earned it a unique place in the world of human rights protection.

Amnesty International's values

- Our vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- In pursuit of this vision, we undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of these rights
- We are a diverse and democratic movement of people who share fundamental global values – dignity, freedom, justice, equality and a fair go for all.
- We highlight human rights abuses and create change by inspiring people around the world to take action.
- We call on governments and other decision-makers to protect and respect human rights.
- We are an independent, impartial and non-partisan organisation. We do not take a view as to which party should govern. Our responsibility is to hold the government of the day accountable for Australia's international human rights obligations.
- We work for and with individuals – to give voice, to stand alongside and to secure fundamental human rights for all.
- We work collaboratively and in partnership with others to achieve shared human rights outcomes.

A word of caution about submissions

In the past there has been confusion when multiple submissions have been received by parliamentary inquiries all claiming to be on behalf of Amnesty International.

It is very important that local groups or supporters who want to contribute to these processes make submissions as individuals or as Amnesty International supporters rather than as Amnesty International.

Parliamentarians raising a toast to freedom for Amnesty International's 50th anniversary in May 2011 at Parliament House in Canberra.
© Andrew Taylor/AI



COMMUNICATING YOUR SUCCESS

If you engage locally with a politician we would love to know about it. Please let your community organiser know how it went.

NSW Action Centre

Level 1, 79 Myrtle Street Chippendale NSW 2008
Telephone: (02) 8396 7670
Fax: (02) 8396 7677
Email: nswaia@amnesty.org.au

ACT/Sth NSW Action Centre

Lower Ground Floor, 33–35 Ainslie Place Canberra City ACT 2600
Telephone: (02) 6202 7500
Fax: (02) 6202 7508
Email: actaia@amnesty.org.au

QLD/Nth NSW Action Centre

Level 1, 354 Brunswick Street Fortitude Valley QLD 4006
Telephone: (07) 3136 6400
Fax: (07) 3216 0235
Email: qldaia@amnesty.org.au

SA/NT Action Centre

Ground Floor, 14 Grote Street Adelaide SA 5000
Telephone: (08) 8110 8100
Fax: (08) 8110 8101
Email: sant@amnesty.org.au

TAS Action Centre

First Floor, 130 Macquarie Street Hobart TAS 7000
Telephone: (03) 6221 1000
Email: tasaia@amnesty.org.au

VIC Action Centre

Suite 8, 134 Cambridge Street Collingwood VIC 3066
Telephone: (03) 9412 0700
Fax: (03) 9412 0720
Email: vicaia@amnesty.org.au

WA Action Centre

Suite 70, City West Centre Plaistowe Mews West Perth WA 6005
Telephone: (08) 9476 4800
Fax: (08) 9476 4801
Email: waaia@amnesty.org.au



Former National President Nicole Bieske (right) presents Human Rights Parliamentary Committee member Mary Kostakidis with 10,000 submissions to the committee calling for a Human Rights Act.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Here are some helpful online resources to use in your advocacy work:

List of Members of Parliament

www.aph.gov.au/house/members/index.htm

List of Senators

www.aph.gov.au/committee/committees_type.htm#joint

List of Parliamentary Committees

www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/index.htm

Parliamentary Sitting Schedule

www.aph.gov.au/house/info/sittings/2012/index.htm

Australian Electoral Commission

www.aec.gov.au

Open Australia

www.openaustralia.org

Amnesty International Australia has a government relations team located in Sydney and Canberra. Some of the team's work includes:

- Liaising with Ministers, advisers, Members of Parliament, Senators and committees.
- Liaising with public servants and other decision-makers.
- Participating in policy round tables.
- Writing submissions to UN review processes.
- Writing submissions to parliamentary inquiries.

Please contact your local community organiser if you have any queries – they can put you in touch with our government relations team if necessary.



