



**CHALLENGE  
INJUSTICE.**



**This is a critical moment. Human rights defenders are not only being surveilled, harassed, tortured and threatened with murder for exposing the truth – but their children have become the target. With your help we can protect them.**

**PLEASE HELP SUPPORT OUR GLOBAL EMERGENCY FUND  
WITH A TAX-TIME DONATION TODAY.**

I'm writing to you from my desk at the Amnesty International offices. At the end of a busy day I often think what a privilege it is to lead this incredible organisation, and how fortunate I am to be able to challenge injustice without fearing for my life.

My colleagues and human rights defenders in countries like Belarus, Hungary, Poland or Myanmar are not so lucky. Unlike you and I who can go about our work without fear for the safety of our families, sleepless nights and long, anxious days looking over their shoulder are part and parcel of their jobs.

Human rights defenders are facing an onslaught of harassment, intimidation, smear campaigns, unlawful detention, and torture and ill-treatment in custody. They're even being killed, just for courageously standing up for what is right.

**Can you imagine being attacked for just going about your work? How would you feel if upholding your values put your children in harm's way?**

Your support of Amnesty International tells me that you believe that brave voices should never be silenced, that the relentless assaults on human rights defenders and their children need to end.

**When human rights defenders and their children are in danger, we need you to help. Please make an urgent tax-time donation today to ensure that together, we can respond rapidly when people are in danger.**

There's been an alarming rise in attacks against human rights



defenders in recent years. It bears repeating that **at least 331 human rights defenders promoting social, environmental, racial and gender justice in 25 countries were murdered in 2020.**

This is a continuation of what has become a very open and aggressive attack on civil society around the world, as well as an attack on anyone who challenges governments or businesses with vested interests.

With leaders around the globe pushing agendas based on a narrative of blame, hate and fear, it is critical we give these courageous human rights defenders all the support they need right now to continue to expose the truth and protect their communities.

Fortunately, Amnesty International has the resources to provide life-saving action for defenders and their families. It's called the **Global Emergency Fund**, a special pool of funds that Amnesty holds in reserve which is critical to our crisis response.

The fund provides essential interventions such as sending lawyers to defend the falsely accused and imprisoned, providing security grants for defenders in urgent danger, and temporarily relocating those targeted by authoritarian leaders.

**Offering protection to human rights defenders who take on injustice is, in some instances, a matter of life and death. But with the growing need around the world, the fund that shields these brave people is under strain, and we urgently need your help.**

**Your kind donation could help Amnesty International provide life-saving interventions to protect human rights defenders on the frontline.**

In the highly politicised environments where defenders often live and work, authorities have for a long time employed oppressive tactics which make human rights work riskier and more difficult.

From laws that authorise force against peaceful protesters or allow for mass surveillance, to bans on access to foreign funding or the imposition of stringent requirements to register organisations, the space to stand up for human rights is purposefully being tightened.

Meanwhile, human rights defenders are being labelled as criminals and undesirables, even being called "foreign agents" and "terrorists". They are painted as a threat to security, development or traditional values.

Those who dare to make a stand for human rights are coming under attack in more and more places, and I can now reveal that authorities are going one step further.

We have concrete evidence that family members, particularly children, are being targeted as a way to indirectly intimidate defenders, forcing them to choose between continuing their important human rights work and keeping their loved ones safe.

Right now in Belarus, authorities are resorting to threats, harassment and prosecution of children in an increasingly desperate attempt to suppress dissent.

Mass protests and demonstrations have continued since last August's disputed presidential election returned Alexander Lukashenko to power. During this time we've witnessed a continued pattern of police brutality and impunity, with excessive use of force against protesters and repression of journalists in the country.

Over 27,000 people have been detained for taking part in peaceful demonstrations and an increasing

number of peaceful protestors are being heavily fined, criminally prosecuted and, too often, sentenced to years in prison.

**But now this sinister crackdown on all dissent is impacting innocent children. They're in danger and it must stop.**

According to Aisha Jung, one of our senior campaigners on Belarus, some **children are facing years in prison** for being at a protest, while others have been **beaten by police** or live in fear that their parents will be imprisoned. She also revealed to me that **children as young as eight have been openly threatened** by school staff for participating in the protests.

*"One of the most insidious forms of harassment and intimidation is the threat to remove children from families and place them in state care – effectively making them hostages of the government,"* Aisha told me.

Can you believe that children are being targeted by police because of their beliefs, or those of their parents? It's truly shocking, and it demonstrates a blatant disregard for human rights.

Children's rights should be respected and protected. Instead, their vulnerability is being exploited by the government in its ruthless pursuit of power.

I have enclosed a case report about a 16-year-old who was targeted after a protest in Minsk that he didn't even attend. It's distressing reading, but I want to show you the extreme lengths the Belarussian authorities will go to in order to crush freedom of expression.

**It's critical that the Global Emergency Fund has enough reserves to respond when defenders or their family members are facing life-threatening circumstances. Please make a tax-deductible donation by June 30 so we can offer these courageous people legal aid, advocacy and protection when it's needed.**

When authorities begin to attack young children because of their parents' activism, it's clear that the assault on human rights defenders has reached a crisis point. And with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic adding its own complex challenges to the work of human rights campaigners, it's imperative that we act now to help.

Together we must do everything we can to protect human rights defenders and their families, so they can continue their vital work exposing human rights abuses without fear of retribution.

Your support of the Global Emergency Fund enables rapid responses to clear and present danger: legal support where required, rescue to safety when lives are on the line, and medical care for people who have been tortured and ill-treated.

With your generous contribution today we can also increase our capacity to respond to any need that may arise tomorrow. You can invest in long-term interventions such as:

- Training that strengthens the knowledge, skills and abilities of human rights defenders, including on how to protect their rights and manage their security.
- Practical support towards capacity building, for example by assisting individuals to travel to important human rights events, workshops or conferences.
- Ensuring women defenders receive the specific protection they need against gender-based threats and violence they may face due to their work.
- Demanding those in power take immediate action to ensure that human rights defenders are

recognised, protected and equipped to conduct their work without fear of attack.

Human rights defenders come from all walks of life. They're students, community leaders, journalists, lawyers, victims of abuses and their families, nurses, teachers and farmers. They're mothers, fathers, sons and daughters – ordinary people who fight to protect themselves and their communities.

As someone who is equally committed to challenging injustice, this is your opportunity to do what it takes so that these brave people will not have to continue to risk their lives.

Please help defend the defenders today and make fundamental human rights a reality for all of us.

Yours in solidarity,

Sam Klintworth  
Amnesty International Australia

**P.S. No child should be persecuted because of their parents' belief in human rights. You can help ensure human rights defenders and their families have access to emergency support to protect them from danger. Please make a generous donation today.**



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