

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



PAING PHYO MIN, MYANMAR

**LOCKED UP
FOR A POETRY
SLAM**

HUMAN RIGHTS INTRODUCTION

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

Amnesty International's "Write for Rights" campaign takes place annually around 10 December, which is Human Rights Day (commemorating the day when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948). Write for Rights aims to bring about change to the lives of people or communities that have suffered or are at risk of human rights violations. Among the many actions that take place as part of Write for Rights, Amnesty raises cases of individuals, groups and communities with decision-makers who can change the situation, gives visibility to those cases by organizing public actions, and brings international attention through media and internet exposure.

A major part of the Write for Rights campaign consists of a letter-writing marathon and involves millions of people around the globe. As a result of the international call to action, decision-makers are bombarded with letters. This year's cases cover people imprisoned for defending their rights and expressing their opinions, LGBTI activists targeted

for who they are, peaceful protestors beaten and shot at and environmental defenders harassed and intimidated or other human rights violations. They will receive messages of solidarity from thousands of people in far-off corners of the globe. Those suffering the violations and their families know that their cases are being brought to public attention. They know that they are not forgotten.

The results of similar campaigns in previous years have been striking. Individuals affected by the violations report the difference that these letters make, they express their gratitude to those who have written, and they often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people are concerned about their case.

Often there is a noticeable change by officials towards these individuals: charges are dropped, treatment becomes less harsh, and laws or regulations addressing the problem are introduced.

Read about the people we're fighting for:
www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

Contact the Amnesty team in your country:
www.amnesty.org/countries

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R20

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family group, an activist group, online or offline. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the needs and context of the group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity and any limitations. When participants take action on a case, discuss with them whether it is safe for them to do so – why or why not?

The activities are all based on participatory learning methods in which learners are not merely presented with information, they

explore, discuss, analyze and question issues relating to the cases. This methodology is very important for the wider learning objectives because participants will:

- **develop** key competences and skills
- **have the opportunity** to form their own opinions, raise questions, and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented.
- **take control** of their learning, and shapes discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns.
- **have the space** required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes



Students and school teachers in Taiwan organized letter writing events with Amnesty International for the Write for Rights campaign 2019.
© Amnesty International Taiwan

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start. This can be found at www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/

Amnesty International offers further human rights education courses on different human rights issues through **the Amnesty Academy**, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights Campaign**: <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn>

SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE 2019 CAMPAIGN

**HOW YOUR WORDS
HAVE CHANGED LIVES**

**JAIL SENTENCE
REDUCED IN IRAN**

In 2019, Yasaman Aryani was sentenced to 16 years in prison for handing out flowers to train passengers while unveiled. In February 2020, her sentence was substantially reduced, thanks in part to the more than 1.2 million messages written worldwide for her freedom. We won't stop until she's free.



**“We are joining hands around
the world to combat all the
injustice.”**

Crystal Swain of Grassy Narrows



**HEALTHCARE WIN FOR GRASSY
NARROWS, CANADA**

For decades, the Grassy Narrows Indigenous community have been suffering the effects of mercury poisoning in one of Canada's worst health crises. The youth of Grassy Narrows have been particularly affected, and have been at the forefront of the fight for a healthy future for their community. *After years of delay, a \$19.5 million (CDN) agreement to build a care facility was finally signed on 2 April 2020 – a victory for the people of Grassy Narrows.*

**DEATH SENTENCE REVOKED
IN SOUTH SUDAN**

Magai Matiop Ngong was only 15 when he was sentenced to death. But thanks to the amazing support of people like you, his death sentence was cancelled in July 2020. People around the world took an incredible 765,000 actions, including letters and tweets, calling for Magai's life to be spared – and it worked.

**“Thank you so much.
I have no words.
You have no idea
how my heart is filled
with happiness.”**

Magai Matiop Ngong



HUMAN RIGHTS INTRODUCTION

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments or state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries that can be met only when practicalities allow.



Members of Amnesty International Togo joining in the Write for Rights campaign, 2019. Every year they mobilize people throughout the country to take part.

© Amnesty International Togo



HUMAN RIGHTS INTRODUCTION

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed that they are bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that they will abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up on the basis of its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

HUMAN RIGHTS INTRODUCTION

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



CIVIL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES

Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.

Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights

Article 2 Non-discrimination

Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person

Article 4 Freedom from slavery

Article 5 Freedom from torture



LEGAL RIGHTS

Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.

Article 6 All are protected by the law

Article 7 All are equal before the law

Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated

Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile

Article 10 Right to a fair trial

Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty

Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection



SOCIAL RIGHTS

Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.

Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life

Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders

Article 16 Right to marry and start a family

Article 24 Right to rest and leisure

Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education



ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.

Article 15 Right to a nationality

Article 17 Right to own property and possessions

Article 22 Right to social security

Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union

Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being



POLITICAL RIGHTS

Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion

Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)

Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information

Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way

Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country



CULTURAL RIGHTS, SOLIDARITY RIGHTS

Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life

Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized

Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others

Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!

ACTIVITY

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

FOLLOW COVID-19 MEASURES

Be sure to comply with public health advice in your area during the Covid-19 Pandemic and conduct your activity ensuring safety and any physical distance measures in place.

If you are doing the activity online:

- **Choose** a platform that provides participation and interaction while being secure.
- **Adapt** the activity to allow for relevant reflections and debriefing (in small groups)
- **Provide** technical support for participants to allow for good participation.

In light of Covid-19 and the various digital spaces in which schools and other groups now have to come together to continue their normal activities, Amnesty is developing additional material to support the delivery of these activities online. Check the **Write for Rights** webpage www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

KEY CONCEPTS

- Freedom of expression
- Right to liberty

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

The first part of the activity examines the right to freedom of expression (see pages 9-10) using a real case of an artist and student who has been targeted for performing satire. In the second part of the activity, participants create their own poems or images to convey a message of solidarity.

TIME NEEDED:
60 minutes

AGE: 14+

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Participants have examined the concept of freedom of expression and its importance, and connect it to their own lives.
- Participants build empathy for those whose right to freedom of expression has been violated.
- Participants know about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign and prepare to write a letter in support of Paing Phyo Min.

PREPARATION AND RESOURCES

- Copies of Paing Phyo Min's case cards for each participant page 11
- Paper and pencils
- Copies of the page of quotes for each participant page 10

INTRODUCTION:

1 EXPRESSING OUR IDEAS

 10 MINUTES

Welcome participants and ask them to share

- **What are some of the art forms that young people use to express themselves in their country?**
- **What are some of the ways that they like to express their ideas?**

Hand out the sheet of quotes on page 10 to everyone. Tell them that all these quotes are from one person (Paing Phyo Min, an artist and student from Myanmar, that uses Thangyat as a form of expressing their ideas but do not tell them anything more about the person! Explain what Thangyat is.

Ask participants to discuss with a partner the following questions:

- **What did you learn about the author of these quotes? What happened to this person?**
- **Which of the quotes resonate strongly with you? Why?**

Bring the participants back together and ask a few to feedback briefly to the others on their discussions.

THANGYAT

Akin to slam poetry, Thangyat is a century-old Myanmar traditional art form which fuses poetry, comedy, dance and music, and is usually performed during Myanmar's New Year water festival in April and other festive occasions.

2 EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Ask participants to share what they understand by “freedom of expression”.

Explore a little more with the following questions:

- Should there be any limits to what people can say?
- If you were the government, how would you decide what should be allowed to be said, and what should not be allowed?
- Does it make a difference who you’re criticizing? Why or why not?
- What do you think about criticizing the government itself?

Give them some information on the right to freedom of expression using the background information on page 9.

3 PAING PHYO MIN’S STORY

Hand out the case card for Paing Phyto Min and give participants a few minutes to read it through. Explain that Paing Phyto Min is one of the cases Amnesty International has included within the **Write for Rights** campaign. Provide some information on the campaign if people are not familiar with it (see page 2).

Explain that in countries all over the world there are governments who control what a person can or cannot say or express: they are limiting the right to freedom of expression for people living in their country.

Split participants into pairs and ask them to discuss the following questions:

- What surprises you most about Paing Phyto Min’s case?
- What human rights violations is Paing Phyto Min subject to?
- What impact does government censorship, and other violations of the right to freedom of expression, have on people? How does it change society?

All together, ask participants to share responses from their discussion and highlight that Paing Phyto Min’s right to liberty has been violated, along with his right to freedom of expression.

 15 MINUTES

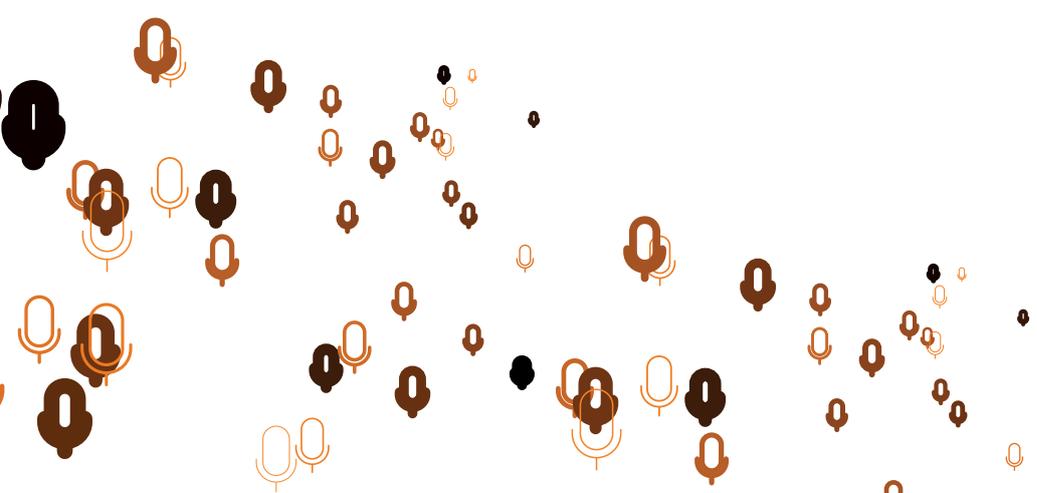
If you have access, watch a 3 minute YouTube video explaining the right to freedom of expression here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=711bdA9XLqQ>

To learn more about Freedom Expression check out the Amnesty Academy’s online courses <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course-external/view/elearning/100/speaking-out-for-freedom-of-expression>

 10 MINUTES

If you have time you can share the 5 min introductory video on Write for Rights link <https://youtu.be/Tm8tzokmAik>

If you have time you may want to share the 1 min video about Paing Phyto Min <https://www.amnesty.org/en/w4r-videos/>



4 SUPPORT FOR PAING PHYO MIN – BE CREATIVE

🕒 15 MINUTES

Explain to participants that messages from supporters around the world will give Paing Phyo Min and his fellow Peacock Generation members strength while they are still in prison. Tell them that in the next part of the activity, they shall be composing some messages of support to let him know that there are people who care about him, fighting for his liberty. These messages will be helpful as he has said that he gets lonely at times being in a small walled cell.

Brainstorm for a few minutes with the whole group some of the things they would like to say to Paing Phyo Min. Encourage them to think about the kind of thing someone like Paing Phyo Min might like to hear. You can prompt with some of the following questions:

- What would make him feel stronger?
- What would make him feel that he didn't do anything wrong?
- How has his case inspired you?

Encourage participants to be creative and share their belief in freedom of expression through a poem, verse or message. Give participants time to create their poems, verses or messages. Allow them to work in groups or pairs, but remind them that it would be nice to send as many messages as possible! Allow plenty of time for the creative work.

Organize to send Paing Phyo Min the poems and messages of solidarity, friendship and hope to help lift his spirits in prison. They can be sent to:

President of the Students' Union

Dagon University Students' Union Office Theater (1), Cherry Street
Dagon University, North Dagon Township, Yangon
Republic of the Union of Myanmar 11422

Some examples of solidarity messages can be "Stay strong!", "You are not alone", "I/we stand with you and your colleagues", "I am/we are thinking of you and your colleagues", "Your work has inspired me/us, and I/we will keep fighting for human rights".

5 WRITE A LETTER – SAVE A LIFE

🕒 10 MINUTES

If you have time you can share the 5 min introductory video on Write for Rights on the **Amnesty Academy** website <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide>

Share some of the success stories from previous Write for Rights campaigns and explain that Amnesty is encouraging people to demand justice for Paing Phyo Min:

- Encourage them to write to Myanmar's State Counsellor at the following address:

Participants can use the template letters in the letter writing toolkit which you can download on the Write for Rights web page at <https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights>. Or you can give them the following guidelines to write a more personal letter:

H.E. Aung San Suu Kyi

State Counsellor
Ministry of the State Counsellor Office
Office No. 20,
Nay Pyi Taw
Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Twitter: @MyanmarSC
Salutation: Your Excellency

Tell the state counsellor something to make this a personal letter:

- Tell her something about yourself
- Tell her what shocks you about the case of Paing Phyo Min
- Tell her why you think it is important governments respect the right to freedom of expression
- Tell her to immediately release Paing Phyo Min and other members of the Peacock Generation.
- Ask that her government repeals or amends all repressive laws that violate the right to freedom of expression.

If there isn't enough time for participants to do this immediately, they can plan to do so afterwards or in a follow up activity.



INFORMATION ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

ARTICLE 19, UDHR

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) protects the right to freedom of expression. Freedom of expression guarantees your right to hold your own opinions and to express them freely, without government interference. This includes the right to express views through public protests or through written materials, media broadcasts, the internet and works of art. This right is regarded as a very important feature in any society. We need a free flow of ideas in order to ensure that different opinions are taken into account and different ideas are aired. Limiting the right to freedom of expression also undermines transparency and accountability, and makes the fight for human rights even more difficult.

Freedom of expression is important not just to society as a whole, but also to the individual. Our opinions and thoughts are a fundamental part of what makes us human, and stopping people from expressing these is equivalent to cutting off a part of their personality!

The human rights treaties which expand the rights in the UDHR allow for the right to freedom of expression to be restricted only in some very specific cases. Most countries, for example, have laws against racist or other discriminatory speech. However, limits to the right to freedom of expression are only permitted where these are necessary for the protection of the rights of other people or groups of people, or to protect national security, public order or public health and morals. The Peacock Generation’s satirical poetry (Thangyat) cannot be said to fall in any of these categories.

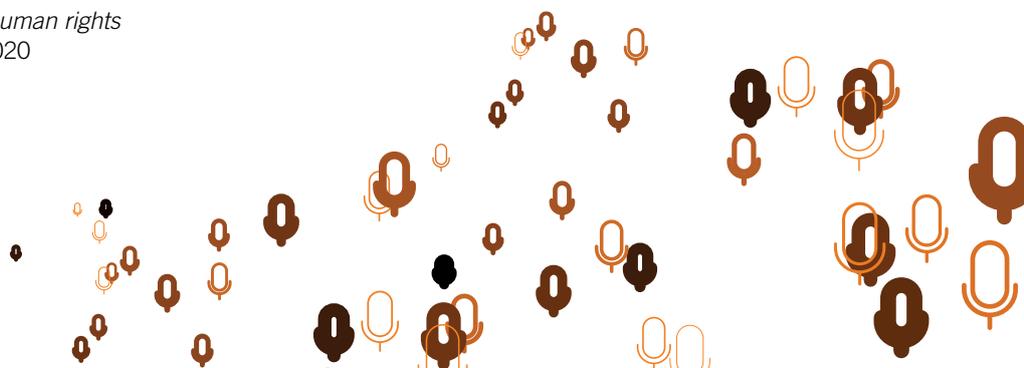
AMNESTY REPORT

For further information on the **Peacock Generation** read: *“I will not surrender”: The criminalization of human rights defenders and activists in Myanmar – April 2020*
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/2041/2020/en/>



Paing Phyo Min is in prison for “incitement” after performing Thangyat, a Myanmar traditional art form, with lyrics that poked fun at the authorities.

© Private



SPEAKING OUR MINDS AS YOUNG PEOPLE

EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

“I just want to say that it’s unjust to prosecute and imprison Myanmar people for performing a Myanmar cultural activity, Thangyat. It is a symbol of Myanmar culture – not a crime.”

“I feel like Thangyat is a symbol of Myanmar democracy. We can express what we want and convey what the public want through this art form. Attacks against this activity are an attempt to steer away from the democratic path that the country is embarking on.”

“We have been performing Thangyat every year since 2013. We have been directly communicating with the public, expressing their needs and what is wrong in our society in the last year, including criticisms of the government. But in 2019, the military targeted us. They are undermining Myanmar’s democratic transition.”

“We may be imprisoned, but we will not be deterred from speaking our minds as young people with love for our democracy and culture.”

“It is boring being in a small walled space all the time. But I take comfort in the fact that I said and did the right thing. I didn’t do anything wrong. I have to constantly remind myself of that. It’s like I battle with my own mind almost every night, so to speak.”

“Apart from politics, I am interested in music. If I wasn’t involved in political activism, I think I would have been making music. That’s what I have always wanted to do since I was young. Otherwise, I love painting. My father used to draw. It’s in my blood. I am happy when I am doing something art-related, either writing or reciting poetry, painting, or singing and playing a musical instrument.”

“My favourite artist is Htoo Ein Thein [a Myanmar singer-songwriter]. For painting, my favourite is my first mentor and influence, my father. He drew cartoons when I was growing up and I am familiar with his work.”



PAING PHYO MIN, MYANMAR

Paing Phyto Min (aka De Yay) loves singing, playing the guitar and Taylor Swift. The 22-year-old student leader is also a member of the Peacock Generation, a poetry troupe dedicated to “Thangyat”, a traditional version of slam poetry. Fusing verse with comedy and music, Thangyat is usually performed in April during Myanmar’s New Year Water Festival.

In April and May 2019, Paing Phyto Min and other Peacock Generation members were arrested after performing Thangyat dressed as soldiers. They made fun of the military, saying it couldn’t take criticism, was desperate to hang on to power, and was bankrupting the country while its generals accumulated wealth.

Paing Phyto Min was convicted and sentenced to six years in prison simply for exercising his right to freedom of expression. The charges against him include “incitement”, that is, encouraging military officers to abandon their duties; and “online defamation” for sharing photographs and videos of their performances online. A shared image of a dog in military uniform seemed particularly upsetting to the authorities.

“We have been performing Thangyat every year since 2013,” says Paing Phyto Min. “We have been directly communicating with the public, expressing... what is wrong in our society... including criticisms of the government. But in 2019, the military targeted us. They are undermining Myanmar’s democratic transition.”



Top: A family photo showing Paing Phyto Min with his parents; Bottom: Paing Phyto Min before his arrest, 2019.

“We may be imprisoned, but we will not be deterred from speaking our minds.”

Paing Phyto Min



ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who take injustice personally. We are campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice. Change oppressive laws... And free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

www.amnesty.org

Peter Benenson House
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom

e: contactus@amnesty.org
t: +44-20-74135500
f: +44-20-79561157

December 2020
Index: POL 32/2886/2020 English

All images © Amnesty International unless otherwise stated.

Cover photograph: © Private
Script development: © David Hunter

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL** 