

PRISONER DOSSIER

General Instructions

Amnesty International

This prisoner dossier is a record of a human being deprived of fundamental rights. It suggests the action you might take to help to restore these rights.

This dossier must be protected at all times. You should be careful not to misplace it or jeopardize those people whose names are mentioned.

Read the enclosed materials before starting work and become thoroughly familiar with the *Amnesty International Handbook*. Some of the ideas for activities on behalf of prisoners that are given in the handbook are summarized below for your use, but these suggestions cover only some of the possibilities and you should use your own initiative to develop further ideas.

PLEASE NOTE:

Before acting on any of these General Instructions you are advised to study carefully the Recommended Case Action sheet enclosed in the prisoner dossier. Instructions contained on that sheet are to be strictly followed. If any actions suggested in these General Instructions are specifically prohibited by the Recommended Case Action sheet, you should under no circumstances undertake them.

1. SECURITY

This prisoner dossier is a sensitive document. Human beings may be placed at risk if the information is not handled responsibly. Amnesty International is an organization whose membership is entrusted with extremely confidential material and expected to treat all such information with discretion. Each group is advised to observe the following rules:

- a) please keep all information about prisoner cases in a secure place such as a locked filing cabinet;
- b) if any prisoner dossier or its contents is lost or stolen, *immediately* inform both your section's headquarters and the International Secretariat's Campaign and Membership Department. Please explain in detail the circumstances under which the information was lost or stolen and the steps taken to retrieve it;
- c) please do not give any prisoner dossier to anyone who is not a member of the adoption group. Only the parts clearly marked "external" may be photocopied for outsiders. Unless there are instructions to the contrary, factual information about the prisoner and the nature of Amnesty International's concern may be treated as "external";
- d) special care should be taken with "confidential" information, which should never be revealed to anyone who is not a member of the group. Normally such information should be written on the special sheet in the prisoner dossier intended for this purpose;
- e) please take care when working with and giving information to or receiving it from political refugees or exile organizations. Their help can sometimes assist your work, but such groups can be infiltrated by hostile intelligence agents. Do not adopt their suggestions for action without prior consultation with the relevant coordinator or IS researcher. It should be remembered that such people often have aims that are quite different from those of Amnesty International.

2. STATUS OF YOUR CASE

The dossier on your case will indicate into which of the two categories of Amnesty International case it falls: *adoption* or *investigation*. Although the recommended actions for these two categories differ, in both instances Amnesty International believes that an individual's human rights are likely to have been violated. *It is important that you work equally hard on both categories of case to bring Amnesty International's concerns to the attention of the government involved.*

a) *Adoption*

Amnesty International *adopts* individuals who have been imprisoned, detained or otherwise physically restricted when, on the basis of evidence collected, it concludes that they are men and women detained because of their political, religious or other conscientiously-held beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour or language, provided they have not used or advocated violence. The reasons for adoption by Amnesty International are included in the case sheet. Since a prisoner of conscience is held in violation of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Amnesty International works for the prisoners' immediate and unconditional release.

b) *Investigation*

There are several sorts of *investigation* case. Amnesty International investigates the following cases:

- a) people who are probably prisoners of conscience but where the organization lacks conclusive information;
- b) political prisoners (who may not be eligible for adoption) who the organization believes to have been detained for long periods without trial or sentenced after trials whose procedures did not meet internationally recognized standards (see Article 1(b) of the Statute of Amnesty International);
- c) individuals who have "disappeared" under circumstances suggesting that they may have been taken into custody by government officials for political reasons and may face continued, unacknowledged detention, torture and even death.

With respect to the last two categories, the purpose of the investigation is not to establish whether the person concerned is a prisoner of conscience; it is, therefore, most unlikely that the status of the case will be changed to adoption. As regards the first category, information obtained later may determine whether adoption is possible. In many instances, however, it may prove impossible to obtain conclusive information. This may be because, for example, governments fail to respond to letters or are deliberately secretive about human rights violations, and seeking information from other sources would put indivi-

duals at risk. The main purpose of continued activity on such cases is to continue to signal to the government concerned that the international community is aware of alleged human rights violations in connection with the case and is monitoring the latter. Unceasing activity on behalf of such cases can, therefore, still be important whether or not further information is elicited from the government or other sources.

The prisoner dossier should in each investigation case explain why Amnesty International is concerned and why the case is being investigated.

In their inquiries to governments, in other correspondence and in their publicity (where this is recommended), groups should make it clear that the case is being investigated by Amnesty International. They must not say that the prisoner is a prisoner of conscience nor call for his or her immediate and unconditional release. Each case dossier will contain clear recommendations.

If information is obtained to the effect that a prisoner under investigation is, in fact, a prisoner of conscience, the International Secretariat will make the case an adoption case. The decision is made on the basis of all available information about the case in the context of the country's political and legal situation. Responsibility for the decision rests with the International Secretariat. In another type of situation, where there is information suggesting that further Amnesty International action on a particular case would not be appropriate, the case is closed by the International Secretariat.

c) *Group Adoption or Investigation*

Although both adoption and investigation case dossiers generally are about individual prisoners, Amnesty International may in some instances take up the case of several prisoners at the same time and consider this *group of prisoners* as a single case. This is normally done if it is believed that this will be more conducive to achieving their release or to ensuring their safety. Full details on actions to be taken on behalf of such groups of prisoners are included in the prisoner dossier.

d) *Aftercare*

In some cases, after a prisoner is released, an AI group still needs to assist him or her. The Research Department decides whether such assistance is appropriate and will change the status of the case from adoption or investigation to aftercare for a limited period. Aftercare consists of giving humanitarian aid to the prisoner — for example, sending relief payments and maintaining correspondence with the prisoner and his or her family. The Research Department recommends particular activities when informing the group of the change in status.

While a group is working on an aftercare case it should submit six-monthly reports to its section, coordination group and the International Secretariat. If there is any fresh information about the person's

situation, this information should be checked with the Research Department before any action is taken. Groups should also continue to send the Research Department copies of any correspondence received from the family or the released prisoner.

3. COORDINATION

Some sections appoint an individual or group to act as a coordinator or coordination group for work on a particular country or part of the world. These coordination groups are responsible for advising the section and groups about human rights in the country or particular region concerned and for monitoring group activities on behalf of prisoners. (Please see the *Amnesty International Handbook* for further information about coordination groups.) If such a group exists in your section its address will be included in the prisoner dossier. Your group should contact the coordination group when you have any inquiries about a particular case or need further suggestions about possible activities. Copies of all correspondence from the IS to each group go to the appropriate coordinator or coordination group, but your group should also keep the coordination group informed of any new developments in the case. You should direct your inquiries to the IS only if there is no appropriate coordination group in your section.

4. CONTACTING GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

Write to all the authorities suggested in the dossier and see the Recommended Case Action sheet for advice on what approach to use. It is important to exert pressure from every possible quarter, so, as well as writing letters yourselves you should:

- a) get friends to write in their own names to the authorities;
- b) get important local personalities to write personal letters.

Always give the people you contact addresses to which they can write and give them details about the matters they should raise with regard to the case. Inform them of particularly important dates for appeals (national days, anniversaries, etc.) and of important human rights instruments which can appropriately be cited (see background materials enclosed with the case-sheet).

All letters to the authorities should be polite, as abusive or ill-considered language can harm rather than help the prisoner concerned. *In no circumstances should a national of the country concerned sign letters appealing on behalf of the prisoner, even if the person is a member of the group (please see Working Rule 24 in the Amnesty International Handbook).*

Letters should be sent at regular intervals even when, as is very often the case, the authorities do not reply. Using "advice of delivery" forms often ensures a response from the addressee; you should ask your post office for information about this service.

Letters are not, however, the only means of exerting pressure. An appeal

or petition can have a very powerful effect. If you are a university group, organizing this is relatively easy, but office workers and others may not find enough interest on the part of their colleagues to be able to get many signatures. Take into account the prisoner's occupation; the petition might be published by sympathetic professional groups in their bulletins and journals.

After consultation with your coordination group or section office, you might try to meet the diplomatic representatives of the prisoner's country and present any petition you may have organized. After trying to contact the authorities within the prisoner's country, you might raise with the ambassador the difficulty of getting answers from his or her country. You may consider it wise to confine your discussion to how to get an answer from the authorities. Explain that your interest is humanitarian and non-partisan. On the other hand, if you are sympathetically received, ask the ambassador to undertake to try to get a response from his or her superiors. You should also talk to the ambassador generally about his or her own reactions to the allegations of violations of human rights in that country.

5. CONTACTING THE PRISONER AND FAMILY

Your group will be given the prisoner's address (place of detention) and that of his or her family if AI knows them. Details about contacts with the prisoner and his or her family are supplied in the Recommended Case Action sheet. In *no* case should the person who signs letters to the prisoner and family also sign letters to government officials. Nor should the person signing letters to the prisoner and family ever be a national of the country concerned. Instructions will be given on whether AI may or may not be mentioned in letters to the prisoner and his or her family. Unless otherwise advised, you should never mention Amnesty International on the envelope. The names of other organizations or people who may have more information about the prisoner and to whom you may write will, if possible, be given in the prisoner dossier.

Please note that in countries where mail is censored or where letters from abroad are particularly conspicuous, it may be unwise for prisoners and their families to receive correspondence from groups. In such cases this will be clearly indicated in the prisoner dossier; the addresses, even if known, will not be given and groups should make no attempt to contact the prisoner or his or her family.

6. CONTACTING PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

If you know the prisoner's occupation, try to interest local organizations in your country in the case. Write to local professional associations and trade unions asking them to write to the authorities in the prisoner's country. Ask them to urge their members to write individual letters, to write as a collective organization, to publicize the case among their own members, to get prominent members of their occupation or interest group to sign a letter

of appeal and to invite a representative of your group to their meeting to explain the case to the membership. These local bodies should be encouraged to ask their national representative to take an active interest in the case by making their own approaches to the ambassador or, where appropriate, to the equivalent organization in the target country. National cooperation is the responsibility of the Amnesty International section, and your section should be informed of any local initiative that may have wider repercussions.

Cultural associations and friendship societies should also be contacted and their assistance sought in working on behalf of the prisoner.

7. PUBLICITY

One of the main means of exerting pressure on governments is publicity. In some cases, however, it may be unwise to publicize the case; or else certain information may be confidential. If you are *not* to seek publicity this will be indicated in the Recommended Case Action sheet. However, in most cases — whether adoption or investigation — your group should seek publicity. Possibly, as regards investigation cases, groups may be asked to avoid seeking publicity until further information has been obtained about the case. However, if this proves difficult, the Research Department may suggest that you publicize the case, explaining carefully the nature of AI's concern and not claiming that the person is a prisoner of conscience. You should follow instructions carefully about this.

Contact all local news media: press, radio and television. Your section and the relevant coordinator or coordination group will be able to advise you. A handbook for press relations has been issued by the International Secretariat to all sections and this may help your group. Write a number of letters to the editors of newspapers. Prepare a short article on the work of your group highlighting prisoner cases. Try to suggest specific activities in all your publicity efforts — such as giving readers an address to which appeals can be sent, or giving your group's telephone number so that they can find out more about activities on behalf of the prisoner. Local radio and television stations are sometimes willing to report on activities taking place in the locality. Invite them to a public event your group is organizing and talk about the prisoner's case.

Photographs of your prisoner and /or the prisoner's family will be sent to you if available and should be useful in publicity work. Some sections and coordinators can provide audio-visual material of general interest about the country. You should consult your section or coordinator about how to get hold of this.

Publicity is important as a means of making the general public aware of the issues of political imprisonment, unfair trials, torture and executions and of involving more people in your work. You should, furthermore, ensure that copies of all publicity material you obtain reach the authorities of the country where the prisoner is detained. Send such copies both direct to the appropriate officials in the country concerned and to the ambassador

for comment and forwarding to the government. (See the *Amnesty International Handbook* for further advice on publicity.)

8. RELIEF

If your prisoner is an actual or probable prisoner of conscience, he or she and his or her dependants are entitled to relief assistance under Amnesty International's Relief Policies and Procedures, and your group may be called upon to provide such assistance. Details about the need for and possibility of channelling relief to the prisoners and/or their families is provided in the prisoner dossier if known. All details on the sending of relief are *strictly confidential* and to be used only within Amnesty International. The International Secretariat requires a regular report on all relief money distributed by each group. Government authorities frequently disapprove of efforts to send relief to prisoners or their families. You should never *publicize* or disclose who is the recipient of relief, the amounts sent or the channels used to anyone who is not *directly* involved. (See the *Amnesty International Handbook* for further important notes on relief.)

Relief money for some prisoners is sent via the International Secretariat. When groups are asked to forward relief money via the International Secretariat, they should write to the appropriate researcher indicating the sum of money sent, the identity of the sender (section and group number) and the purpose of the payment.

You may use your group's fund-raising activities to raise money for relief, but you should avoid any public suggestion that any particular prisoner is to be the beneficiary of relief payments. You may refer instead to Amnesty International's general relief work on behalf of such prisoners. If your section has a relief officer, he or she may be able to give guidance on relief work.

If groups cannot meet relief needs from their own funds they should consult their section. Additional funds may be available from the section, or else from the International Secretariat.

9. REPORTING TO AND CONTACT WITH THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

When you undertake work on behalf of the prisoners assigned to your group you must always remember that each prisoner is one of many. Your group is working directly for individual prisoners — or groups of prisoners — but these are not the only prisoners whose cases are being taken from that particular country. Many other groups are handling other cases, conducting general campaigns, sending appeals or interceding at top level on behalf of other detainees. Your work is, therefore, part of a team effort to draw attention to political imprisonment, unfair trials, torture or other human rights violations in that particular country. So it is important that all parts of the organization coordinate their activities at least once every six months. For this reason the International Secretariat asks groups to prepare

reports on their activities every six months. Report forms will be sent to you from your section or the International Secretariat.

Please note that English, French and Spanish are the organization's three official languages. However, staff are recruited internationally and English is the working language of the International Secretariat. Wherever possible, therefore, groups should write their reports in English; material in French and Spanish will often need to be sent for translation and will therefore be delayed.

In addition to the general reports, groups should keep the Research Department and appropriate coordination group informed of any new developments in the case. Groups should in particular send copies of any letters they receive from government officials, the prisoner, or his or her lawyer *without delay* to the International Secretariat. The Research Department automatically keeps the group informed of any new information that comes in. Correspondence from the International Secretariat usually goes to the group secretary as it is impossible to keep records of individuals holding prisoner dossiers. Groups should ensure that any correspondence is sent on immediately to those responsible.

If groups have a problem or query about a particular case or would like further suggestions about action, they should first approach the appropriate coordination group or their section. If they cannot help, the matter should be referred to the International Secretariat. All inquiries about individual prisoners should go to the Research Department, which is responsible for preparing casesheets, background papers and general campaign documents. The Executive Assistants who work closely with the researchers on particular countries or regions, are responsible for most of the correspondence between the Research Department and groups. All communications to the International Secretariat about individual cases should be addressed (on the envelope) to the relevant research region (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, or the Middle East) and the letter itself should be clearly marked with the group's number and the name and country of the prisoner concerned.

10. CLOSURE

Once a prisoner dossier has been assigned to a group, the latter is expected to work on the case until the prisoner is released or the case closed by the International Secretariat. If a prisoner is released and there is no need for further action, the Research Department notifies the group on special "Closure of Case" notepaper. Groups should not consider the case closed until this official confirmation has been received. If it is possible the prisoner may be arrested again, the case is closed but the group may be asked to keep the dossier for a while. If rearrest is unlikely, the group will receive instructions from its section (or from the Campaign and Membership Department of the International Secretariat in countries without a section) about what to do with the prisoner dossier.

The material in the dossier is confidential and must be handled with care. The group is, therefore, advised to destroy it or return it to the section.

Once a case has been closed by the International Secretariat, the group can apply to its section for another prisoner dossier or to the Campaign and Membership Department at the International Secretariat in countries where the section has not yet taken over responsibility for case allocation or where no section exists.

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