

**Get up, Sign Up for Human Rights**

**Statement by Pierre Sané  
Secretary General, Amnesty International**

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**(Check Against Delivery)**

Amnesty International is in South Africa to launch our most ambitious campaign ever to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Declaration was proclaimed as a response to the atrocities and the causes of the Second World War. It was a promise by governments to work towards a world without cruelty and injustice; to work towards a world without hunger and ignorance.

Yet almost 50 years later, the record of many governments is one of broken promises. Half the world's governments still put "prisoners of conscience" in jail; a third of those governments torture their prisoners; 1.3 billion people live on less than one dollar a day; 35,000 children die of malnutrition and preventable diseases every day.

However, we want to do more in our campaign than just point the finger at governments who have fallen short of their promises.

We want to show that there is a groundswell of popular support for the rights in the Declaration. To show that the public will not stand by for another 50 years of broken promises.

We will demonstrate that support through our "Get Up, Sign Up" campaign, where we are asking world leaders and ordinary citizens alike to "sign up" to the values of the Declaration with a simple pledge.

I will do everything in my power to ensure that the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights become a reality throughout the world.

Our members in some 100 countries and our partners elsewhere around the world will be gathering signatures from leaders and ordinary citizens alike.

We expect to get millions of signatures, which we will present to the United Nations on 10 December 1998.

And as we launch this campaign, I am extremely pleased to announce the fact that the first leading world citizen who has signed this pledge is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Laureate and leader of the major opposition party in Myanmar.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is a human rights defender of international renown, whose struggle to gain respect for the human rights of Burmese people has been a long and distinguished one.

Her political activities led to her being placed under house arrest in 1989, and for six years she was denied her liberty.

Although no longer under house arrest, she and members of her party continue to face harassment and intimidation. Party members are also occasionally arrested by the authorities.

Their rights to freedom of expression and assembly -- guaranteed in the Declaration -- are curtailed.

In the face of such adversity, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi continues to stand up for the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the need for the declaration to become a genuine expression of the will of the people.

Writing in the book *Freedom from Fear*, she said.

“It is difficult for the Burmese people to understand how any of the rights contained in the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be seen as anything but wholesome and good. That the declaration was not drawn up in Burma by the Burmese seems an inadequate reason, to say the least, for rejecting it, especially as Burma was one of the nations which voted for its adoption in December in 1948.

If ideas and beliefs are to be denied validity outside the geographical and cultural bounds of their origin, Buddhism would be confined to North India, Christianity to a narrow tract in the Middle East and Islam to Arabia.”

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s courageous defence of human rights is an inspiration, and her support for our campaign on the Declaration is a powerful example for other human rights defenders, world leaders and ordinary citizens.

Adding her signature to that of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the start of our campaign is Mary Robinson, United Nation’s High Commissioner for Human Rights, who signed the pledge book yesterday. She said:

“I am very honoured to join my name with that of (Daw) Aung San Suu Kyi. I hope this link will mean that she will feel she is being thought about, as one of many millions who need our thoughts during this year, and who need us to join with her in recommitting ourselves to the principle of the UDHR.”

Graca Machel, the leading defender of children’s rights, in signing the pledge, said, “it’s not only a question of signing it, but it’s the meaning of what my life has been about: to try to fight for the dignity and freedom of my own people, to dedicate myself in a very small scale to voice the rights of women and children.”

In the “Get Up, Sign Up” campaign, we are also asking the people who sign the pledge to support human rights defenders who have been harassed, jailed and tortured for their campaigning work in defence of basic human rights.

The 28 individuals we are highlighting in our campaign include religious leaders, lawyers, and activists in fields of human rights including socio-economic rights.

- In Mexico, Leticia Mectezuma Vargas has campaigned to stop a government-sponsored project which would seriously damage the environment in her community. She and her young daughters were beaten and received death threats.
- In Nigeria, Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, Chairman of the Campaign for Democracy was sentenced to 15 years in prison for his work on behalf of prisoners convicted in secret treason trials.
- In Pakistan, the journalist and human rights activist Zafaryab Ahmed has long opposed bonded labour. He was arrested and charged with sedition after writing about the case of a 10-year-old-boy who had been sold into bonded labour in a carpet factory.
- And in the Chechen Republic, journalist Nadezhda Chaykova was warned to stop her investigations into misappropriation of funds by leaders of all sides in the Chechen conflict if she wanted to stay alive. At age 32, she was killed. Her body was found in a shallow grave -- she had been blindfolded, severely beaten and killed by a bullet in the back of her head.

The last two human rights defenders were journalists. As you will know from the experience of journalists in this country, and throughout Africa, the right to freedom of expression -- Article 19 in the Declaration -- is a right often under attack by governments.

I would like to end the press conference by inviting the journalists present here today to show your support for Article 19 - and the 29 other rights in the Declaration - by signing our pledge book.

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