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HANDOVER OF THE PLEDGES TO KOFI ANNAN -- QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is Amnesty International presenting to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on 8 December in Paris?

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10 1998, Amnesty International (AI) has been running a campaign for exactly one year called Get Up Sign Up! AI's one million members have been collecting pledges of support for the UDHR from people all around the world.

The pledge reads: "I will do everything in my power to ensure that the rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights become a reality around the world."

Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and leader of the Burmese opposition was the first person to sign the pledge, followed by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Since then, around 11 million other people from all walks of life in 136 countries have signed the pledge. Their pledges are being presented to Kofi Annan in Paris at the Palais de Chaillot -- the building where the UDHR was adopted by the UN in 1948.

On the same day, in a globally coordinated event, Amnesty International offices around the world will also be presenting collected pledges to United Nations offices in their country.

Why is Amnesty asking the public to pledge support for the UDHR in 1998?

Fifty years on from the adoption of the UDHR, governments are failing to live up to the promises they made in 1948. Torture, unlawful killings, "disappearances", unfair trials and judicial executions continue.

Through its campaign, Amnesty International is asking people all around the world to rededicate themselves personally to upholding the rights in the UDHR. Each person who pledges will commit themselves to try to bring about an improvement in a small way or a big way depending on their position in life.

The 11 million pledges collected powerfully demonstrate worldwide support for the UDHR and a demand on government leaders to bring about real change and improvement in the global human rights situation.

So who has signed the pledge?

Over 11 million people from 125 countries have signed the pledge so far. They include government leaders such as Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac, Vaclav Havel, Yasser Arafat, Kim Dae-jung, Ezer Weizmann, Rafael Caldera, Lech Walesa, Abdelrahman Alyusofi, and Yoweri Museveni; religious leaders including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu; human rights defenders such as the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo; entertainers including U2, Courtney Love, Puff Daddy, Mick Jagger, Harrison Ford, Julia Roberts and sports people such as Mohammed Ali, Brian Lara and the national football teams of France, Holland and South Africa.

How were the pledges collected?

During the campaign, pledges were collected in a myriad of different ways. A nationwide tour in Mongolia took in

army camps and police stations and in Sierra Leone, volunteers spread the message using megaphones. The largest TV network in the Philippines called on its viewers to sign the UDHR pledge and used its local stations as collection points. In the Netherlands, one TV company collected a huge number of signatures in bookstores, record stores, libraries, theatres and cinemas and in the Palestinian Authority, signatures were collected in high schools in both Gaza and the West Bank, and from the Ministries of Information and Culture.

Who else helped AI collect the pledges?

The majority of pledges have been collected by Amnesty International offices around the world with support from the Body Shop, who have collected thumb print pledges from people visiting their stores in 34 countries. Many other organisations and groups have helped in the collection including other human rights organisations, church and religious groups and trades union groups. Other pledges have been collected via the world wide web.

Why are you giving these pledges to the United Nations?

The collected pledges are being presented to the UN to reaffirm the commitment of citizens around the world to uphold the values contained in the UDHR and to realise the goal of human rights for all the world's citizens. As the UN is the international body charged with the responsibility to ensure global recognition of basic human rights, Amnesty International wants to demonstrate to the UN the wealth of support from the public to see this aim become a reality.

What impact do you think this campaign has made to global human rights?

The UDHR has been called the world's best kept secret and little more than a paper promise. When governments adopted the UDHR, in 1948 they promised to disseminate it throughout their countries in schools, colleges, government offices, local councils and workplaces.

50 years on, how many people around the world have seen a copy? Amnesty International and other organizations have been spending the past year in a massive global publicity campaign to do the job that governments have been failing to do.

The aim of the campaign was not only to acknowledge the importance of human rights, but also to inform and educate the global community at a grass-roots level what their rights are. The campaign has reached people from all sectors of society in cities, towns, villages and remote rural communities in 125 countries.

The campaign has focussed on human rights defenders -- 28 ordinary individuals who have taken the extraordinary step of dedicating their lives to defending the rights of others. During the campaign, two of these defenders have been released, and tens of thousands of letters, faxes and emails sent to government leaders, local officials and prison governors demanding an end to persecution, harassment and ill-treatment of the defenders.

Some political leaders from countries with dubious human rights records have signed the pledge, what does Amnesty International think about this?

By signing the pledge to uphold the values of the UDHR, Heads of State and government leaders have committed themselves personally to protect their citizens' human rights. Amnesty International will continually campaign to remind these leaders of the commitment they have made and to ensure that their citizens are able to fully enjoy those rights.

Aren't human rights a developed or first world issue?

Human rights are an issue for everyone, everywhere. Until the rights of all the world's citizens -- rich or poor, from whatever ethnic or religious background, political belief or gender -- are respected and upheld, all of us have a role to play in campaigning to protect human rights.

Amnesty International's 1998 Annual Report details human rights abuses in approximately 150 countries. Human Rights abuses take place in developed as well as developing countries. In October 1998 Amnesty International launched its USA Campaign, a campaign to see the rights of individuals in the world's largest democracy respected by highlighting the continued and systematic abuse of human rights.

Do you really think the individual can make a difference?

YES. It is only through the actions of individuals that meaningful change takes place. Three hundred human rights activists from 100 countries gathered in Paris for the first ever world summit of human rights defenders show that individuals can make a difference. By campaigning for the rights of others, they have been able to bring about an awareness of human rights amongst their fellow citizens, and through new technology they have been able to highlight human rights abuses to a global audience and bring about international pressure on the perpetrators.

But it is not just these defenders who can make a difference. One man, Peter Benenson made a difference 37 years ago by starting Amnesty International, and since then millions of ordinary people have made a real difference by writing letters, sending faxes and sending emails to protect the rights of others.