

EXTERNAL

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40th anniversary Peter Benenson quote

Peter Benenson has agreed the following quote for use during the 40th anniversary.

"On 28 May 1961 I wrote an article in The Observer newspaper which gave birth to Amnesty International. It began with these words: 'Open your newspaper any day of the week and you will find a report from somewhere in the world of someone being imprisoned, tortured or executed because his opinions or religion are unacceptable to his government ... The newspaper reader feels a sickening sense of impotence. Yet if these feelings of disgust could be united into common action, something effective could be done.'

"Forty years on, Amnesty International has secured many victories. Its files are full of letters from former prisoners of conscience or torture victims thanking the organisation for making a difference. Torture is now banned by international agreement. Every year more countries reject the death penalty. The world will soon have an International Criminal Court that will be able to ensure that those accused of the worst crimes in the world will face justice. The Court's very existence will deter some crimes.

"But the challenges are still great. Torture is banned but in two-thirds of the world's countries it is still being committed in secret. Too many governments still allow wrongful imprisonment, murder or "disappearance" to be carried out by their officials with impunity.

"Those who today still feel a sense of impotence can do something: they can support Amnesty International. They can help it to stand up for freedom and justice.

"In 1961 I wrote 'Pressure of opinion a hundred years ago brought about the emancipation of the slaves'. Pressure of opinion is now needed to help Amnesty International achieve its ultimate objective: to close for business. Only then, when the last prisoner of conscience has been freed, when the last torture chamber has been closed, when the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a reality for the world's people, will our work be done."