“Human Rights Begin With You” is a new awareness-raising workshop from Amnesty International which aims to introduce young people between the ages of 12 and 18 to the idea of human rights activism through drama. The workshop emphasizes the importance of individual citizens taking active responsibility for human rights protection and promotion in their own communities. Using a highly participatory format, the workshop challenges young people to reflect on the following questions:

• What are human rights? Which human rights are most important to me? Which human rights do I need to ensure that I have a happy and fulfilling adult life? What kind of society do I want to live in ten years from now?

• What experiences in your life and the life of your community have taught you most about human rights? How does that knowledge help you to understand the concerns about human rights which people have in other parts of the world? What can you do to use that understanding and experience to help create the society in which you want to live in the future? What can you do to use that understanding and experience to help protect the human rights of people in other parts of the world?

• Who guarantees my human rights? Is human rights something which only politicians and diplomats can talk about? What can I do in my local community to help more people think and talk about human rights?

Identifying with young victims of human rights violations

During the workshop, the participants will be introduced to the stories of a young people from other countries who have been denied their basic human rights - and whose cases have been taken up for action by Amnesty International. Examples of such cases include:

• a 15 year old novice Buddhist nun from Tibet, imprisoned for 20 months by the Chinese authorities for the peaceful expression of her beliefs.

• the President of the Cuban Youth Movement for Democracy, sentenced to 18 months’ imprisonment by the Cuban authorities for advocating peaceful reform of university education in his country.

• a leader of the Kenya University Students Union who was expelled from university and threatened by the authorities after campaigning with fellow students for constitutional reform in Kenya.

• a 13 year old Sri Lankan boy, held in maximum security in a detention center for several months by the Australian authorities before he was granted refugee status - after fleeing bombing and artillery attacks on his native village and enduring ill-treatment by police in the capital city.

After learning about the stories of such young people, participants will be asked to imagine that they are coming to visit them at their school or youth group. Some of the participants will be asked to play the role of the visitor - making themselves familiar enough with their story that they can present their lives and histories dramatically to an audience. Other participants will be asked to play the role of a “welcoming committee” - given the task of presenting the life and history of their own community to the visitors, and deciding on a list of questions which they want to ask their guests. The “welcoming committee” will need to consider:
• What questions would you want to ask the visitor about his or her experiences? And what would you want to tell them about your own country and community? What sorts of experiences would you have in common? In which ways would you be different?

• What sorts of things could you do in your country and community to help make people aware of the human rights violations experienced by the visitor?

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants will be asked if they would like to write a collective appeal on behalf of one of the individuals discussed during the session. The appeal would be addressed to the authorities of the country concerned, and would ask that the authorities respect fully the peaceful expression of the human rights of the individual in question - and of all citizens - in keeping with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The appeal would then be sent to the relevant authorities by Amnesty International.

Participants will also have an opportunity to learn about how such simple interventions can make a difference in the lives of young people who have experienced or are at risk of human rights violations in countries around the world. The practical results of Amnesty International's campaigning - through letter-writing and other techniques - will be emphasized. Basic information about Amnesty International and about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be distributed to the participants - in the local language.

For more information about this workshop, please contact Brian Phillips, Campaign Coordinator, Europe Regional Program, Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 8DJ, United Kingdom.

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