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## **Write for Rights: Two million letters, tweets and texts to change lives**

Write for Rights, one of Amnesty International's major global campaigns, will mobilize hundreds of thousands of people around the world in the aim of changing the lives of individuals at risk through the simple act of sending a letter.

From 6 to 17 December, people from more than 80 countries all over the world will campaign on behalf of 12 individuals and communities suffering human rights abuses. They will name, shame and make specific calls to the offending governments in support of those suffering state oppression.

Amnesty International expects more than two million letters, faxes, emails, tweets and text messages to be sent during the course of the campaign.

"Write for Rights is a key moment, which goes to the heart of Amnesty International's work: taking action on behalf of others, showing solidarity with those who courageously stand up against tyranny," said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

From Algeria to Slovenia, from Hong Kong to Morocco a series of events including concerts, a graffiti art show and 24-hour letter writing events will be held to promote the cause.

The 12 cases come from every continent and cover a wide range of different human rights issues.

### **Amnesty International is calling for prisoners of conscience in five different countries to be released:**

- Ethiopian journalist Eskinder Nega has been in jail since 2008. He is serving an 18-year prison sentence for "terrorism" after he criticised the government in a public speech in Sweden.
- Myanmar community leader Dr Tun Aung, was sentenced to 17 years in prison for multiple offences, including "inciting a riot", after he tried to calm clashes between Buddhists and Muslims.
- Three Russian activists, jailed shortly after the peaceful Bolotnya Square protests, were accused of "participating in mass riots".
- In Bahrain 13 human rights defenders were sentenced to between five years and life for expressing their opinions and campaigning peacefully.
- Tunisian blogger Jabeur Mejri was imprisoned in 2012 for over seven years for "attacking sacred values" and "undermining public morals", after he posted some opinions about religion.

### **It is campaigning for four individuals victimised by the state:**

- Cambodian activist Yorm Bopha was released on bail last 22 November but still faces fabricated charges relating to her housing rights activism on behalf of the Boeung Kak Lake community.
- Mexican housewife Miriam López was tortured and raped by military officers, and forced to sign a statement that she was involved in drug trafficking.
- Turkish driver Hakan Yaman was savagely beaten and blinded in one eye by Turkish police during protests this year.
- Belarusian drag artist Ihar Tsikhanyuk was beaten and is subjected to ongoing police harassment for his campaigning for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights in his country.

**It will highlight the plight of three communities under threat:**

- Nigerian members of the Badia East Community in Lagos, Nigeria were forcibly evicted from their homes last February, when more than 2,237 households were affected by a massive demolition.
- Palestinian residents of Nabi Saleh village are under virtual siege by Israeli settlers and face continuing repression as they demonstrate each Friday against Israel's occupation.
- Honduran members of COFADEH, an NGO devoted to investigating disappearances and other human rights abuses is under constant surveillance and subjected to threats and attacks.

“Write for Rights is a great demonstration of international solidarity. Also, it has a powerful, positive impact in the lives of individuals whose human rights are at risk. A single letter to the authorities can be brushed aside. But thousands of letters all calling for human rights changes are harder to ignore. We know from decades of campaigning that writing letters does save and change lives,” said Salil Shetty.

Since its inception, Write for Rights has achieved concrete results with prisoners of conscience released. This year, just days before the campaign officially launched, Yorm Bopha, a Cambodian housing rights activist, jailed on spurious charges was released on bail 22 November.

Just days after being reunited with her family and community, she told to Amnesty International: “Thank you to Amnesty International's supporters! Your campaign has been successful, as my release shows! But my case is not over yet. Please keep pushing the Cambodian government to end the case against me. And please keep supporting me, my community and others in Cambodia! We can achieve the most success when we all work together!”

And for those still in jail, the messages of support are invaluable:

“I have been covered with an avalanche of letters and postcards. Over New Year I kept reading the hundreds of letters and postcards. I can sincerely say I haven't missed out a single one of them. It was an indescribable New Year,” said Ales Bialiatski, a human rights defender imprisoned in Belarus.

**Background information**

Amnesty's first Write for Rights took place 11 years ago in Poland. A Warsaw local group coordinator met a girl who told him about her experience in Africa organising 24-hour events, writing protest letters to governments. The group decided to write letters for 24 hours non-stop and then count how many they'd written.

They emailed the idea to other Polish groups and the idea caught on, uniting activists around the country. They emailed Amnesty offices around the world and it snowballed into a global campaign. The Write for Rights campaign had started.