STRENGTH AND LIGHT: BURKINA FASO’S HEROIC WOMEN

Virtual Reality
How activists are bringing Syria’s reality home

My Body My Rights
Looking back at your campaigning around the world

Connection Denied
How to make an international phone call from North Korea
Wire is Amnesty’s global magazine, published four times a year to inform, empower and inspire people worldwide to take injustice personally.

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Cover image: She is a poet with a conscience. Slam poetry artist Malika Ouattara, known as ‘Malika La Slameuse’, is a student and women’s rights activist. Ouagadougou, 13 January 2016
© Leila Alaoui for Amnesty International
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ANTI-TORTURE ACTIVIST RELEASED
A teenager who stood up to torture in Egypt was finally released in March, after tireless campaigning from Amnesty supporters. Mahmoud Hussein had spent more than two years behind bars after being arrested aged 18 for wearing an anti-torture t-shirt. He was tortured while in detention and forced to sign a “confession”. Read more: http://bit.ly/1VMtWgF

FIGHTING THE CYBER CENSORS
“Without freedom of speech there is no modern world, just a barbaric one.”
Ai Weiwei

There was a big win for our Stop Torture campaign in the Philippines after a police officer was convicted of torturing bus driver Jerryme Corre. It was the first ruling under the country’s 2009 Anti-Torture Act, and follows three years of campaigning by Amnesty supporters, including more than 70,000 people who took action for Jerryme during Write for Rights 2014. Read more: http://bit.ly/1q6bHX2

HISTORIC TORTURE CONVICTION
Ai Weiwei, Edward Snowden and Pussy Riot joined forces for free speech on World Day against Cyber Censorship in March. They were at the heart of our partnership with AdBlock, the web tool that helps users block unwanted ads. On 12 March 2016, AdBlock replaced online ads with messages that censors in certain countries wouldn’t want people to see. The campaign helped to raise awareness about the global crackdown on freedom of expression online. Read more: http://bit.ly/24k9pmj
4 POET FINALLY RELEASED

Qatari poet Mohammed al-‘Ajami, also known as Ibn al-Dheeb, was finally freed in March after a four-year ordeal. He had been charged with “insulting the Emir” after performing a peaceful poem to a group of people in his apartment in Cairo, Egypt, where he was studying Arabic literature at the time.

5 SPEAKING UP FOR MYANMAR

A huge thank you to the thousands of Amnesty activists who took action for prisoners of conscience ahead of elections in Myanmar. The country’s new parliament includes more than 100 former political prisoners, but many more remain behind bars. We’ll continue to demand freedom for all those who have been locked up for speaking out. Read more: http://bit.ly/1U1OWjL

6 WHAT’S IN YOUR SMARTPHONE?

In January, we told the world how major electronics brands, including Apple, Samsung and Sony, are failing to ensure that cobalt mined by child labourers has not been used in their products. In response to our research, a number of companies told us they would investigate their supply chains. The Chinese government also said it would work with the Chinese smelting company named in our report. Read more: http://bit.ly/1T06hrA

7 ALBERT WOODFOX IS FREE AT LAST!

In February 2016, Albert Woodfox was released – 44 years after he was first placed in solitary confinement in the USA. More than 240,000 of you had demanded his release and sent him messages of support during this year’s Write for Rights.

Albert had spent more than 40 years locked up alone in a tiny cell with little natural light for 23 hours a day. He was convicted in 1973 for the murder of a prison guard, but there was no physical evidence linking him to the crime.

At the time he told us: “Your messages from beyond the prison walls have become an enormous source of strength for me. I would like to thank all of the members of Amnesty International and its supporters for all of the wonderful work they are doing on our behalf.”
DEATH PENALTY IN NUMBERS

54%
more people executed in 2015 than in 2014.

1,634+
people executed in 2015 – the highest number recorded by Amnesty since 1989.

89%
of all recorded executions occurred in three countries: Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia.

4
countries abolished the death penalty for all crimes: Congo, Fiji, Madagascar and Suriname.

102
countries have totally abolished the death penalty, more than half the world.

BEHIND THE SCENES

A GHOSTLY ASSEMBLY FOR FREEDOM IN SOUTH KOREA

Amnesty’s campaigner on Korea, Tom Rainey Smith, explains how he got “phantoms” to protest in downtown Seoul recently.

Demonstrations are a regular sight in Seoul, South Korea. After all, it’s on this city’s very streets that democracy was fought for and won with people power in the 1980s.

So it has been disheartening in recent years to see public assemblies increasingly met with police force and subject to restrictions. We knew we needed something creative to bring across our message: that freedom of peaceful assembly is a right rather than a privilege. The big question was: how could we organize an event the public could freely participate in?

Impressed by how Spanish activists had used holograms in Madrid last year to protest a “gag law” restricting assemblies, we decided to hold our own in central Seoul. Then, we rolled into action.

Putting the word out online and through social media, we received a fantastic response – over 130 text messages, and numerous voice recordings. One hundred and twenty people also joined us in the studio to be filmed marching, dancing, singing and chanting against a green screen.

On the evening of 24 February 2016, against the backdrop of one of Seoul’s most iconic locations, the Gyeongbok Palace, these recorded images were projected onto a large screen erected in the square. They took on ghostly forms, becoming South Korea’s first “phantom” protestors.
DIARY DATES AND ANNIVERSARIES 2016

1 MAY
International Workers’ Day

3 MAY
World Press Freedom Day

7 MAY
Saudi Arabia sentences Raif Badawi to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes, 2014

15 MAY
International Conscientious Objectors Day

17 MAY
International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia

23-24 MAY
World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey

28 MAY
Amnesty’s Ambassador of Conscience Award

1 JUNE
International Day for the Protection of Children

4 JUNE
Protesters killed in Tiananmen Square, China, 1989

5 JUNE
Edward Snowden’s disclosures on government surveillance, 2013

20 JUNE
World Refugee Day

26 JUNE
International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

EDITORIAL

A BREATH OF LIFE IN THE SHADOWS

For decades, Amnesty has exposed governments who torture. At times it has felt near impossible. Torture usually takes place in the shadows – in secret cells or prisons. Full investigations are all too rare.

But we persist. And in the last two years alone, we’ve supported many torture survivors to get justice. People like Ángel Colón, who was tortured and wrongly imprisoned in Mexico for six years. Tens of thousands of us demanded his release. When it finally came he told us: “My message to all those who are against torture is ‘don’t drop your guard. A new horizon is dawning’.”

People like Moses Akatuugba, who was released after spending 10 years in prison in Nigeria. “I am overwhelmed. Amnesty activists are my heroes,” he said.

People like Mahmoud Hussein – a young Egyptian tortured after attending a protest. “Because of your solidarity, I am free now,” he declared last month. “And I dream of a nation without torture.”

We collected over 400,000 signatures for torture survivors in Morocco and Western Sahara, helping to secure a meeting with the Minister of Justice. In the Philippines, the first police officer was convicted under the Anti-Torture Act, after thousands of us spoke out with his victim, Jerryme Corre.

Over 140,000 of us have called for the release of journalist Muhammad Bekzhanov, imprisoned for 16 years in Uzbekistan. Whereas once he asked God to “let him die. The torture was so unrelenting”, today his family tells us: “It is such a big boost, when people write, when people talk about him. He knows he is not forgotten – for him it is a breath of life.”

We are many. And we’ll continue to stand up and remember all who’ve survived torture.

Louisa Anderson
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There are two stories to these photographs – the story of those who survived terror and brutality, and the story of those who did not.

The first is the story of our “sheroes”: girls who have endured and overcome violence, rape, early and forced marriage, and the women who stand with them, defending, nurturing, empowering. Theirs is a story of hope and of light.

The second story is of the people who were taken from us as they worked to gather portraits for Amnesty’s My Body My Rights Sheroes exhibition. Leila Alaoui and Mahamadi Ouédraogo did not survive the terrible attacks of 15 January 2016 that robbed Ouagadougou, the rest of Burkina Faso and other cities around the world of so many loved ones.

The loss is devastating. But even in this tragedy, we find a story of hope and of light.

She is a provider.
When Awa Ouédraogo fell pregnant at age 14, she was rejected by her family. She lived on the street and gave birth to her child one evening in a shop where she had taken refuge. After a few years at the Pan-Bila shelter for survivors of forced marriage, rape and unwanted pregnancy in Ouagadougou, Awa is now independent and able to provide for herself and her child thanks to her small fruit selling business.
LEILA AND MAHAMADI: FIVE DAYS FOR THE SHEROES OF BURKINA FASO

**Monday 11 January** – two people meet at Ouagadougou International Airport and their destinies become immediately and eternally entwined.

She – Leila Alaoui, 33, photographer, arriving on an early evening flight from Paris. She will be spending the next nine days in Burkina Faso photographing courageous girls and women for Amnesty’s My Body My Rights “Sheroes” exhibition.

He – Mahamadi Ouédraogo, 42, driver and guide, coming to fetch Leila from the airport. He will be spending the next nine days accompanying her all over the country and assisting with the photo mission.

They are a well-matched team for this mission. Leila comes with her talent as a photographer and her passion for helping marginalized people tell their stories. Mahamadi has seven years on the road with Amnesty, a good knowledge of the country, and a helpful, caring nature that makes him the ideal travel companion.

**Tuesday 12 January** – Ouagadougou. Leila has photo sessions planned with several women across the city: Hortence, Catherine, Cendrine, Angèle, Martine. She wants to spend time talking to each woman so she can set the right tone for each portrait.

Mahamadi is concerned for the wellbeing of mother-to-be Noëlie Kouraogo of Amnesty Burkina who is with them that day and has helped plan the schedule and set up the photo sessions. He confides his concerns to Leila and the two of them team up to make sure Noëlie is comfortable, well taken care of and doesn’t overdo things.

**Wednesday 13 January** – Ouagadougou. Another day in the capital. Mahamadi picks Leila up at her hotel, a few streets from the Splendid Hotel and the Cappuccino café, and they set off for the two photo sessions planned that day: Awa and Malika.

Later, at Cappuccino café, Leila and Noëlie talk about the deadly attack in Istanbul the previous day. Leila says how hard it is to feel safe anywhere anymore.

---

She provides a safe haven.
Catherine Ouedraogo, 58, has been co-ordinating the Focex (Fondation Cardinale Emile Biyenda) shelter since 2005. The shelter takes in girls aged 12 to 18 who have survived rape, early and forced marriage and unwanted pregnancy. Between 2001 and 2009, the shelter accommodated a total of 209 girls and 168 children either born there or taken in with their mothers.
She empowers through education. Hortence Lougué’s Association d’appui et d’éveil PUGSADA works on gender-based violence, education and human rights. She works with young girls and women who have been forced into marriage, including at a very young age, or have suffered female genital mutilation. Her organization also supports education for girls who face early and forced marriage.
She makes her life useful to others. 28-year-old Cendrine Nama is a businesswoman, singer and activist for women’s and children’s rights. Her association Enfance en péril (childhood under threat) provides accommodation, education, food, and healthcare to street children and helps them integrate into adoptive families.
Thursday 14 January – Kaya. At 6am, the team sets out on a day trip 100km north-east of Ouagadougou to meet the chairperson of a local women’s rights organization. But when they get there, they must wait several hours. She has just lost a family member, and when she finally arrives, she can only spare 15 minutes.

Friday 15 January – Yako-Tema Bokin-Ouahigouya. Another early start, with scheduled visits to three women in locations many kilometres apart. We know little of the hours before the tragedy struck; Leila and Mahamadi are no longer here to tell us about their work that day. What we do know is that, on their way back to Ouagadougou, they were slowed down by car trouble that took about an hour to resolve. They arrived in Ouagadougou just after 6pm. Shortly afterwards, in front of the Cappuccino café, Leila and Mahamadi were shot by gunmen.

Much love, affection and respect have been expressed for both Leila and Mahamadi by those who knew them and by those who met them only briefly. It is a measure of the people they were.

We remember and we thank them for bringing us these inspirational Burkinabé women so we can honour them as sheroes.

We hope that the qualities that Leila and Mahamadi were loved for, all the qualities they were carrying with them when they met at Ouagadougou International Airport that Monday evening, will continue to illuminate the memories of all those who knew and loved them even if their journey among us has come to an end.

FIND OUT MORE:
View our Sheroes online exhibition:

All images © Leila Alaoui for Amnesty International

Mahamadi Ouédraogo had worked with Amnesty International since 2008 as a driver.

Leila Alaoui had been commissioned by Amnesty to take a series of photographs for the My Body My Rights Sheroes exhibition. It was her first time working with Amnesty.
Over one million refugees and asylum-seekers risked their lives to reach Europe last year in fragile, overcrowded boats. By opening up more safe and legal options like resettlement, governments can stop people suffering and dying. Here’s how it works, and how we can make it happen.

**WHAT IS RESETTLEMENT AND WHO QUALIFIES?**

Resettlement is a way of protecting the most vulnerable refugees of all, including people who:

- have survived torture or serious violence
- have medical needs, such as a serious illness
- are female at risk of abuse or exploitation
- are a child or teenager on their own
- face persecution because of their gender or sexual orientation
- need legal or physical protection – for example, because they face being deported to a country where they could be tortured or killed
- have been on the move for a long time and can’t go home in the foreseeable future

**HOW DOES RESETTLEMENT WORK?**

Put very simply: you’re forced to flee your home and escape to another country. There, you register with the UN’s refugee agency, UNHCR, and the local authorities. But you still face threats, abuses like sexual violence, or problems getting life-saving medical treatment.

Using specific criteria, the UNHCR will identify whether you are especially vulnerable and urgently need protection in another country. This is called resettlement. If you qualify, and you’re very lucky, you might get a phone call one day saying you can pack your bags and settle down in a third country.
ARE OTHER SAFE AND LEGAL ROUTES AVAILABLE TOO?
Yes. Governments can open up so-called pathways to safety in emergency situations, such as the Syrian refugee crisis. They include:
- Academic scholarships and study visas allowing refugees to start or carry on studying.
- Work visas offering professionals the chance to get a job abroad.
- Family reunification – this means refugees can join close relatives already living abroad.
- Private sponsorship involving private individuals or organizations funding refugees to settle in their communities.

Any of these will allow refugees to travel in a safe, organized way instead of risking life and limb to reach a few overcrowded destinations, such as the Greek islands.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DO THESE SOLUTIONS MAKE IN PEOPLE’S LIVES?
Being able to travel safely and legally means not being forced to hand over your life savings to a smuggler, only to put your family in terrible danger. It can mean not being beaten up, exploited or sexually abused on long, exhausting journeys.

And it can be your escape route from crushing poverty in countries that can’t cope.

Above all, solutions like resettlement offer hope to people who have lost everything and protect refugees’ human rights when their own country can’t or won’t do it.

WHAT IS AMNESTY CALLING FOR?
Very few countries have offered up enough resettlement places to make a real difference. So Amnesty is calling on governments to massively increase safe and legal routes, for example, by resettling at least 10% of Syria’s most vulnerable refugees – 480,000 people – from countries like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan by the end of 2016. So far, only 178,195 places have been offered globally, and many have yet to be filled. Worldwide, we estimate that 1.38 million of the world’s refugees – 19.5 million and growing – will need resettlement by the end of 2017.

WHAT CAN I DO?
Speak out for refugees’ rights – take our pledge:

Living among ruins:
Over 200 people took part in an action to show solidarity with the people of Syria on the 5th anniversary of the beginning of the Syrian revolution. Bern, Switzerland, 12 March 2016

© Philippe Lionnet
BRINGING THE HORRORS OF WAR HOME: SYRIA 360°

How media activists are shining a light on war crimes.
Citizen journalists also rush in. In the aftermath of a bombing, while the Syrian Civil Defence volunteers head to the scene to help with medical care, search for life in the rubble or to drive fire engines, media activists work to document the devastation.

A new virtual reality project is bringing the work of Syrian media activists to the attention of the world, through the power of 360° photography. In partnership with Lamba Media Production, we’re working to empower and train Syrian media activists who document the devastation wrought by war and the human resilience in the face of it all.

These days, Syria is just about the most dangerous place in the world. Yet when bombs rain down from the skies, Syrian Civil Defence volunteers – unarmed men and women – risk their lives to save others, no matter what side of the conflict they’re on. In a previous life, when public emergency services still existed, they were ordinary citizens – teachers, engineers, carpenters, students. Now their bravery provides hope in a place where there is little else. It’s safe to say that their courage is truly remarkable.
THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY

Photographs of bombings help to record possible war crimes and human rights abuses in Syria and bring us one small step closer to holding the perpetrators of these atrocities to account.

As part of the new project we’re providing equipment and training to Syrian media activists using the latest photographic equipment, allowing them to capture high-quality 360° images with the touch of a button, and ensuring that their work is seen by the rest of the world.

The images live on 360syria.com, with narration by Razan Ghazzawi – a prominent Syrian blogger and activist. The site is built using “WebVR” – a pioneering new technology which brings virtual reality to any internet-connected device via your browser, with no need to download an app.

In the UK, street fundraisers, school speakers, volunteers and local groups are using virtual reality viewers to give the public an immersive experience of the apocalyptic scenes.

We want these images to provide some hope in what is a seemingly hopeless situation. In the most dangerous country in the world, despite all the odds, there are people continuing to make ends meet, to survive, to thrive. If they haven’t given up hope for a solution, then the international community must not either.
360° scenes of destruction in Aleppo, Syria.
Letter to a young activist in prison.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, activist Fred Bauma has been labelled a “terrorist” and accused of planning to violently overthrow the government. His “crime”? Organizing an event that encouraged young people to hold the regime to account. There is no viable evidence against him. If convicted, he faces the death penalty.

Fred’s close friend Micheline Mwendike has been writing to him in prison. Here, we publish extracts from her letters.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

This difficult affair has lasted a year now but the passage of time has affected neither my convictions nor the commitment that I share with you and with all the other activists. You have passed your strength of resistance on to me and thousands of young people around the world. The anguish of knowing you are in prison for having tried to be a good citizen only gives me greater strength to confront the injustices that you have been forced to symbolize. Your courage is exceptional for you are today walking the path of death and yet you do not give up.

That phrase you sent me from your cell finally reached me: “If you can no longer walk, then crawl. But at all costs keep moving forward!” I would never have imagined that speaking up for what you believe would lead to prison. While those who lead armed groups that have killed and continue to kill our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, are rewarded with political posts and military ranks.

That a state, our state, has become so oppressive towards us, its own youth is unbelievable.
Fred Bauma is one of two human rights activists who have been held in detention in the DRC following their arrest after organizing mobilizations in March 2015.

Fred and Micheline in happier times, at a humanitarian village in Goma, DRC.

How wonderful our dreams used to be! The environment, health, entrepreneurship, changing the system, I don’t think like this anymore. With you in prison, I only dream of your freedom. Although forced upon you, your sacrifice means a lot. Your imprisonment has given deep meaning to our history. It reveals the animosity of the current ruling class... Those leading our institutions have not understood that the generation of “president-for-life” has grown old and that democracy is now the order of the day. The constitution is our guide.

Your imprisonment has loosened tongues: questions about changing the constitution are always in the news, and you are the eternal scapegoat being used by those who are for and against democracy. (…)

After your imprisonment, other young people from our movement have been arrested. I have realized that we are being targeted by those keeping you in prison, they want to destroy us. They want to discourage the youth from determining our country’s future. Day after day, they take bad decisions for us and, unfortunately, for themselves. (…)

They use our country’s institutions such as the media for their own interests, and mobilize the people against us. The consequences are serious, and many like you are now in prison without having done anything wrong.

Your imprisonment has also taught me that we are not alone. That the youth of the Congo and the entire world are with us.

My dear friend, you should know that, in my eyes, you are a free man even though you are in prison. Promise me that, even there, you will fight for your survival. The struggle seems hard and long. Always take care of yourself. Don’t accept death physically, intellectually or morally.

I give you my support, you can count on me. I am praying for you and for our struggle.

A patriotic hug.

See you soon!

Micheline Mwendike
In just one year, more than 3,200 civilians have been killed in Yemen, including at least 700 children. On 25 March 2015, coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia launched airstrikes against the Huthi armed group. In the process, they worsened an already dire situation for millions of civilians. Here, the photos of British-Yemeni journalist Rawan Shaif tell a story of the 10 months he spent in Yemen, and the human cost of the conflict.
Homes, schools, markets and mosques. These are places of work, play, rest and daily life. Yet in Yemen, these places have been rained upon by thousands of airstrikes over the last year. Some attacks appear to have deliberately targeted civilians.

What is certain is that the coalition’s use of cluster bombs – by their very nature indiscriminate – has disproportionately harmed civilians. Cluster bombs are banned under international law and release dozens – sometimes hundreds – of small “bomblets”, some of which lie unexploded and can cause horrific injuries long after the initial attack.

As a result of the relentless airstrikes, over 2.4 million people have fled their homes in the past year.

Smoke blends into the clouds in the capital, Sana’a, as a coalition airstrike hits the densely populated residential area of Hadda, where the Huthi/Saleh-aligned Central Security Forces are based. 4 January 2016

The sensor from a cluster bomb. The Saudi Arabia-led coalition has used cluster bombs multiple times on civilian areas.

Abdo Al-Malehi finds a Qur’an in the remains of his abandoned home in Attan, Sana’a. Refusing to leave his home behind, he says, “Where else can we run to and how long can we run for?” July 2015
Temperatures drop as the sun sets over the IDP camps in Amran. People there live with hunger and cold, selling their blankets for food and their food for blankets. The majority of IDPs in the camp have fled from Sa’dā.

Um Abdulrahman carries her 10-month-old son. They have been forced to flee their home in Sa’dā governorate, a Huthi stronghold in the north of the country, due to coalition airstrikes. They now live in a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in neighbouring Amran. 20 February 2016.

A worker takes a cigarette break as he rummages through the debris of the bombed Sana’a home of Judge Yahya Al-Roubaid. Nine members of Yahya’s family were killed in the coalition airstrike on 25 January 2016.
The remains of vegetable merchant Haifthallah Al-Aynis’ home in the Old City of Sana’a, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Haifthallah, his wife and their children were killed by a coalition airstrike in September 2015 whilst eating their last meal of the day.

“Families have been separated, isolated and forced to move from their homes,” explains Rawan Shaif. “Ten months on, more people are being dragged from beneath the rubble, mothers are in agony over the death of their sons.” A staggering 83% of Yemenis now rely on some form of humanitarian assistance in order to survive.

One man whose neighbourhood was hit and who lost 49 neighbours told Rawan, “Although we now have nowhere to live, we are lucky we are still alive.” Rawan reflects on this attitude. “Against all odds, Yemenis across the country have shown resilience and renewed strength despite tragic hardship.”

All images © Rawan Shaif
Connection is a basic human need. But North Koreans are unable to freely access information and make connections, including phone calls to family and friends outside the country.

Your parents are missing. You live in a country with limited access to information and have no way of finding out where they are.

When state agents pay you a sudden visit a month later to tell you that your parents are dead, having been shot down trying to escape the country, it’s incredibly hard to verify the information.

To speak to your parents, you will have to travel hundreds of kilometres to the border in order to make an international phone call using a smuggled phone, illegally tapping into foreign phone networks. You will traverse mountains on foot in order to circumvent restricted areas, under the cover of night. There is intense surveillance, and at every moment, you will run the risk of getting caught by the authorities.

An outrageous predicament in our ultra-connected world? This is a modern-day scenario for North Koreans, who face significant risks attempting to establish any connection outside the isolated country. But North Koreans must be free to talk.

FOUR WAYS NORTH KOREA restricts access to outside information

1. The vast majority of North Koreans have no access to the internet as we know it. The domestic intranet, known as the kwangmyong, only allows access to domestic websites and email.

2. Only foreigners are able to obtain SIM cards at Pyongyang airport to make international phone calls and access the global internet.

3. North Korea’s State Security Department has a branch – “Bureau 27”– that specializes in covert intelligence, including using sophisticated equipment to detect mobile phone frequencies.

4. North Koreans caught using smuggled mobile phones to call out of the country risk being sent to political prison camps or other detention facilities.


Choi Ji-woo was unable to get in touch with her father when he fled North Korea, due to restrictions on communications.
RUNNING AGAINST THE FLOW

Peruvian journalist Graciela Tiburcio Loayza, aged 23, on her journey towards becoming an Amnesty activist.

What made you want to become an activist?
You could say my activism started when I was a child. Despite my insecurities, I pointed out injustices whenever I saw them. A few years ago, I had to move to one of the poorest districts of Lima. Moving there not only changed my view of the world, it also changed the way people saw me.

How did you first hear about Amnesty?
One day [while at university], I saw a flyer with information about a marathon called “Run against the Flow”. In the corner was an image of a candle surrounded by wire. That is when I discovered Amnesty International.

What impact has Amnesty had on your activism?
The first activity I attended was a flashmob for the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia. It was unforgettable. I met people who shared the same ideals as me and for the first time I felt I could identify with others and I felt safe. From that moment I decided I would no longer feel afraid to be outspoken. I promised myself that my voice would speak for all the other voices that were silenced.

What challenges have you faced as an activist?
While campaigning for abortion rights as part of Amnesty’s My Body My Rights campaign, I heard people shout: “I wish your mother had aborted you”. Some of my friends were even threatened with rape. Fortunately, my family has always supported my activism, even when it was difficult for them to understand certain issues, like gay marriage.

What’s your message for budding activists?
Our commitment and work is not in vain. It doesn’t matter how many times you fall, you can always start again. You will always have people beside you giving you strength and fighting by your side.

FIND OUT MORE:
Read Graciela’s blog: http://bit.ly/1RhtTUw

© Amnesty International
Hundreds of thousands of you joined us in standing up for sexual and reproductive rights through Amnesty’s My Body My Rights campaign. Launched in 2014, the campaign is founded on the principle that we all – women and men – have the right to make decisions about our health, body, sexuality and reproductive lives without fear or force.

Here are nine ways that you defended those rights and helped break down barriers for women and girls around the world.

1. **OVER A QUARTER OF A MILLION OF YOU ACTED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE’S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.**
   An incredible 280,000 of you from over 165 countries called on your governments to ensure young people’s right to access contraception and sexual health services. In April 2014, Amnesty’s Secretary General Salil Shetty handed your signatures to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon ahead of the UN Commission on Population and Development in New York, USA.

2. **NEPAL’S GOVERNMENT FINALLY RECOGNIZED UTERINE PROLAPSE AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE.**
   Following sustained lobbying by local women’s rights activists, with support from Amnesty, Nepal’s government included the prevention of uterine prolapse, a debilitating condition that can affect women during pregnancy, as part of their Human Rights action plan in July 2014.
   This announcement by the government came shortly after we handed them our petition, signed by more than 100,000 of you.
3. **YOU HELPED STOP SPAIN FROM TURNING BACK THE CLOCK ON ABORTION.**

When Spain moved to restrict access to abortion in December 2013, 133,400 of you stood up in protest over the subsequent months. In September 2014, the government dropped the proposed changes.

4. **YOUR SUPPORT HELPED CONVINCE GOVERNMENTS TO CHALLENGE EL SALVADOR’S ABORTION BAN.**

Intense campaigning, particularly in September 2014 around the launch of our new research on the effects of the total abortion ban in El Salvador, spurred several governments to action. The following month, Australia, Czech Republic, Iceland, Slovenia and Spain spoke at the UN, strongly urging El Salvador to repeal the ban. The impact of the ban includes prison sentences of more than 40 years for women who suffer stillbirths.

5. **YOUR SIGNATURES COMPELLED MINISTERS IN TUNISIA TO PROMISE TO PROTECT SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE.**

Some 198,000 of you called on Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to protect women and girls who have survived rape and other sexual violence. When we presented your signatures to the Tunisian government in November 2014, the Secretary of State for Women and Family Affairs and the Minister of Health both pledged to protect survivors of sexual violence – an unprecedented public commitment.

6. **EL SALVADOR FREED GUADALUPE.**

Thanks to the hard work of dedicated activists in El Salvador, Carmen Guadalupe Vasquez was finally pardoned and walked free from prison in February 2015. She was jailed for 30 years in 2007 on trumped-up murder charges after suffering a miscarriage when she was 18. She was suspected of having an abortion, which is banned in all cases in El Salvador. In April 2015, we handed over a petition demanding an end to El Salvador’s abortion ban signed by an incredible 300,000 of you.

7. **YOU HELPED CONVINCE THE IRISH PUBLIC THAT WOMEN WHO NEED ABORTIONS ARE NOT CRIMINALS.**

Hundreds of thousands of you spread our message: She is #notacriminal for needing an abortion. Together, we sparked debate within Ireland, shifting public opinion and attracting the support of health professionals and celebrities. With your help, we are getting closer to tipping the balance on abortion in Ireland, bolstering local calls for a change to the constitution that should finally bring an end to Ireland’s regressive abortion law.

8. **YOUR SUPPORT HELPED US PERSUADE BURKINA FASO TO TAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE.**

In December 2015, Burkina Faso adopted a national strategy and a three-year action plan to prevent and eliminate child marriage, which affects more than half of all girls in the country. Much more work needs to be done, but this is a first step towards eradicating this practice once and for all. The strategy and plan followed public commitments from ministers and the traditional king to support My Body My Rights by addressing the obstacles that women and girls face when trying to access sexual and reproductive health services and information.

9. **YOU BROKE THE SILENCE AROUND SEX, RELATIONSHIPS AND REPRODUCTION.**

More than 100,000 young people took the lead in starting conversations about traditionally taboo subjects like sexual harassment in schools, rape, child marriage and sexuality. Thanks to educational materials produced by Amnesty and training workshops developed through My Body My Rights, thousands challenged discriminatory attitudes and gender-based violence. Young people did this through workshops, video, theatre, debates, poetry, song and dance. In rural Zimbabwe, they opened empowerment centres in schools as a safe space for young girls to talk about sex, relationships and pregnancy.
‘TO DENY PEOPLE THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS IS TO CHALLENGE THEIR VERY HUMANITY.’

Nelson Mandela