



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Staff Wellbeing Review



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## STATEMENT FROM THE ASSESSMENT TEAM

Dear Staff and Leadership Of Amnesty International,

It has been our privilege to conduct this Staff Wellbeing Review for Amnesty International. Every member of the assessment team strongly believes in the values and rights that Amnesty strives to uphold and protect around the world. Thank you for entrusting us with this task and for frankly sharing your experiences and reflections on how Amnesty can better protect and promote the wellbeing and rights of its own employees.

During the course of speaking at length with dozens of Amnesty employees, reviewing your survey responses, and undertaking additional research, all of us on the assessment team found ourselves moved and inspired by your passion for your work and your perseverance in the face of hardship and injustice.

It is widely acknowledged that the restructuring efforts in recent years, however effective they may have been on reshaping and repositioning Amnesty as a human rights organisation, have also caused significant disruption within the organisation and taken a considerable toll with regards to staff wellbeing. The Global Transition Programme has created an organisational landscape and culture within Amnesty where there is significant room for improvements to be made with regards to promoting and protecting staff wellbeing.

Reading this report may be uncomfortable and challenging for many of you. It may stir strong emotions. You might find yourself feeling overwhelmed, angry, vindicated, or threatened. Our findings and recommendations, as well as the quotes we have included, are likely to stir debate and dialogue. This is to be expected, perhaps even welcomed. In these situations, an uncomfortable challenge can introduce new perspectives and possibilities for growth and change. Debate and dialogue can clarify priorities and spur progress.

It is our sincere hope that this review report and other input we have been able to gather and provide during this process will assist you in planning and implementing changes to better support employee wellbeing, and that you will approach this task with a genuine desire for restoration, reconnection, and renewal for staff at all levels.

After all, in the words of one employee, we all believe that, “now more than ever, in the current global context, we need a strong Amnesty International.” The organisation you work for and the work it accomplishes is of immense value. So are its staff members, each and every one.

All the best,  
Kavita, Lisa, and Sébastien

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The unexpected losses of beloved Amnesty International’s International Secretariat colleagues, Gaëtan Mootoo and Rosalind McGregor served as an impetus for this comprehensive review of staff wellbeing, which explored two questions:

1. What are the major lessons that Amnesty International can learn from these tragic incidents?
2. What additional measures, if any, would you recommend to ensure adequate support to our staff and their wellbeing, including those experiencing exceptional levels of stress?

Amnesty International is a leader in the human rights field, and Amnesty’s ambitious human rights mission naturally carries with it considerable and unusual pressures. In addition, the recent Global Transition Programme (GTP) exacerbated already existing tensions by creating significant disruptions to team structures and resulted in further divisions between staff and leadership at many levels.

Amnesty’s wish to better support the wellbeing of staff who work so hard for the organisation is laudable. There are some inspiring examples from within Amnesty of managers supporting the needs of their staff. In general, however, Amnesty’s approach to supporting staff wellbeing has been reactive, unsystematic, and insufficient.

Key findings of the International Secretariat’s staff wellbeing review include:

*Working at Amnesty is not just a job:* Most staff believe in Amnesty’s mission very deeply and care a great deal about the work. Many describe their work as a vocation or life cause, and it provides them with a compelling sense of purpose and meaning.

*Working at Amnesty often places staff under exceptional stress:* Although Amnesty employs many talented and caring individuals, Amnesty as a working environment is often described as “toxic.” The top five reported sources of stress all involved workload and management culture, and a significant proportion of staff (39%) reported that they have developed mental or physical health issues as the direct result of working at Amnesty. Further, many roles at Amnesty hold significant risk of experiencing secondary stress or vicarious trauma.

*In general, Amnesty’s efforts to support staff wellbeing have been ad hoc, reactive and piecemeal:* Amnesty has made some nascent attempts to explore wellbeing and has engaged a range of staff care providers for counselling-related services. On balance, however, these initiatives are not meeting the needs of most staff, and the organisation lacks a comprehensive, well-coordinated, and integrated approach to supporting staff wellbeing.

*Organisational culture and management failures are the root cause of most staff wellbeing issues:* The lion’s share of current staff wellbeing issues at Amnesty are not isolated to staff members

routine exposure to suffering, abuse, and trauma. Instead, the adversarial culture of the workplace, failures in management and *People & Organisational Development* (People and OD, formerly called ODHR) functioning, and pressures related to workload are the most significant contributors to current wellbeing challenges.

*People and OD has largely failed in recent years to fulfil its key roles as an impartial advisor to staff and the guardian of workplace standards:* People and OD as a system is not functioning as effectively as it should. While there are many professional, hard-working and dedicated staff in this department, the overall system is broken. For example, People and OD often fails to manage information to standard, provide accurate and timely information, or manage their role in the grievance processes effectively.

Collectively, the key findings suggest multiple recommendations for better supporting the wellbeing of staff, including:

1. *Work to repair ruptures and foster a sense of safety and trust among senior leadership, the organisation, and staff:* Focused and expert guidance must be made available at every level—senior leadership, staff, and the organisation as-a-whole—to acknowledge, understand, and transform the current divisive dynamics.
2. *Work to counter a culture of criticism and blame by fostering a development culture:* Seek out and adopt a framework (such as the Deliberately Developmental Organisation) to transform the current cycles of indignation and blame.
3. *Implement a comprehensive and systematic approach to staff wellbeing:* Create a Wellbeing Task Force with authority and SLT representation to develop a staff policy on staff wellbeing, clarify and agree upon priorities, and oversee implementation.
4. *Improve support for issues related to stress:* Provide more and better counselling access, improve crisis and critical incident response protocols, and further educate managers and staff about resilience and supporting others in distress.
5. *Enlist, equip, and better support managers to improve wellbeing:* Seek to help managers improve their relational and communication skills, emotional intelligence, and conflict management skills. Encourage managers to lead by example in terms of prioritizing wellbeing, and support them in their management efforts with structural adjustments to workloads.
6. *Review and professionalize People and OD.* Review People and OD to help address the current disconnects between staff and People and OD. Improve performance management policies, professional behaviour and tone, and instil a culture of mutual feedback. Improve the grievance process, and strengthen assessment and recruitment practices.

Following discussion of the key findings, some basic guidance for the Sections - who would greatly benefit from their own wellbeing review - is offered as well as a recommended timeline for moving the recommendations forward. These are grouped into 4 stages that Amnesty can move through in the coming months to respond to emergent needs and ensure a better wellbeing strategy that meets the needs of a global workforce.

## OVERVIEW

Gaëtan Mootoo was a highly esteemed colleague at Amnesty International's International Secretariat (Amnesty). His outstanding work and humane nature touched the lives of many, and his death was shocking and devastating to his family and to his colleagues, former and current. After over 30 years at Amnesty, he took his life in his office in Amnesty's French Section in Paris during the night of May 25, 2018. He left a note that, among other things, made it clear that work pressures played a major part in his decision to end his life.<sup>1</sup>

On July 1, 2018, Rosalind McGregor, a highly regarded and high-performing intern hired by the Swiss Section and seconded to the IS, took her own life at her family's home in London. An independent review into the circumstances surrounding her death has determined that there is no evidence that work pressure or distressing organisational dynamics at Amnesty played a role in her decision.<sup>2</sup>

Gaëtan's and Roz's decision to take their own lives made it clear that staff wellbeing must become a priority at Amnesty so that staff in distress are supported to the greatest extent possible. Their unexpected deaths served as an impetus for this review of staff wellbeing.

## Purpose

Following the news of Gaëtan and Roz's deaths, Amnesty commissioned an external investigation into the circumstances surrounding these events. Commissioned by the Secretary General with the full endorsement of the International Board and in consultation with Amnesty France, the investigation sought to answer the following questions:

- A. Did Amnesty International (International Secretariat) discharge its duty of care to Gaëtan Mootoo?
- B. What are the major lessons that Amnesty International can learn from this tragic incident?
- C. What additional measures, if any, would you recommend to ensure adequate support to our staff and their wellbeing, including those experiencing exceptional levels of stress?

Amnesty appointed James Laddie, QC and The KonTerra Group (KonTerra) to collaboratively, yet independently, answer these questions. In consultation among Amnesty, Mr. Laddie, and KonTerra, it was agreed that Mr. Laddie, with his legal expertise, was best positioned to answer Part A. KonTerra, with its staff care expertise was best positioned to answer Part C and both Mr. Laddie and KonTerra would answer Part B as there are major lessons to be learned from both a legal and staff wellbeing perspective. Mr. Laddie submitted his report on October 31, 2018. KonTerra has reviewed his report and references it throughout this review.

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<sup>1</sup> Review Into the Death of Gaëtan Mootoo by James Laddie QC, point 5.

<sup>2</sup> Rosalind McGregor Review, by Kavita Avula & Romain Félix



## The Oversight Committee

The Oversight Committee appointed to support this review included:

- Three Section directors: Kate Allen of Amnesty UK, Seydi Gassama of Amnesty Senegal, and Manon Schick of Amnesty Switzerland
- One Senior Leadership Team (SLT) member: Richard Eastmond
- Regional Coordinator of Unite: Alan Scott

The Oversight Committee oriented The KonTerra Group team to the task and was consulted in addressing issues that came up during the course of the review. For example, when it became clear that many former staff interviewed were experiencing considerable distress as they recounted their experiences, KonTerra informed the Oversight Committee who agreed to make counselling resources available to former staff commensurate to those available to current staff (i.e. five sessions provided by a staff care provider and covered by the organisation). The Oversight Committee also granted KonTerra's request to triple the page limit of this report from 20 to 60 pages so that the writers could adequately answer the questions they were tasked with answering.

## The Assessment Team

The Assessment Team was led by Kavita Avula, Psy.D., Lead Consulting Psychologist for the KonTerra Group, who also led the Rosalind McGregor Review. The other psychologists on the team included Lisa McKay, M.Sc. M.A., and Sébastien Galland, M.Sc. M.B.A. Collectively and individually, the team has extensive experience in living and working abroad, and providing psychological support and consultation services to humanitarian organisations, NGOs, universities, journalists, and other global organisations. The assessment team resides in three different regions of the world—North America, the South Pacific, and Europe—and represent three cultural backgrounds.

Licensed as a clinical psychologist for 15 years, Dr. Avula has extensive experience with international and cross-cultural psychology, suicide, trauma, crisis and critical incident response and has consulted widely with senior leaders across many organisations in the humanitarian sector and beyond.

Lisa McKay's training is in forensic psychology. She has since specialized in trauma and resilience, working mostly with humanitarian and journalism agencies during the past 15 years. She has lived in eight countries and is currently based in Vanuatu.

Sébastien Galland's training is in engineering, management and organisational psychology. For more than a decade, he has served various NGOs on humanitarian and development missions in

developing countries. His work focuses on training and providing coaching and psychological support to NGO staff. He is based in France.

The KonTerra Group is a private consulting firm and global staff care expert that offers a wide range of comprehensive staff care and resilience services to more than five dozen client organisations in the humanitarian sector around the world.

## Methodology

This review is comprised of five components:

1. All staff electronic survey
2. Semi-structured interviews
3. Open door email invitation
4. Review of current practices, procedures and policies
5. Integration of results of investigations by the French authorities, Amnesty International France, and James Laddie's Review on duty of care to Gaëtan Mootoo

### All Staff Electronic Survey

A quantitative survey was designed in consultation with the Oversight Committee, and opened to all 680 International Secretariat staff. Staff members from every region participated, even if minimally.

Some data from the survey is included in the body of the report and the full results (except for open-ended responses, as many of these contained personally identifiable information) are included in Appendix A.

Some key demographic information regarding staff who completed this survey is as follows:

- 475 staff participated in the online survey (70% of Amnesty staff)
- Of those, 19% had been working at Amnesty for less than a year. 81% had been working with Amnesty for more than one year, including 32% for more than 5 years.
- 72% of respondents were female.
- 61% were currently based in Europe.
- 31% reported that their job responsibilities included supervising other staff.

### Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview format was used (see Appendix B). Participants were asked to discuss Amnesty's current approach to staff wellbeing, major gaps they perceived in this approach, how managers are (or are not) role models for wellbeing, and their key recommendations to Amnesty as they seek to better protect and promote staff wellbeing. While there were a set of guiding questions, interviewees also had the space to share what they felt would be most useful in relation to staff wellbeing.

Individuals to be interviewed were initially selected based on recommendations by the Oversight Committee who worked to find a selective sampling of staff. These initial interviewees recommended additional staff for interviews. Still other staff “self-referred”—contacting the Assessment Team via the Open Door Email channel. The Assessment Team attempted to interview as many of those who expressed interest as possible prior to the deadline for input. Throughout this report many quotes from staff are included. Unless otherwise noted, these quotes were provided during the interviews or via email.

The Assessment Team conducted close to 100 hours of interviews with 49 individuals, five groups including 22 participants, and two dyads. In total, 75 individuals were interviewed, and nine individuals were interviewed more than once. While 60 minutes was the interview time envisioned, many individuals interviewed for well over an hour due to the Assessment Team’s need to gather additional information or due to the individual’s level of distress and the interviewer’s concern for their wellbeing. Because some individuals interviewed experienced significant distress while recounting their experiences, the Assessment Team advocated for access to counselling to be made to all of those interviewed, including former staff.

The individual interview participants consisted of 27 women and 22 men, the dyads included four women, and the groups consisted of 17 women and five men. In total, 48 women and 27 men were interviewed. Of those interviewed, 60 are current staff, 13 are former staff, and two are external consultants. Interviewees are or were based in the following countries at the time they worked for Amnesty: Belgium, England, France, Greece, Hong-Kong, Israel, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Myanmar, Peru, Poland, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland, and the USA.

### **Open Door Emails**

Former and current staff were invited to participate in the review by providing information to the Assessment Team via email. Over 20 individuals opted to share documents via this channel and more than half of these individuals subsequently participated in an interview.

### **Document Review**

The Assessment Team reviewed policies and programs related to staff wellness—including Employee Engagement Survey results, the Behaviors Framework, various stress audit reports, assessment reports related to the GTP process, staff benefits documents, and others. (A list of the major documents reviewed can be found in Appendix C.)

While the interviews and email input offered an opportunity for in-depth exploration of issues, the survey offered greater anonymity and a much wider sampling of staff. Collectively, the document review, interviews, email input, and online survey inform the findings and recommendations outlined in this report. Where appropriate, results from other studies and assessments (such as employee engagement surveys) are also referenced. These complementary sources of information collectively provide robust data and a strong basis for the recommendations made.

## INTRODUCTION

Amnesty International is a leader in the human rights field, and Amnesty's ambitious human rights mission naturally carries with it considerable pressures.

Its leadership and staff are focused on the overwhelming and often distressing task of researching and reporting on serious human rights abuses around the world in the context of shrinking humanitarian resources. Almost unavoidably, many Amnesty staff members will find themselves impacted by exposure to accounts of severe deprivation, violation, and trauma during the course of their duties. Further, as Amnesty has undergone the restructuring process associated with the Global Transition Programme (GTP) in recent years, staff have experienced organisational change and turmoil and those living regionally are now more often finding themselves directly impacted by civil unrest and conflict.

Even prior to the GTP, Amnesty International had a reputation for doing great work, but being a hard place to work. Across many interviews the word "toxic" was used to describe the Amnesty work culture as far back as the 1990's. So were the phrases "adversarial," "lack of trust," and "bullying".

If tensions were high prior to the GTP, they were exacerbated significantly by the way in which the plan was rolled out. This is unfortunate because many staff agreed with the vision for decentralization and the values and aims underpinning the process. The rationale to live and work closer to the human rights abuses being investigated and reported on made sense to the vast majority of staff. However, the seemingly dead-end internal consultation loops, the way the plan was formally announced, and the perceived unreasonable pace and force with which the plan was implemented caused widespread disruption and distress and sowed many seeds of confusion, grief, and resentment.

*"I believe that now more than ever, in the current global context, we need a strong Amnesty International. Many staff at Amnesty have found themselves conflicted in recent years. We have been treated badly, and we want justice and accountability for that, but we also don't want to damage the organisation's reputation and undermine the organisation's work. So many people care so deeply about this organisation and its work, and many committed individuals have remained silent and essentially put up with mistreatment and misconduct because of this tension."*

Of course, every organisation has the right to restructure. Organisational leadership must sometimes make contentious or unpopular decisions for the sake of organisational efficiency, relevance, and perhaps even survival. When such momentous decisions have to be made, however, it is imperative that massive organisational changes such as the GTP are informed and attended by excellent communication processes and rolled out in a conscientious and thoughtful manner.

*“Frankly, the Secretary General at the time, with support from the international board, pushed forward moving closer to the ground [GTP], at any cost and in a very dogmatic manner. They were insistent on doing it one way and one way only. It was made clear it was going to happen one way or another, and staff wellbeing was not a priority.”*

In many instances and offices, it appears that one or both of these parts of the change management equation were very deficient with regards to the GTP. Most staff still appear to agree with the values that drove the GTP process. However, many staff also feel that consultation was essentially a “tick box exercise,” that their input was not taken into serious consideration, that many changes were rushed, and that communication failures exacerbated and added to pre-existing issues and tensions.

Further, as noted in James Laddie’s recent investigative report, the experience of the GTP created significant disruption to team structure and individual staff member’s roles and locations, exacerbated divisions between staff and leadership at many levels, created a pervasive lack of trust in the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), cemented a defensive “bunker mentality” within the SLT, and saw numerous apparent irregularities unfold in hiring, dis-establishing positions, and renegotiating working arrangements.

There is a widespread and deeply-held perception (especially among staff who have worked for the organisation for more than a couple of years) that staff wellbeing was vastly disregarded and neglected during the GTP process. While some departments and managers did make efforts to promote and protect staff wellbeing, these steps appear to have been one-off, reactive, unsystematic and insufficient. In sum (and to use a political term that many within Amnesty will be familiar with), it seems that Amnesty has largely been operating in a “state of emergency” since the inception of the GTP.

Against this organisational backdrop came recent tragic events—two suicides of Amnesty staff within six weeks of one another in the spring and summer of 2018.

Gaëtan Mootoo, a long-serving and highly esteemed employee of the International Secretariat (IS) took his life in his office in Paris during the night of May 25, 2018. He left a note that made it clear that work pressures played a major part in his decision to end his life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Review Into the Death of Gaëtan Mootoo by James Laddie QC, point 5

And on July 1, 2018, Rosalind McGregor, a highly regarded and high-performing intern hired by the Swiss Section and seconded to the IS, took her own life at her family's home in London. An independent review into the circumstances surrounding her death has determined that there is no evidence that work pressure or distressing organisational dynamics at Amnesty played a role in her decision.<sup>4</sup>

The way that internal and external communications around these events were handled greatly distressed many staff. One staff member put it this way:

“The initial reaction by management to his [Gaëtan’s] death upset many of us a lot. The way they announced it, the way they tried to cover up. The way it seemed that the thing they were most concerned about was communicating the message: ‘Moving Closer to the Ground wasn’t a failure, it didn’t cost a life.’”

*“Gaëtan’s suicide was a wake-up call. The first step to any change process is creating awareness and a sense of urgency. These [the deaths of Gaëtan and Roz] have done that. There is more openness and momentum now around this topic of staff wellbeing than there has ever been before. However, it remains to be seen whether that momentum and energy translates into effective practice, not just policy.”*

Collectively, these events led to the vision and impetus for this wellbeing review. The decision to undertake such a focused review as an extension of the investigation into the circumstances surrounding Gaëtan’s death, signals Amnesty’s willingness to bring to bear some of the considerable energy and resources that the organisation provides in the form of investigating and defending human rights abuses around the world to a related imperative: better caring for its own staff.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Working at Amnesty is not just a job

Love for the job is a thread that unifies many staff who work (and have previously worked) for Amnesty. In fact, this dynamic sets Amnesty staff apart—in today’s workforce it is unusual to hold such passion for work.

*“We love Amnesty, it’s in our blood.”*

*“It’s been my life.”*

Most current and former staff believe in Amnesty’s mission very deeply and care a great deal about the work. A significant number of staff have worked for Amnesty for many years largely because they love the work they do. Many staff describe their work at Amnesty as a vocation or life cause, and it provides them with a compelling and important sense of purpose and meaning.

<sup>4</sup>Rosalind McGregor Review, by Kavita Avula & Romain Félix

Many who had to leave during the re-structuring process have deeply mourned the loss of being part of such an important movement. For some, the end of their tenure with Amnesty created a void that has proven difficult to fill. One interviewee put it this way, “I’m still doing the job in my head. I’m still doing the job, even though I’m not there anymore.”

In relation to this, two important findings emerged related to staff wellbeing.

First, there is a widespread perception among staff that some members of the SLT, and some managers, do not fully appreciate this dynamic (how motivated and committed many staff are) but simultaneously tend to use Amnesty’s mission as a reason *not* to attend to staff concerns under the guise that staff “should be grateful for being able to work at Amnesty.”

*“A ‘martyrdom culture’ is present, which encourages people to sacrifice their own wellbeing because of the critical importance of the work.”*

Second, this level of attachment to the movement has functioned as a double-edged sword in relation to staff wellbeing. The level of passion many people feel for their work has made it difficult for individuals to set healthy boundaries in relation to their work. And a significant number of staff do not want (or feel unable) to leave Amnesty as an employer—even in the face of discrimination, bullying, or other internal abuses of power—which has tacitly condoned these behaviours. Some staff are making decisions that undermine their overall wellbeing in order to remain at a job that they love and believe in so much.

*“I’ll do just about anything to support the organisation.”*

## Working at Amnesty often places staff under exceptional stress

Many Amnesty staff do very difficult jobs that expose them to some of the toughest imaginable circumstances. The work of monitoring and reporting on human rights abuses routinely requires staff to interview survivors and review distressing stories and footage of violence, killings, and torture. These are well-known risk factors for experiencing secondary stress and vicarious trauma.<sup>5</sup> While not

*“I was good at my job but as the months and years went on I started to get burnt out. Spending every day seeing the worst people can do to people takes a real toll. I started to have nightmares about being unsafe, or being tortured or killed.”*

*“It’s very challenging to read what one human being can do to another. Nobody in my whole career has ever asked, are you okay reading this stuff?”*

<sup>5</sup> Dubberley, S., Griffin, E., Bal, H.M.: Making secondary trauma a primary issue: a study of eyewitness media and vicarious trauma on the digital frontline (2015). Research report by Eyewitness Media Hub. Available online at: <http://eyewitnessmediahub.com/research/vicarious-trauma>.

the focus of this review, it is important to note that some of the smaller and underfunded Sections staff also report being under exceptional stress with a subset of staff contending with death threats and feeling that they don't have the resources to put additional security measures in place.

To a certain extent, experiencing some secondary stress is an occupational hazard of working for Amnesty. These sorts of stressors are “exceptional” in the sense that they are unusual: few occupations carry this particular constellation of inherent stressors. However, they are not the only types of “exceptional stress” Amnesty staff have experienced in recent years. In addition to exposure to stories of trauma, many staff have been more directly exposed to the risks and pressures that arise from *living* in high-risk contexts since the start of the GTP.

Furthermore, the organisational environment within Amnesty appears to have been exceptionally stressful in recent years.

Although Amnesty is an organisation that employs many outstanding, talented, caring individuals, many former and current staff describe Amnesty as an environment in which staff do not feel that they are valued, protected, or treated with respect and dignity. The Assessment Team received many reports (from multiple offices and regions) of power misuse, discrimination, targeting, bullying, and other practices which have undermined wellbeing. One current staff member described Amnesty as “a toxic culture of secrecy and mistrust—a place where there are back-room deals.” Numerous other staff provided similar descriptions. Even if you leave aside the unusual occupational stressors that attend exposure to details of human rights violations, this sort of organisational environment has exposed many staff to exceptional levels of stress in recent years.

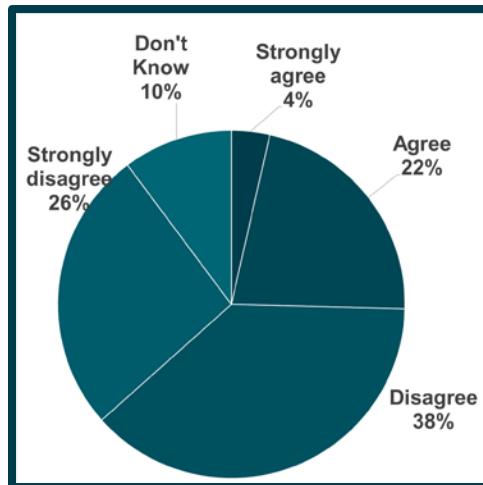
*“What I find to be the worst thing is difficult to pin down. It has to do with the atmosphere and working culture in the organisation that is very isolating. I have never before worked in a place where everyone works so alone, where people barely talk to each other, where you can't expect to get help and support from your colleagues. This is not because of individuals – I think people in my team are all sweet and caring people – but it's because of a system where everyone is scared, stressed and overworked and thus can only focus on their own survival”.*

## Staff perception on the impact of the work and the causes of their stress

The Wellbeing Survey results provide some valuable insight into Amnesty staff experiences in this regard. One staff member put it this way: “To me, Amnesty tries very much to ensure our duty of care, but very often it's more a question of ticking a box than really ensuring employees work in good conditions.” In general, as illustrated by the survey data in the figure below, staff do not believe that their wellbeing is a priority for Amnesty's leadership/management.



“My wellbeing is a **priority** for Amnesty’s leadership/management ”



There are some staff who do not report significant stress as a result of working at Amnesty. In the words of one respondent, “To be honest, I don’t really suffer from work stress at all. I love this job.” However, a significant proportion of Amnesty staff (39%) report that they have developed mental or physical health issues as the direct result of working at Amnesty (while 47% said they had not, and 14% weren’t sure.) In the comments that attended this question, the following words or phrases appeared often: stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, exhaustion, headaches, insomnia, back problems, panic attacks, and feeling alone.

*“Gradually, I have been experiencing more and more emotional distress... and am more and more convinced that this is due to the work environment. I have gotten used to dealing with very difficult subject matters both in the field and in the office, but the feeling of not being valued and, worse, being seen as someone who has been here too long, is very difficult to cope with.”*

Those who reported that they had developed health issues were asked to elaborate on *why* they believed they had developed those issues. Of particular interest with regards to the perceived “causes” of these experiences, there were far more reports related to the working conditions (conflict with managers, poor treatment, “bullying” and the like) than accounts related to viewing distressing footage or other sorts of traumatic material.

## What are the five most significant sources of cumulative stress for you as an employee?



This is *not* to say that witnessing or hearing stories of personal tragedy, suffering and devastation is an insignificant stressor for Amnesty staff—in fact, almost 20% of staff report that this issue is one of the top five sources of work-related stress for them. Rather, this heightened focus on working conditions when asked to point to the cause of their difficulties merely highlights the pervasiveness and severity of the workplace culture and management issues that Amnesty is currently grappling with, and the significant negative impact these issues have had on many staff.

*“As I have said many times before, my causes of stress is how I am being treated by Amnesty and not the work I do with victims, defenders or state officials. In that sense, it is much more important for me to ensure that Amnesty take concrete steps at treating its staff fairly rather than having a peer to peer programme or a health check.”*

Pulse Survey (2017)

## Amnesty has been making some efforts to support staff wellbeing

Particularly during the last year or two, Amnesty has been making some specific efforts to support staff wellbeing. Some of these are briefly summarized below.

### **The Wellbeing Committee**

A Wellbeing Committee – a cross section of wellbeing champions including the People and Organisational Development Team - has recently been tasked with strengthening and evolving organisational approaches to wellbeing in the IS. The group describes itself as being in its infancy and its presence is still emerging, however they are aiming to develop a “fair, positive, and supportive internal culture where people are valued and feel that they truly belong” as well as a model of psychological support for Amnesty staff. One of the initial offerings this year was Wellbeing Week, which consisted of a series of talks and wellness sessions in which various support services were highlighted. There is also an intranet (Norwazi) that hosts information about wellbeing events.

### **Provision of counselling**

Amnesty currently has an Employee Assistance Programme and Amnesty IS staff are eligible to have five sessions of counselling provided by a contracted provider covered every year. This resource is advertised as being available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

### **The Leadership Development Program**

Amnesty has been working with leadership development consultants Lara Rabala and Mary Murimi (based in Nairobi, Kenya) since 2014. They have implemented a comprehensive leadership development program focusing on developing transformational leadership and management skills. The program focuses on key areas of leadership competency, including strategic thinking, influencing and negotiation, communication, and emotional intelligence. It involves in-person workshops followed by remote coaching across six months for cohorts of mid to senior level managers. To date, approximately 100 people in the organisational at senior level leadership have gone through these programs.

### **Peer support programme**

This network was initiated by Organisational Services & Human Resources (ODHR now called People and OD) with the aim of having colleagues support peers in distress. The initiative works to provide knowledge, experience, and emotional, social or practical help to colleagues at the IS. People and OD engaged in a selection process and then trained those selected in a three day workshop on how to support colleagues affected by direct or indirect traumatic incidents and also bolster resilience across the whole organisation. The first cohort of peers were trained in November 2017 and the offering launched in January 2018. Staff from Nairobi and London took part in the first pilot training.

### **SafeCall**

An independent external whistleblowing reporting service, this resource is available 24/7 and is designed for staff who are not comfortable making reports internally. Issues that are reportable include corruption, bribery, dishonesty, fraud, harassment, victimization or any other issue that is regarded as unacceptable in the workplace. SafeCall summarizes the content of the call (which can be anonymous) and sends a written report to the designated IS representative.

## Dignity Advisor

Amnesty has recently created a vision for a new role with the working title of Dignity Advisor. The duties of the Dignity Advisor will involve equipping individuals, their managers, key stakeholders and the wider organisation, with the skills to strengthen the resilience of individuals and teams. It is envisioned that the Dignity Advisor will create an internal psychology support service and assist in further efforts to support staff wellbeing at Amnesty.

## In general, Amnesty’s efforts to support staff wellbeing have been ad hoc, reactive, and piecemeal

In advance of any detailed analysis of Amnesty’s efforts to support staff wellbeing, a couple of important points should be acknowledged.

First, every organisation must make tough decisions about how many resources it should devote to supporting staff versus directing their focus and resources outwards, to “accomplishing the work.” No organisation—particularly in the humanitarian and human rights sector—has unlimited resources.

Second, the responsibility for supporting staff wellbeing does not lie completely with “the organisation” as an entity. The onus is on every staff member to help create a working environment that is respectful, caring, and supportive. Individual staff members are responsible, in part, for taking care of themselves. This effort involves making decisions not to work when they are sick, making efforts to take annual leave, and setting some healthy boundaries around their work to enable them to devote some time and attention to personal relationships and other interests.

However, when the work context is inherently stressful and staff face unusual psychological risks as an “occupational hazard,” the organisation itself bears some extra responsibility for taking a comprehensive and proactive approach to supporting staff wellbeing. Proactively caring for staff will, over time, improve productivity and performance and reduce the number of staff who take leave for burnout or other stress-related reasons.

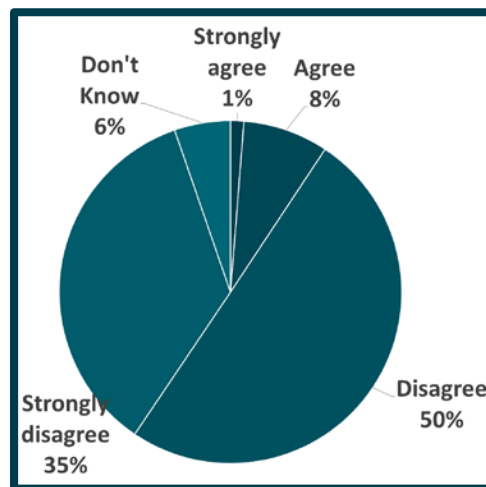
*“I don’t think there is a clear understanding of what wellbeing at work is. We don’t have an integrated strategy. It’s more of an Anglo-Saxon benefit that has not served our multicultural organisation.”*

In this regard, Amnesty has made some nascent attempts to explore wellbeing and has engaged several staff care providers for counselling-related services. Critically, however, the organisation lacks a comprehensive, well-coordinated, and informed approach to supporting staff wellbeing.

For example, the peer support programme was reportedly launched without any proper oversight for tracking how many used the service and whether or not it was helpful.

To date, most efforts to support staff wellbeing have been ad hoc, reactive, and inconsistent, and staff do not feel well equipped with regards to developing personal resilience or supporting the wellbeing of their colleagues.

*“I have been given enough guidance on how to support the wellbeing of my colleagues, including those in psychological distress.”*



After presenting the wellbeing survey results, several major concerns with existing wellbeing support efforts are discussed, before highlighting additional key findings that inform the recommendations for supporting staff wellbeing.

Staff opinions related to the wellbeing services that Amnesty provides

The following staff opinions related to the wellbeing services that Amnesty does provide are of interest:

- Almost 50% of respondents on the wellbeing survey agreed with the statement: *“Amnesty provides a range of support services for employee wellbeing (e.g., access to counselling services).”* 28% of staff disagreed with that statement. 23% of staff replied that they “don’t know”.
- However, only 13% of respondents agreed with the statement: *“There are enough wellbeing resources at Amnesty for employees experiencing psychological distress.”* 47% disagreed with this statement, and 40% didn’t know.
- Almost 20% think that psychosocial support is proactively offered to employees affected by trauma exposure, crises, employee deaths, or other critical incidents. 31% of staff believe such support is *not* proactively offered in these situations, and almost 50% aren’t sure.
- More than a third of staff reported that they didn’t know how to find out information on Amnesty’s health insurance/coverage.

- 46% of staff reported that they don't know how to gain access to emergency services at Amnesty (e.g., evacuation and mental health services following trauma.)
- 35% of staff reported that they didn't know how to access wellbeing resources and support services at Amnesty.

## Counselling resources do not appear to meet the needs of Amnesty staff

Amnesty currently offers up to five sessions of counselling to staff, delivered by a contracted provider, with the possibility of additional sessions if requested by the therapist. This five session limit is lower than the counselling session limit offered by a number of peer organizations that do comparable high pressure work that can expose staff to high stress levels and trauma. The provider that currently offers counselling to Amnesty staff received mixed reviews.

*“I believe there is a help line I would never use, because I don't feel comfortable talking on the phone about something so personal.”*

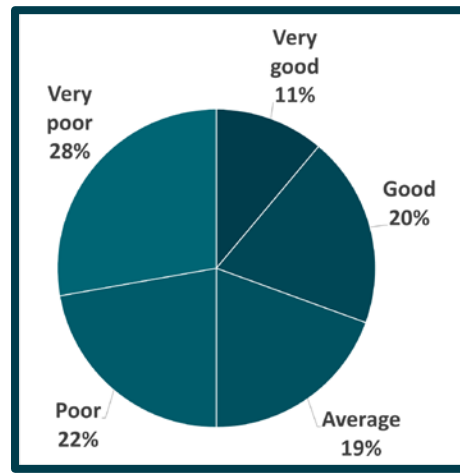
*“There is access to counselling but I didn't know about it but even if I did, I wouldn't have trusted it was confidential.”*

*“I had belly pain, insomnia, could not concentrate and I tried to call the hotline but it didn't work and the chat also was not available as advertised.”*

While the provider reported that 28% of employees accessed the service in 2017, far fewer staff indicated accessing the service in the Amnesty Wellbeing Survey. This discrepancy appears to be due to counting logins to the online platform in the tally of total contacts. This results in doubling the number of contacts when many represented in logins to the online platform may be the same that had a telephone call. It would be useful for the counselling provider to separate actual counselling sessions from the number of logins to a web resource to achieve a more accurate representation of what percentage of staff are utilizing the service.

According to the survey, a vast majority of employees (83%) have not used this service, at least for the last 12 months. Among those who used it, some reported that the sessions they received were beneficial. However, on balance, more staff interviewed reported that, while the counsellors were pleasant, the service did not adequately meet their needs.

If you have accessed the Employee Assistance Programme in the last 12 months, please rate the support you received



Concerns that were communicated during the course of this review related to the provision of counselling include:

1. A number of the counsellors are unfamiliar with the unique nature of the work that Amnesty does and therefore are not well-positioned to support them effectively.
2. Services are based in London and widely referenced as only being offered in English (though this is reportedly not accurate) and, therefore, do not currently meet the needs of a global work force (since few seem to know that the service is available in languages other than English).
3. The service is advertised as available 24/7 but, in practice, does not appear to be available around the clock. Some staff reported that at the point of first contact there was not always a prompt reply.
4. The first session is used as an assessment—with a significant portion of the time devoted to answering questions asked by the therapist. Some staff have reported feeling frustrated because they were expecting to be able to talk about their distress more freely during this initial contact. In addition, with only 5 sessions available, if one is used as an assessment this leaves only 4 for the counselling.
5. Individuals who are assessed to need more than short-term counselling during this initial assessment are told that the service is not a good fit for them and that they should seek longer term treatment elsewhere. Though the provider indicates that they offer a referral under these circumstances, multiple staff have denied that this occurred in their case.

Finally, there is confusion apparent among Amnesty staff over how to access this service. Some staff believed they needed the approval of their manager which is not accurate. And there is the perception, though incorrect, that the service is not free for those who reside outside of the UK.

As such, this type of EAP service and the number of sessions offered do not adequately meet the needs of the organization in light of the pressures Amnesty staff are currently facing and the distress many are experiencing.

### Support efforts have been UK-centric

One of the biggest constraints of the current wellbeing approach is that many of the key support services are UK-centric. Amnesty strives to be a global organisation and have many of its staff living and working “closer to the ground.” As such, its approach to wellbeing must also be global, not affording staff in any one location the vast majority of benefits.

Similarly, Wellbeing Week was a positive initiative, however all the sessions were based in London and on GMT, making them inaccessible to staff elsewhere. As one regional office staff member put it, “I was very pleased to hear about Wellbeing Week but obviously waking up at 3 a.m. does not increase my wellbeing. When I asked if the sessions would be taped, I received no response.”

### There is little data on the application and usefulness of the peer support and other programs

With the exception of the counselling service, there has been little research or follow up on the application or usefulness of the peer support programme or other offerings. In relation to the peer support programme, for example, the training has been described by more than one attendee as not offering significant application and practice. There also does not appear to be any tracking system for documenting how many use this service, what issues staff are coming in with, or any mechanism for evaluating its effectiveness.

In the last month, efforts were taken by Amnesty’s Conflict Advisor to develop Measures of Success for the Peer to Peer Support Group in order to determine whether this service is in fact effective. This type of quality assurance is essential in evaluating wellbeing services and should occur prior to renewing such programs.



## Organisational culture and management failures as the root cause of staff wellbeing issues

The lion's share of current staff wellbeing issues at Amnesty are not isolated to staff members routine exposure to suffering, abuse, and trauma. All forms of data collection indicated that the general culture of the workplace, failures in management and People and OD, and pressures related to workload are the largest contributors to current wellbeing challenges. In the following sections, these issues are explored in more detail.

*“Overall, I don't think the levels of stress & unhappiness are related to difficult work content and trauma, I think it's mostly related to the culture of work and the lack of support.”*

### Workplace culture and the “Us versus Them” dynamic

There appears to be a strong “Us versus Them” dynamic permeating the current organisational culture, and troubling lack of trust for the SLT, and (to a lesser extent) leadership and management in general.

*“Amnesty lives their mission both externally and internally. There's a “them versus us” syndrome that is very evident. It permeates their external work, but it seeps into the workplace too, and creates a very adversarial culture.”*

Mission mirroring is a useful concept described by David Allyn that suggests that

organisations can become embroiled internally in the same conflicts it strives to deal with externally. When it is not recognized for what it is, mission mirroring can take a toll on organisations and often results in anger, gossip, frustration, and accusations of bias and injustice. Heavy-handed responses can further erode morale. Allyn suggests that if mission mirroring is recognized and acknowledged as a normal, predictable dynamics in mission-driven organisations, it can help to forestall its impact on staff.

During his recent investigation, James Laddie also observed this dynamic and offered this reflection:

“There remains a major level of distrust of the SLT, as illustrated by the results of recent Staff Engagement Surveys. A significant number of witnesses spoke of the SLT in terms that indicate that they distrust almost any SLT initiative. One witness said “*They don't give a shit about us*”. There was a preparedness to ascribe malign intentions to the SLT on the basis of instinct rather than evidence. For the avoidance of doubt, I do not agree that the SLT is so careless of the workforce ... but it is of concern that that is the perspective of so many.

Yet a mirror image may be seen in the perspective of senior management. (I am here referring to the SLT and some other senior managers in the organisation.) ... As opposition

to the GTP was articulated, I think that a bunker mentality developed at a very senior level. One of the ways that this manifested itself was in a readiness to dismiss the concerns of longer-serving staff as the gripes of “old-timers”...

...Almost everybody to whom I spoke said that they supported the idea of GTP in principle, but that they disagreed with how it was done. In particular, it was suggested that it was done too quickly, that it should have been phased in over a longer period of time (10 years was a commonly-cited measure) and that it could have been done in a much less “brutal” fashion.”

The wellbeing survey results on this front are also telling:

- 65% of staff think that their wellbeing is *not* a priority for Amnesty’s leadership/management (while only 25% think their wellbeing *is* a priority, and 10% aren’t sure).
- More than 50% of staff *do not* feel valued by Amnesty’s leadership/management (while 38% *do* feel valued, and 11% aren’t sure).

This “Us versus Them” dynamic may not have been initiated by the GTP, but it was certainly exacerbated by it. In addition to the obvious contentions over how the GTP was implemented, and ongoing distress that is directly attributable to the shock-waves of that change process, several specific perceptions were observed that have acted to erode trust and further contribute to this divide.

*“There does not seem to exist a clear idea about what teamwork means (or even what team means) or what coaching and mentoring should be; this organisation seems to know a lot about rights but not very much about humans.”*

Pulse Survey (2017)

First, the perception that SLT members (who often do not come from a human rights background) are largely motivated by somewhat different values than the majority of Amnesty staff.

Second, the perception that SLT members are frequently in conflict with each other. Numerous interviewees and email contributors also talked of the perception that the SLT themselves “don’t get along”—that they are not just in frequent conflict with “staff” but also with each other.

Third, respondents frequently spoke of a “lack of transparency” and “poor communication” around many issues such as the decision-making processes behind the GTP, payouts and expenditures, grievance processes and outcomes, and hiring and redundancy practices and decisions.

It is impossible, of course, to accurately measure how widely and strongly the preceding perceptions are actually held across the bulk of Amnesty staff. However, these sentiments were frequently vocalized during the interview and focus group processes. In and of itself, that suggests that these perceptions are a major cause for concern, pervasive enough to do significant

damage to the organisational culture, and entrenched enough to present a major barrier to the organisation functioning well.

## How “Us versus Them” causes stress and prevents healthy organisational functioning

The “Us versus Them” dynamic that is deeply entrenched at Amnesty is basically the “fight” in the flight-fight-freeze response so characteristic of the human response to a threat to survival. It typically results in a destructive tendency on both sides to blame and villainize the “other” rather than acknowledge one’s own part in any conflict or seek contact or compromise.

Organisationally, it is clear how this has played out at Amnesty. The SLT has tended to blame staff (particularly long-serving staff), and many staff blame senior leadership. There are reports of some senior managers avoiding or dismissing complaints related to bullying or unfair processes. Other senior managers have reportedly dismissed requests for assistance or accommodations as arising from “an entitlement culture.” Conversely, there is a tendency for many staff to villainize the SLT as privileged, out of touch, incompetent, and callous. Some members of senior leadership believe any unhappy staff should simply leave, while a number of staff would like to see most senior leaders dismissed from their positions. Both factions are clearly pushing back at each other and (essentially) pushing each other further away.

This “Us versus Them” dynamic is dangerous for multiple reasons. Here are several:

- This sort of entrenched relational rift makes it very difficult to establish dialogue and seek constructive ways to resolve conflict within the organisation, and therefore tends to fuel a “might rules the day” use of power within an organisation.
- Employees who are victims of human rights violations *at* Amnesty, with valid complaints, are more likely to be blamed for “causing trouble” instead of being listened to and cared for.
- Any organisation that touts protecting human rights as its mission but is itself mired in in a conflictual and adversarial culture will lose credibility. As organisational rifts and evidence of nepotism and hypocrisy become public knowledge they will be used by government and other opponents of Amnesty’s work to undercut or dismiss Amnesty’s advocacy around the world, fundamentally jeopardizing the organisation’s mission.

## Workload

Given its mission, Amnesty as an organisation has unfortunately always had more work that it *could* be doing globally than it can possibly take on. As such, many Amnesty employees must regularly contend with the sense that vulnerable people need immediate help, and so much more often needs to be done. In such a situation, workload pressures are inevitable, perpetual, and can feel unusually personally distressing.

In organisations with a mission similar to Amnesty’s, heavy workload, long hours, and not having enough time or resources available to do the job properly is always among the top three sources of stress for organisations in this field. And given the advances in technology over the last decades—and the work can now be accessed easily from one’s home, dinner table, bed—it takes effort and focused support to create effective boundaries so that work does not become a 24/7 endeavour.

As described earlier, during the Wellbeing Survey, when Amnesty staff were asked to pick only the five most significant sources of cumulative stress from a long list of 38 possibilities, the six items most frequently endorsed were all related to workload and management:

Answer choice	Percent of staff who selected this
Conflicting priorities and demands	33.9%
Heavy workload/long working hours	32.4%
Not having enough time or resources available to do the job properly	31.9%
Inadequate/ineffective communication from management/leadership	26.2%
Overly hierarchical organisation structure/culture	25.7%
Lack of appropriate planning and prioritization mechanisms	24.6%

The restructure at Amnesty is likely a large contributor to the top three sources of stress, even though tensions existed long before the restructuring occurred. As the GTP unfolded, many long-term and experienced staff left Amnesty, taking with them decades of institutional knowledge and expertise. Instead of leaving on good terms which might have made it possible to have them serve as ambassadors for the organisation, many reported being “pushed out” with very little care, conversation, or follow up. The location and composition of many offices and teams also underwent radical change during the GTP. According to interviewees, many positions were dis-established, leaving one person instead of a team of three or four to get the job done. It seems fair to say that in recent years the workload has increased for many staff, particularly longer-serving staff.

*“The restructuring affected our work on the field. A lot of staff left. One result was that we had to hire new local staff members. They generally were unskilled, unexperienced, insufficiently trained, and not ready to face the difficulties of the job.”*

Knowing that there is no one else to cover their work has made it even more challenging for individuals to take time off and feel they can truly disconnect. Due to lack of shared responsibilities among teams, many are forced to check email and be available while on leave

which means there is no true break from the work. In a field where this issue of workload is a perennial problem anyway, the current situation at Amnesty is a clear recipe for overload and burnout. In fact, the Assessment Team learned of a substantially greater proportion of Amnesty staff on extended sick leave for burnout when compared with peer organisations. Collectively, members of the assessment team have conducted similar assessment reviews for more than five peer organizations during the last five years. Amnesty appears to have the highest number of staff, by far, reporting that they have experienced severe burnout and had to take months of work to recover.

## Managers inability to manage effectively

In any organisation, managing people well is a challenge. In this particular industry—with the nature of the work and the panoply of pressures and other tensions that are at play—it is a particularly demanding task. Many managers feel considerable and competing pressures arising from responsibility for their own heavy workload, duties arising from demands made by the SLT, and their need to manage and support their own staff with limited time and resources.

*“The IS has responded in the most humane, flexible and caring way that I can imagine an employer can – both at the time when the world was turned upside down in an instant and continues to do so. I will be forever grateful!”*

In this context, it is encouraging that many staff reported having a good relationship with their individual line manager. It is clear that some managers within Amnesty are regarded highly for their compassion and attention to wellbeing. Several staff reported that their line manager has shown flexibility that has greatly contributed to their wellbeing. For example, a number of individuals have been able to informally adopt flexible schedules so that they may fulfill parenting and other personal life responsibilities. However, this benefit has been dependent on the good faith of the manager which, in turn, depends on luck of the draw.

*“I have a good manager and we have a good relationship. So there is trust and a way of working and speaking openly to each other that really helps.”*

In addition, the following survey results are somewhat encouraging with regards to managers supporting staff wellbeing:

*“I am extremely fortunate to work in a team where wellbeing is taken seriously and where a level of trust between team members and line managers is such that it facilitates relatively open dialogue. I feel genuinely supported by my team and the environment I am fortunate to work in. However, I know that this is somewhat of a rarity in the organisation and relationships within and between teams are often tense and devoid of trust.”*

- About half of respondents think their manager models self-care more often than not.
- More than half of respondents reported that their manager regularly discusses employee wellbeing with their team or work group (while 46% reported they did not).

- 46% also reported that they regularly discussed self-care and work-life balance in on-on-one meetings with their manager (while 49% reported that they did not).
- More staff (40%) also agreed that their manager actively supported employees in psychological distress than disagreed with this statement (33%), while 27% “didn’t know” in response to that question.

However, the Assessment Team also encountered many descriptions of managers currently being overwhelmed by their own responsibilities, being unavailable, being unable or unwilling to help their reports prioritize their work, and generally failing to provide effective guidance and connection as a manager.

There were a number of other issues related to effective management that arose repeatedly during the review process (including the challenges inherent in managing geographically dispersed teams, high workload, and others).

### Alleged abuse of power and other misconduct by managers

A number of the management-related issues observed went beyond normal failures of effective management in high pressure contexts. In fact, given Amnesty’s status and mission—to protect and promote human rights—the number of accounts the Assessment Team received of “bullying,” “racism,” and “sexism” is disconcerting. There were numerous egregious reports of abuse of power, discrimination, and other unfair treatment and processes of staff. Details about these accounts will be provided to the Secretary General in a private report with the recommendation that they be properly investigated by an external provider. The following issues seemed especially widespread.

### Bullying and public humiliation as a management tool

The first tier of responses to the question about sources of stress in the Wellbeing Survey mostly focused on workload, conflicting priorities, insufficient resources, and general management issues. However, the *second* tier of responses to that question about sources of stress included:

- A disrespectful work environment (which, at a 19.3% rate of endorsement, ranked higher than witnessing or hearing stories of personal tragedy, suffering, and devastation)
- Regular experience of microaggressions (17%)
- Not being able to voice opinions without fear of retribution (15%)
- Bullying management style (15%)

*“I find it shocking that in an organisation which makes accountability it’s so-called business, there is seemingly no accountability for failures at management level.”*

*-Employee Engagement Survey (2015)*

Many staff gave specific examples of experiencing or witnessing bullying by managers. There were multiple reports of managers belittling staff in meetings, deliberately excluding certain staff from reporting, or making demeaning, menacing comments like, “You’re shit!” or, “You should quit! If you stay in this position, your life will be a misery.”

Others discussed this issue more generally, reporting that bullying and public humiliation were routinely used by management at all levels. One interviewee put it like this, “There was a real culture of bullying, right up until I left [several years ago] particularly of middle managers. It was well known the management team were kept very much in line, and anyone who stepped out of line was very publicly humiliated.”

A clear sign of the degree of trepidation many staff feel at the thought of speaking up, is the fact that almost half of respondents on the wellbeing survey (49%) reported that they *do not feel able to ask questions that challenge the status quo*. Only 44% of respondents said they *did* feel able to ask such questions, more than 5% were undecided, and 41 people skipped answering this question altogether.

*“They push us to take risks on missions. I’ve had a manager say, “If you don’t want to go on this mission, well, you’re in the wrong position” when I had serious reasons for not wanting to travel at that time related to political instability.”*

## Discrimination or harassment on the basis of race or gender

There were multiple accounts, from all angles, of discrimination on the basis of race and gender and in which women, staff of colour, and LGBTQI were targeted or treated unfairly.

Here is just one example, written by a woman:

“There is a sweep it under the carpet approach. I have been verbally harassed by [name of male manager redacted]. I am not intimidated, though it’s clearly not a way he would treat a man. But I also know that no one reacts to it, and that there are a number of women on his staff in lower grades who receive the same sort of treatment, and again, no one seems to react much to it. Two of them told me about it on a recent trip, but didn’t want it made known [publicly] as they didn’t want to suffer the consequences at work and had no faith that the organisation would support them if they did.”

## Alleged hiring, firing, and other process irregularities

Woven throughout such accounts of alleged bullying, harassment, or discrimination were many examples of due process irregularities in recruitment, termination, and other areas. Although the Assessment Team was not commissioned or equipped to investigate these claims, it appears that there may have been multiple instances of alleged favouritism or nepotism in hiring practices and negotiating working arrangements in recent years. In other cases, it appears that positions or individuals may have been made redundant without due process.

## Failures of People and OD to fulfil their function

One of the primary purposes of a human resources department within an organization is to serve a regulatory function. This department should be, essentially, the guardian of workplace standards, and should act as an impartial and trustworthy advisor on policies, procedures, and matters of contention. Though there are some hard-working, dedicated and professional staff within this department, it is clear that the office of People and OD within Amnesty has, in many instances, failed in recent years.

*“The past eight years with the massive restructurings would have been much better carried out, and caused a lot less stress and suffering, with professional HR advise. It is unfortunately too late to undo, but it should be a lessons learned. I can give you many examples that relate to not ensuring duty of care, the breaking of confidentiality, disregarding disability status, pregnancy status, nepotism and corruption in recruitments among others.”*

Managing human resources accurately and well is an enormous challenge for any humanitarian organization. In Amnesty’s case, these challenges have been greatly exacerbated in recent years by the demands and tensions inherent in the GTP process. Some of the failures of People and OD to provide consistent and accurate service are attributable to general failures in managing and communicating information well (see the section below on “General People and OD functioning.”) In other instances, however, it appears that People and OD was not empowered to ensure due process was carried out or to act as a true regulator (see the section on “Lack of power” below.)

### **General People and OD functioning**

There were numerous reports of People and OD functioning that ranged from “ineffective” to “downright harmful.” Examples include: losing documents, not tracking case details appropriately, filing incomplete performance reviews, making mistakes in leave and benefits calculations that were not easily or quickly corrected, not communicating effectively or accurately, changing policies without warning or consultation, making seemingly haphazard decisions, and providing inaccurate or bad advice.



### **Misuse of power by People and OD**

There were also a troubling number of reports related to People and OD staff mishandling information, breaching confidentiality, and mishandling sensitive issues related to privilege, power, and discrimination.

### **Lack of power by People and OD to create true accountability**

Conversely, the Assessment Team also received credible reports of People and OD investigating cases of irregular practice by managers during recruitment and making clear and accurate recommendations regarding fair due process that were subsequently completely disregarded by the manager involved. It appears that People and OD has little or no redress to ensure compliance or accountability with regards to due process, especially when “star performers” of the organisation are involved.

In fact, People and OD does not appear to have the independence or the power to carry out many of the tasks that a true regulatory body should ultimately backstop. For example, People and OD does not have independent authority regarding process when it comes to negotiating and consulting with the union, appointing staff, or dealing with grievances. The ultimate authority in these cases is the SLT. An appointments manager has the final say on recruitment decisions, the person hearing a grievance is a manager appointed by the Secretary General.

### **People and OD and the grievance process**

Multiple staff who have gone through the grievance process describe it as disorganized, unprofessional, inefficient, and even harmful. The poor or inadequate handling of grievances appears to have placed enormous stress on many staff.

Grievance hearings currently involve appointing managers to hear the cases of other staff. Individuals who have served in those roles have expressed concern about not having sufficient training or knowledge about how to fulfil such an important role semi-judicial role, and those under review often don't feel it is an impartial or fair process. Furthermore, grievance cases are sometimes transferred to different individuals within People and OD with little or no “handover” communication about the case details. Multiple staff who have gone through the grievance process report receiving very little information about the process or outcome, and little empathy or support along the way.

*“HR rarely takes this role of impartial advisor. It's happened several times that an employee has said something and they've gone straight to that person's manager and reported what they said. HR doesn't seem strong in policies and procedures. It's hard to trust you're getting good advice.”*

*“I went to HR to have a conversation about a difficult situation, hoping they would be able to help guide us in how to manage it, and then they took over the “process”—such as it was—but kept us completely in the dark about what was happening and what the outcome actually was. I would never file another grievance. The process was too stressful.”*

In his investigative report, James Laddie provided a pithy and accurate description of the uncomfortable situation HR Offices often find themselves in when he said, “I am alive to the very particular pressures placed on HR in all organisations; I know that there is often an unfair tendency to treat HR professionals as the messenger, and to shoot them for it.” In general, however, it is impossible to draw the conclusion that People and OD is functioning effectively. Staff levels of distrust for People and OD approached the general level of distrust evidenced in the SLT. People and OD appears to be widely perceived as being embattled and defensive, and as engaging in the inappropriate behaviour they are meant to regulate. This alone, independent of the documented systemic failures of efficiency, renders People and OD largely ineffective at present.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS: A Roadmap To Change

Given the nature of the work many staff at Amnesty do, and the general tone of the organisational and managerial culture, if Amnesty wishes to better support staff wellbeing a thoughtful plan must be mapped out and followed. Further, supporting staff wellbeing at Amnesty must go well beyond improving support measures surrounding trauma exposure and extreme stress. These are very important efforts, but focusing on them in isolation will not address the root cause of the pressures the vast majority of staff are currently experiencing. It is strongly recommended that Amnesty adopt a more comprehensive, integrated approach to staff wellbeing that begins by working to resolve the current cultural and relational ruptures.

In this section, recommendations are advised in five key areas: repairing ruptures; adopting a systematic approach to staff wellbeing; improving support for issues related to stress (including burnout, vicarious trauma, and the strain of living in high-threat environments); equipping middle managers with relevant skills; and professionalizing People and OD.

These areas are strategic points of influence for improving staff wellbeing at Amnesty. All of them are important—although it is also important to acknowledge that real change will not happen quickly, and will require serious dedicated effort and allocation of resources. The initial section, *A Roadmap To Change*, will present a summary roadmap of key steps and a recommended timeline for action.

### 1. Work to repair ruptures and foster a sense of safety and trust.

It is not uncommon for organisations whose work exposes individuals to inherently stressful situations to operate with a sense of urgency. However, all humanitarian professionals who seek to care for others must also endeavour to create an internal culture of care, compassion, and respect. Amnesty cannot effectively strive to make the world a better place while perpetuating an organisational culture deeply marked by secrecy, mistrust, nepotism and other forms of power abuse.

It is critical for upper management—the Secretary General, the International Board, and the Senior Leadership Team—to signal that creating a safe and respectful

*“The personal impact of work, especially the professions caring for other human beings, can create an emotional strain, often not spoken of much, and greeted with an attitude of indifference. If the organisation makes no special provision, the result might be unexpected “pathology” of the organisation, which is inscrutable and intractable. The combination of strain and the attitude of silence might amount to a stress that reaches the level of a trauma, and then clear maladaptive behavior occurs, some aspects of which are known as ‘burnout.’”*

Dr. Robert Hinselwood (Personal Trauma and Collective Disorder: The Example Of Organisational Psychodynamics In Psychiatry, *Trauma and Organisations*.)

environment is an absolute and on-going priority. This will mean working to systematically restore a sense of basic trust.

Focused consideration should be paid to each of the following groups: (a) senior leadership; (b) the organisation-as-a-whole; and (c) staff.

#### A. Senior leadership and middle level managers

The Secretary General should engage a trusted and skilled leadership development team that includes group experts to support both the SLT and middle level managers in understanding and working through their own dynamics.

Helping the SLT better understand and manage the conflictual dynamics within their team (and appreciate how those dynamics influence the organisational culture and management styles at other levels) will be critical to their ability to “lead by example” and achieve real progress in improving staff wellbeing.

Concurrently, offering middle level managers the opportunity to build leadership skills, understand different styles of work, and recognize the value of cultivating mutually respectful and satisfying work relationships equips all levels of the organisation with the skills and knowledge necessary to shift the current culture of blame to one of caring and respect. Improving leadership skills throughout the organization will undoubtedly have the much needed impact of creating a stronger sense of community and togetherness.

Such a process could involve the following:

- Assess individual approaches to working and explore them as a group (using an interactive organisational development tool such as DiSC).
- Explore tools and strategies for demonstrating empathy, improving communication, managing conflict and becoming a more effective leadership team.
- Build a stronger sense of group cohesion, compassion, and respect.
- Take steps to create a “development culture” (detailed below) that places a high value on the development of everyone in the organisation and includes taking responsibility for one’s own role in a conflict or dynamic instead of placing blame.
- Create a vision for a comprehensive integrated approach to staff wellbeing that has depth, consistency, and value for all.
- Work to address the many reported power abuses and human rights violations that occur at present.

## B. The organisation

Commissioning this independent review has been a step in the right direction for the SLT to be better positioned to support staff. However, leadership will need to take further action if they genuinely wish to shift entrenched mindsets and create a more cohesive organisational culture moving forward.

To this end, leadership should be looking towards healing frameworks for ways to allow staff to feel heard and valued. This should involve planning a guided participatory process which would first acknowledge harm done and also look towards creating a better future.

Below, two processes are briefly expanded upon that have been successfully used by other organisations to achieve these ends. Leadership should explore these options further with skilled external consultants.

These two frameworks are recommended:

1. Large Group Experience
2. Restorative Circles

Both or either of these frameworks will likely prove useful to Amnesty. These models represent vehicles for:

- Increasing understanding about what dynamics exist and the varying perspectives on them;
- Working through problematic dynamics; and
- Repairing harm done and “putting things right.”

*“The effect of repeated reconfiguration of teams, departmental structures, and leadership arrangements has produced symptoms of failed dependency and cumulative trauma. The absence of reliable structures, the piercing of holding environments, and the regular removal of authority figures causes organisations and their members to regress to more primitive forms of defense against their increasing sense of existential insecurity.”*

Gerhard Wilke, Leaders and groups in traumatized and traumatizing organisations: A matter of everyday survival, Trauma and Organisations

*“They [Amnesty] need to be honest and they need to be transparent. They tell governments that they’re speaking truth to power, but they have been secretive, dishonest, and corrupt themselves.”*

## The Large Group Experience

*“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”*  
Arundhati Roy

The Large Group creates a powerful opportunity to sit in a group of thirty to hundreds of members, seated in concentric circles or one large spiral, with the task of giving voice to one’s relevant thoughts, feelings, and associations in the service of constructive, communal dialogue. Taking up this challenge in earnest is an effective way of discovering and overcoming barriers to communication and connection that operate within and beyond our awareness.

The Large Group Experience is a relational process that facilitates group-as-a-whole understanding, civic mindedness, and systemic change. The process works by helping its members better understand and overcome barriers to genuine connection and engagement. Together the group, with the guidance of the facilitators (who should be experts in group relations and analysis,) can work to help everyone present increase in ability to find one’s voice, develop a sense of belonging, and understand the interplay of complex forces like *scapegoating* and *group-think* that feed and perpetuate negative organisational cultures.

The Large Group Experience can be both volatile and transformative. For this reason, selecting the right provider and adequate preparation is essential. Participants should be oriented to the task, receive an overview of Large Group work, description of relevant concepts from social psychology and basic learning goals. A model that is often used effectively with systems new to the large group experience is “the sandwich model”—which places the large group experience in-between two small group encounters. Experiencing the safety and comfort of a small group before and after the large group makes the experience more accessible. When thoughtfully applied, the Large Group Experience can help organisations and societies better understand their own dynamics and provide a powerful springboard to cultural transformation.

## Restorative Justice and Circles

Restorative practices are an alternative method of justice from the traditional model and draw heavily upon indigenous cultures from around the world. Their aim is to reduce conflict by strengthening communities and providing a path to healing when conflicts arise in a way that is respectful to all parties involved.

The restorative model focuses on healing individual wounds as well as harm done to the community. Rather than simply expelling or punishing the offender, restorative justice seeks to re-integrate them in a way that restores the community and leads to reduced occurrences of such incidents going forward. In comparison, criminal justice focuses primarily on punishing a perpetrator, and doesn’t offer much support for the victims or other affected community members following an offense. Research increasingly suggests that such harsh and isolating treatment of the offender can lead to high rates of repeat offending, resulting in a vicious cycle of misconduct and crime.

A major prerequisite to the restorative healing process is that everyone participates voluntarily—including the offender, who must also freely admit guilt for the harm committed.

### ***Restorative Circle Processes***

The restorative circle is a structured process for helping participants hold open and honest discussions with each other in a safe environment.

Participants sit in chairs in a circle. There should be no table in the circle, but there can be some items that remind participants of the values they wish to uphold during the circle process.

The structured elements of circles are what differentiate circles from just a general “discussion”. These elements include: ceremony, a talking piece, a facilitator/keeper, guidelines and consensus decision-making.

Circles are a critical component of restorative practices, for bringing together the stakeholders in a situation of misconduct/conflict for an open, authentic and ultimately healing process. The basic premise behind circles is that we are all interdependent beings, and solutions to conflicts can only truly be found by acknowledging this interconnectedness through engagement of all stakeholders in the healing process. The actions of one affect the many – in conflict and in resolution and healing. Work-place applications of circle processes can include situations like:

- Team-building
- Developing missions statements and strategic plans in organisations
- Developing new programs
- Handling conflicts (harassment, discrimination, interpersonal conflict)

It may take several circle processes to deal with a particular issue or conflict. Core foundational values for circles include respect, honesty, humility, sharing, courage, inclusivity, empathy, trust, forgiveness, love, compassion, open-mindedness, and caring. Each circle group determines the specific set of values for their own circle.

### **C. Staff**

At present, neither People and OD nor SafeCall - the whistleblowing hotline - are perceived as reliable. A substantial subset of staff report that they are not willing to approach either because they do not trust that anything useful will be done. Worse, they actively fear they will be further targeted and marginalized in place of being supported.

To eradicate abuse of power and staff maltreatment and create safe channels of advice and redress, it is recommended that:

- The Secretary General send a strong message to all managers that abuse will no longer be tolerated, and is willing to hold star performers, organisation icons, and senior leaders accountable.

- Since current internal systems are not trusted by many, have a trusted external provider review claims of power abuse and determine reformative sanctions using a restorative lens that the Secretary General and SLT commit to upholding.

The ultimate goal will likely be to manage these functions independently, without the assistance of external consultants. However, Amnesty does not currently appear equipped to independently handle the misconduct and level of abuses perpetrated by higher level staff onto lower level staff. An external channel of accountability will help provide some safeguards while better internal systems are developed.

## 2. Work to counter a culture of criticism and blame with a “development culture.”

The ability for staff and managers to each describe and take responsibility for their role in conflicts is a sign of organisational health and maturity. Currently, however, many Amnesty staff and leaders expend a great deal of energy feeding into a cycle of blame, unable to acknowledge that all problematic organisation dynamics are co-created. Senior staff, mid-level managers, and staff alike all bear some responsibility for the toxic culture that currently exists. Staff fear senior leadership and senior leadership also fear staff. Many individuals feel overwhelmed, underappreciated and generally miserable at the lack of a more harmonious workplace culture.

Given this backdrop, Amnesty should seek out and adopt a framework that can help transform this cycle of blame, paired with denial of responsibility and involvement. Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organisation (DDO) may serve to encourage a helpful transparency and teach senior leaders, mid-level managers, and staff to be more reciprocally accountable.

### **Deliberately Developmental Organisation (DDO)**

Amnesty could learn a great deal from Harvard professors Kegan and Lahey’s work on creating an “everyone culture.” In traditional organisations, employees spend valuable time covering up mistakes or hiding weaknesses from coworkers. In a deliberately developmental organisation, the company seeks to help staff learn from mistakes, build on shortcomings, and openly work on weaknesses.

The table below outlines how traditional organisational cultures differ from development cultures.



Traditional Cultures	Development Cultures
Organisations see culture, learning and development as <b>separate from company strategy</b>	<b>Development culture IS the strategy</b> —staff development is <b>at the heart of everything, including strategy</b>
Individual development is held as something that happens <b>“in addition” to people’s daily responsibilities</b>	<b>Personal growth and self mastery</b> are at the centre of the organisation and embedded in every interaction
<b>Unconscious motivations</b> drive the need to be <b>liked, be right, and win</b> – employees losing time and power managing these needs	<b>Observation of self</b> and an ability to overcome unconscious commitments and self-defeating mindsets enable growth, clarity, and innovation
A <b>victim/disempowered mindset prevails</b> where individuals project responsibility onto others, participating in “low-grade bonding” and blaming others	A <b>self-authored mindset prevails</b> where individuals at all levels actively take ownership of personal, team and enterprise-wide results

Amnesty leadership and staff could benefit from training in this model and approach (whether or not it opts to become a DDO.) If managers and staff engaged in a workshop to teach them how to move from what Kegan and Lahey call the *socialized mindset* to a more mature *self-authored mindset*, the organisation would be helping develop the insights and skills needed for staff to recognize and own their part in creating and maintaining the current challenging dynamics, and stop blaming each other. It would also help Amnesty shift further away from an overly-hierarchical management culture and towards a more empowered, egalitarian culture. This sort of workshop could be delivered in person and/or via webinar so that all staff would have access to it.

### 3. Implement a comprehensive and systematic approach to supporting staff wellbeing

Amnesty should seek to adopt a comprehensive and systematic approach to supporting staff wellbeing. Some good efforts are already being made to support staff in different ways. In general, however, these efforts are not organized or coordinated, and little data is being gathered to inform ongoing efforts. There is also a general perception that staff wellbeing

*“An organisation-wide problem needs an organisation wide response.” You should make staff wellbeing the responsibility of someone at the very top. The first point of call on this should be senior leadership, because many of the challenges related to wellbeing are actually coming from there. Then, from the top all the way down, every leader should have a role that incorporates protecting their wellbeing and the wellbeing of staff they supervise.”*

efforts are largely focused on English-speaking, London-based staff to the exclusion of the many global staff around the world.

This first step to meaningful change in this area is mapping out what this approach would involve and who will be responsible and accountable for implementing it.

#### A. Create a Wellbeing Taskforce with SLT representation

To that end, we recommend Amnesty create a formal Wellbeing Taskforce to oversee efforts made in the next several years including the efforts of the Wellbeing Committee. More than one member of the SLT should be involved in this, members of the taskforce should have authority to recommend and effect significant change, and these efforts should also be guided and informed over time by external, expert input. Specific recommendations regarding possible committee members will be provided in a separate confidential document to the Secretary General.

This group should be guided through a process of reviewing the various recommendations in this and other recent, related reports, as well as *Essential Principles Of Staff Care* (see Appendix D).<sup>6</sup> They should seek to clarify and agree upon priorities and the timelines attached to them and begin to implement those priorities.

#### B. Create a policy on staff wellbeing

The necessary first step will be to create a well-thought-out policy on staff wellbeing that, once endorsed, should be widely disseminated and referenced in staff communications. The staff wellbeing policy should not be something that is quickly drafted by a small number of people and filed away. The development of a staff care policy should be developed by both senior leadership and staff.

### 4. Improve support for issues related to stress

It is apparent that a significant number of Amnesty staff are currently being affected by burnout, trauma, or vicarious trauma. Given the unusual pressures that are inherent in human rights defense and advocacy, this should not be surprising. In fact, higher than normal levels of burnout, trauma, and vicarious trauma should be expected in this line of work. As such, Amnesty bears some responsibility to acknowledge this, and provide appropriate resources and support for staff experiencing heightened levels of stress and distress.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.konterragroup.net/admin/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Essential-Principles-of-Staff-Care-FINAL.pdf>

## A. Provide more and better counselling access, and more specialized support

Amnesty currently offers up to five sessions of counselling with a contracted provider with the possibility of additional sessions if requested by the therapist. As noted in the findings, it appears that the current programme has not been able to reliably provide multilingual services in a timely manner (or even services in English on the advertised 24-hour/day schedule), and some staff have commented that the counsellors do not appear to be familiar with the unique pressures and tensions presented by Amnesty's work.

Only 4.9% of respondents on the Staff Wellbeing Survey think that Amnesty's counselling services are reliable and effective in supporting employees experiencing psychological distress (19.2% think they are *not* reliable and effective). The vast majority have not used the service. Collectively, these factors reflect the limited effectiveness of Amnesty's current counselling programme and also casts serious doubt on the efficacy of the peer-to-peer support programme.

We recommend:

- Take a more holistic approach to staff wellbeing with a focus on providing services to all staff who need it. Ideally the programme would offer a network of multi-lingual mental health professionals, located around the world, who also have expertise in humanitarian and human rights advocacy work.
- Increase the organisation-funded counselling available to staff from five sessions per year to 12 (with extra available following particularly traumatic events). This is comparable to what peer organisations that place staff in high stress contexts offer.
- Allow staff to access this counselling service for any reason, and discuss any issue that is causing them stress or distress (not just strains and stressors that appear to be directly related to their work). Many peer organisations offer this type of open and unrestricted access not only to staff but their family members as well.
- Make stress-audits and debriefs with this external, confidential, provider standard, routine, practice after high-impact missions and contracts in high-risk environments.

Providing counselling support at this level may appear to be an expensive undertaking. However, peer organisations in which staff face similar pressures have begun to offer 10-12 sessions annually, and research and experience suggest that it will ultimately help reduce many of the financial and other costs (turnover, lowered productivity and extended absences from work) due to burnout or trauma. And given that 38.6% of respondents on the Staff Wellbeing Survey do not feel they have

access to sufficient psychosocial support and counselling, this benefits adjustment would send a clear and meaningful signal that staff wellbeing is a priority for Amnesty.

*“The 5 sessions offered are insufficient to provide ongoing support and are particularly insulting to staff who have suffered traumatic incidents. The service appears to be designed in an attempt to avoid liability and not in the interests of staff.”*

Once a policy is devised and a staff care provider is selected, think strategically about how to best inform all staff about services available. This may include brief presentations to locations that face the highest stress, such as a webinar at a time that allows the most staff to attend globally (and recorded, so that everyone can ultimately access the presentation.) This introductory session should provide an overview of staff care services and also allow several counsellors to introduce themselves. Staff will be more inclined to reach out for counselling if they have some prior knowledge of the provider and the assurance that the providers understand Amnesty's context sufficiently. The policy should also be outlined, and the provider introduced, during induction.

## B. Improve crisis and critical incident response protocols

Critical incidents (events that threaten the life or safety of staff, or involve violence or suicide) have impact and influence far beyond the staff members who are directly affected. Responding quickly and appropriately to staff during these times is essential.

In reporting on his investigation into the recent death of Gaëtan Mootoo, James Laddie observed that he was “struck by the large number of witnesses who criticized the manner in which Gaëtan’s death was addressed.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the investigation into the death of Roz McGregor highlighted that some of the communications by management about this incident violated reasonable expectations of confidentiality or added further distress to Roz’s former colleagues.<sup>8</sup>

Amnesty should review their Critical Incident Protocol and Corporate Crisis Management Plan and ensure they provide guidance on an integrated response to crises. Among other things, they should provide:

- Guidance on how to convey difficult news. After news was received of the two staff deaths, a number of staff communicated using chat and email. When delivering tragic news, it is a best practice to phone individuals to deliver the news or to tell them in person where possible.
- A crisis response team should be assembled immediately and should monitor and coordinate the response including how much information is shared; managers should be given the guidance that detailed information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis.
- Protocols for coverage when key individuals are on leave. The SLT reports that part of the reason for the poor communication after the first tragic death was that key individuals were on leave and there was not sufficient oversight of the process. Especially when there is a crisis, the SLT or the crisis response team should be overseeing the effective management of communications.

Amnesty should also invest in training in Psychological First Aid, for staff. This is the gold standard for critical incident response and a topic many staff want more training in. Amnesty should also

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<sup>7</sup> JL report 3

<sup>8</sup> Rosalind McGregor Review

provide family liaison and death notification training for senior managers, People and OD staff, and crisis team members.

### C. Further educate managers and staff about resilience and supporting others experiencing distress

A startling 85.5% of respondents on the Staff Wellbeing Survey do not think they've been given enough guidance on how to support the wellbeing of their colleagues, particularly those who are in distress. And when asked to select three most important types of wellbeing support and services they prefer Amnesty offer to employees, the top three options endorsed were:

- Coaching for managers on supporting team members in psychological distress (41.6%)
- Stress awareness and resilience building (37%)
- Training on how to support an employee or colleague in psychological distress (32.9%)

#### What kinds of wellbeing support and services would you prefer that Amnesty offer to employees?



We recommend Amnesty collaborate with their EAP and other experts as needed to provide professional development to staff around issues related to stress, burnout, vicarious trauma and secondary stress, self-care, resilience, psychological first aid, peer support and managing for resilience.

How would you prefer to receive information about employee wellbeing resources and services?



When it comes to workshops and other trainings, not all of this education needs to be delivered via sessions or materials singularly focused on that topic. Often, a focus on resilience building can be incorporated into *other* professional development workshops in a way that powerfully enhances learning transfer on both fronts.

Many professional development workshops focused on skills such as data analysis can, with a little adjusting, also incorporate a focus on resilience-building. The following example, provided by one interviewee, illustrates this well:

“Recently a document was circulated on handling violent images. This is a big part of our work—we rely on these sorts of photos and videos to do our job—so it’s good that we were sent this document, which was focused on how to deal with that. The document was useful and provided good information. But at the same time it was pretty rigid and dry. There was no engagement around this, no follow up, and it seemed a bit like a box ticking exercise. And you really *need* that sort of human connection to develop the skills to actually become more resilient in these areas.

We really need to engage with these topics in a human sort of way, not just via an email from a senior manager. Especially for teams working with research are more exposed to disturbing material, and we need periodic trainings/wellbeing support events. We also need to normalize this sort of support.

The best way to do this would be to try to accomplish two things at the same time. You need to try to empower the people to do their work better – e.g., hone the research and reporting skills you need to analyse those images usefully AS WELL as improving personal resilience skills.

Alongside asking “how can you do your work better?” we should be asking “how does that work make you feel?” and “how can you manage the personal impact of that work?” We need to weave resilience building into the fabric of professional development, and we need these sorts of thematic workshops to happen every year.”

## 5. Enlist, equip, and support managers to improve staff wellbeing

As discussed in Findings, managers at Amnesty must often seek to reconcile competing priorities related to their own research or advocacy tasks, and managing others. Given the increased pressures managers face (and the fact that the relationship with one’s direct manager is often cited as the biggest influence on job satisfaction and staff wellbeing), managers at all levels must be enlisted, equipped, and supported in the important task of “managing for wellbeing.”

Key moments for engaging managers in this mission include:

- The manager selection and orientation process.
- One-on-one meetings with regional and senior managers.
- Manager training such as the Leadership Development Program.
- Manager meetings (e.g., Regional Director meetings) and retreats.

Some of the important ways that managers at Amnesty could be engaged and supported include:

- Invite them to reflect on their own wellbeing, personal motivations for prioritizing or not prioritizing self-care, and how they can identify and integrate wellbeing goals, standards, and guidelines for themselves and their teams.
- Provide one-on-one guidance in setting priorities, expectations, and work process.
- Provide coaching to help identify and tackle their own work-related challenges.
- Provide workshops or other training or resources on topics pertaining to staff wellbeing such as:
  - Awareness raising and skill building around stress, secondary stress, burnout, self-care and resilience.
  - Identifying staff in distress and connecting them to resources.
  - Understanding personality and communication differences, conflict management, providing feedback, and conducting difficult conversations.
  - How to conduct effective performance review meetings.
  - How to help those they manage prioritize work and set goals in a complex environment of competing demands and pressures.
  - Awareness raising around microaggressions, implicit bias, and power dynamics in management relationships.
  - Build connections and strengthening team dynamics. Managing staff remotely, and building cohesion in and effectively managing geographically-dispersed teams.

## A. On modelling wellness as a manager

During interviews, staff were invited to discuss managers at Amnesty who are doing a good job at modelling and encouraging good wellness practices, and those who were not. Many staff talked about how successfully (or not) managers limited their working hours, refrained from making work demands outside of office hours, and took leave regularly.

It is very important that managers at every level are encouraged to engage in these sorts of health-promoting practices. As in so many other areas, the leadership that most effectively supports staff wellbeing will come from a place of personal authenticity and alignment on these issues.

*“People are hardworking and motivated and feel connected to victims. It’s hard to say “I’ve worked 2 extra hours this week already and I won’t work on this case anymore right now.” That’s when managers really need to step in and help protect and manage workload. The legal duty of care and responsibility is ultimately with management.”*

However, there is much more to good people management and modelling wellness as a manager than limiting working hours. In reference to managers who were good at modelling and encouraging wellness practices, staff also often talked about managers who demonstrated good relational skills by treating people as peers, being flexible, building good relationships of openness and trust, not micromanaging, and knowing how to make requests without imposing and adding pressure.

Conversely, when asked about managers who were failing to model wellness, interviewees also talked about the lack of relational skills, compassion, and interest. Issues raised included: fostering and contributing to a gossip culture in the office, taking things personally, making decisions based on personal preferences rather than good process, and dressing down and humiliating staff unnecessarily.

Quite apart from managing workload, managing for wellness also involves “leading by example” in how to approach others and show understanding and consideration of their situations. This is why any efforts to help managers develop in this area should also strive to help managers improve relational skills, emotional intelligence, communication, and conflict management skills.



## B. On supporting managers to manage more effectively

Effective people management takes time, attention, and emotional intelligence. Some or all of these appear to be in very short supply for a number of managers within Amnesty. If Amnesty wants to improve the ability of managers to manage for wellbeing, upskilling managers in relational and people skills as well as other management skills is only one part of the necessary equation. The other part is working to change an organisational culture that expects managers to be able to manage other staff well while simultaneously working on multiple other research, reporting, or advocacy projects themselves.

Given the time and mental energy required to manage others well, it will be impossible to reduce the current pressures on many managers and to create such time and space without a culture shift within Amnesty. There must be understanding and acknowledgement from senior leadership all the way down the management chain that a greater proportion of many manager's efforts (and their time) must be spent focusing on and equipping other people rather than producing direct, more visible, outputs themselves. Ultimately, changing expectations for work output and decreasing workload for managers will lead to a happier and more productive work force.

*Overall, I feel that Amnesty is trying to do a good job in this regard, and the managers in our office in particular. However, I often wonder if there is a structural problem with the way "wellbeing" is set up. Managers are ostensibly there to ensure deadlines are met, and quality of work is ensured. To some extent, I think this makes people reluctant in reaching out to managers in terms of wellbeing issues they have experienced as a result of their job's regular duties, heavy workload, vicarious trauma, or issues with work/life balance. I think it may be helpful to have a non-manager responsible for each employees' wellbeing, or perhaps a manager who is not the normal line manager of a person.*

## 6. Review and professionalize People and OD

There is widespread discontent and lack of trust in People and OD as it currently operates, and it is very difficult to see how Amnesty can better support staff wellbeing without transforming People and OD into a more reliable and trustworthy regulatory system. The Assessment Team received multiple accounts of People and OD staff abusing power, not following due process in making or communicating decisions, mismanaging grievance processes, mishandling documents, breaching reasonable expectations of confidentiality, and providing poor advice. There are, of course, individual People and OD staff who are professional and committed and have been helpful to staff. And meeting staff demand may be a challenge. However, People and OD as a current "system" appears to be malfunctioning. To address this, we recommend the following:

### A. Review People and OD functioning and role

As this office is the nexus of many issues that underpin staff wellbeing, and because it should serve such a critical role within the organization (a regulatory function of checks-and-balances for improper or abusive behaviour), a thorough review of its functioning and role should be undertaken. Amnesty should seek to improve People and OD's functioning as a guardian and conduit of information, and as an informed, trustworthy (and trusted) advisor. After these have been achieved, it should empower this office to act as a true regulator.

In the course of these efforts:

- Consider creating a task force to oversee the redevelopment of this office that includes one or more members of the SLT and representatives from different regions and levels of the organisation's hierarchy.
- Create a new vision for this office to assist with its transformation.
- Consult with experts in human resource provision in this field and investigate what effective peer organisations with highly satisfactory employee engagement survey data are doing, then carefully craft a vision of high-functioning office lead by an expert in the field.
- To help address the apparent disconnect between staff and People and OD, consider restructuring this office along the same lines as the rest of the organization has been restructured in recent years. In other words, consider decentralizing the new People and OD office so that it has a more global presence, with an office in each region.
- Leaders of the regional People and OD offices must be well-versed in power and privilege dynamics to protect against inflicting harm on individuals from marginalized backgrounds.
- Practice transparency along the way. For example, solicit feedback from staff on these efforts and demonstrate how staff feedback is being heard and utilized.

## B. Improve performance management processes and instil a culture of feedback

Particular attention should be paid to strengthening the performance management processes at Amnesty. These processes play an integral role in supporting staff wellbeing, as well as supporting organisational aims related to productivity and efficacy.

Amnesty does appear to have some performance management guidelines, but these are often not adhered to. The Assessment Team received many reports of staff rarely (or never) having conversations about performance with their managers, and of performance management being used as a mechanism to control or demean staff.

*“Right now, people at Amnesty can go for months without having any formal, meaningful conversation with their manager, even about work. This needs to change. If they're not connecting with their manager about work issues, they're generally not going to feel comfortable connecting around issues of wellbeing and stress. So strengthen the performance review system, and use these reviews as a mechanism by which you set some wellbeing goals, review them, and make people accountable for them.”*

As discussed in the section on Deliberately Developmental Organisations, Amnesty should work towards developing a culture of regular, mutual feedback for all—staff and managers alike.

Critical components of this culture will include:

- A clear and straightforward process to follow;
- Regular conversations throughout the year on mutual performance;
- Accountability around this process;
- The communication and relational skills to have open, non-defensive conversations that are handled with compassion and genuine care.

In addition, the following is recommended:

- Introduce 360 degree reviews for managers that involve the manager’s manager. If staff manage more than 3 other staff, they should have 360 degree reviews regularly. These reviews should go straight to the manager’s manager and form the basis of performance review discussions—this will circumvent managers from altering or editing the feedback provided as some have reportedly done during similar review processes.
- Make taking leave a performance objective. In his recent report, James Laddie QC wrote, “I have gained the impression from witnesses that it is not that unusual for Amnesty employees not to take their full holiday entitlement. If so, that is worrying. The work carried out by research, campaigns and associated staff is highly demanding. In my view, Amnesty should review its leave procedures and develop a greater preparedness to force employees to take leave. While it might be said that this is overly paternalistic, I believe that it is a proportionate step to take to protect health and safety.” Amnesty may choose not to *force* employees to take their allocated leave but they should, at the very least, make taking leave a performance objective.

### C. Improve the grievance process

Amnesty must reform the grievance process.

A recommendation has already been made that the current manner of handling grievance cases should cease—at least temporarily—and that any reports of inappropriate behavior are primarily investigated and managed by the aforementioned restorative justice or group psychologist external consultants.

Additional recommendations include:

- Offering significantly more training and guidance for the Investigative Manager (IM) role if Amnesty ultimately retains the current model of appointing managers to oversee grievance cases.
- Improve the information flow in these cases. Staff who have been involved in the grievance process have reported that they never received communications summarizing the information that had been received, or telling them what the next steps of the process

would be. They were not proactively provided with any updates during the process, and they were not informed of the findings and outcomes of cases.

- Minimize handover of cases between HR staff and IM's. Whenever possible, grievance cases should be handled from beginning to end by the same HR point person and overseen by the same IM.
- Improve the support offered to both the person making the grievance and the accused.

*“These are stressful and disruptive processes by nature, but tiny things can help make these processes so much easier. I would never bring a grievance in the current system. It is too stressful, it's not worth it.”*

#### D. Strengthen assessment and recruitment practices

Amnesty should capitalize on the strategic importance of recruitment and orientation by reviewing, updating, and enhancing these processes.

An employee's entry into the organisation is a critical period of influence. Weak or inconsistent assessment, recruitment, and orientation practices negatively impact staff wellbeing from the very start of their tenure with an organisation. If an employee is recruited for a position they're not well equipped to do, for example, they are much more likely to fail or underperform in that role. And if staff don't have a clear idea of what their role will involve, they are much more likely to feel frustrated and disappointed.

The more closely aligned a new employee's expectations and their working reality is, the better equipped they are to cope effectively and perform well.

The following recommendations are made with respect to recruitment matters:

- Deliver a workshop or develop an e-learning course on health and resilience so that individuals are knowledgeable about mental health resources should they encounter challenges.
- Explore self-care strategies during the interview process for all positions. Assessment processes should involve explicit discussions around the impact of the work and self-care strategies. This will help lay the groundwork for ongoing discussions around wellbeing throughout the course of the employee's time with Amnesty.
- Further assess resilience and relational skills when recruiting for managers and high-stress roles. Managers with strong interpersonal skills are far more effective than managers with only technical skills.
- Orientation materials for all staff should include a clear statement of Amnesty's vision for staff wellbeing, and self-care and resilience-promoting resources.
- Supervisors should follow-up after orientation by initiating a discussion on wellbeing policies and resources with each new staff member and set the expectation that this will be regularly discussed throughout the year.

## Five Questions Amnesty Sections Should Ask As They Also Seek To Improve Staff Support

While this review was focused on how the International Secretariat could better support staff experiencing stress, the Amnesty Sections undoubtedly face similar pressures and stresses. Given that the Sections engage with similar work that involves examining and defending human rights abuses, attention must be devoted to staff wellbeing at the Section level as well. Detailed guidance on these issues is well beyond the scope of this report. Below, however, we outline five important questions Section Leadership should ask as they seek to improve staff wellbeing support in their Section.

### 1. WHAT? Strive to establish a culture of care and respect.

A good measure of the health and success of any human rights organisations is the extent to which the organisation has created an internal culture of care and respect. Human rights organisations who are unable to attend well to the humanity of their own workers will ultimately fail to embody their values and achieve an important part of their vision.

### 2. WHO? Attend to the staff wellbeing of all staff, not only staff who engage in field work.

There is a misperception that only staff in the field (or staff who work directly with those experiencing human rights abuses) are susceptible to stress and trauma. During the last twenty years, however, research and awareness around the impact of secondary stress on helping professionals has increased. Many organisations have come to understand that all staff working in this arena are susceptible to exceptional stressors and every staff member has the right to excellent wellbeing support.

### 3. WHY? Amnesty staff are placed under unusual stressors that necessitate specialized support.

The work that Amnesty staff undertake is inherently stressful and quite different from the sorts of jobs that many in society hold. As such, any community mental health services available are unlikely to meet their needs, and it is incumbent upon the Sections to ensure that adequate mental health services are accessible and available.

4. WHEN? Don't wait for a crisis to be the impetus to make wellbeing a priority.  
The time is now.

Sadly, it often takes a crisis for many organisations to understand that prevention works a lot better than response when it comes to supporting wellbeing. Adequately attending to wellbeing means investing time, energy, and resources to the cause on a proactive and continuous basis.

5. HOW? Begin with a needs assessment for your Section office.

Take a deliberate, thoughtful approach. Find out first what staff need and what they believe is missing. Conduct a survey of staff in conjunction with interviews by a trusted external source to learn what staff really think about the tone of the office culture and whether there are gaps in staff support policies and practices.

Wellbeing is not achieved by offering a quick workshop or benefit or covering a few sessions of counselling with an under-qualified provider. An effective approach to staff involves:

- Working to build dignity, respect and compassion into the fabric of the organisation's culture. Building a safe team-culture that encourages staff to look out for one another.
- Expanding services to include all and any staff who need them.
- Identifying specialized services for staff and offering counselling by culturally competent trauma specialists who have experience working with a similar clientele.

## Recommended Timeline for Action

Amnesty cannot carry out its mission well if the organisation doesn't adequately support its own people. An organisation that dedicates itself to exposing human rights violations but does not work fervently to protect the human rights of its own people loses credibility and the quality of the work will inevitably suffer.

By commissioning this extensive review, the organisation's leadership has demonstrated its readiness to take a more sophisticated, holistic, and well-planned-and-executed approach to supporting staff wellbeing. The strong participation of both former and current staff in this review demonstrates the strong interest of the organisation's key constituents in seeing this come to pass.

The commitment and quality of Amnesty staff members suggest that there truly are no bounds to what Amnesty could achieve in exposing human rights violations and advocating for positive change if it can learn to apply its own mission internally, as well as pursue it externally. To this end, learning how to better get along, hold each other accountable to basic standards of fairness, and cultivate a culture of care and respect is critical. After all, seeking the ethical and humane treatment of all individuals, groups, and societies should start at home.

A common fear of those interviewed was that this report would "gather dust on a shelf somewhere" just like many reviews and surveys that have preceded it. In an effort to help prevent that from happening, we suggest the following staged process for addressing the recommendations in this report. Since it will not be possible to implement all the recommendations at once, this is meant to serve a guide to help Amnesty address the most pressing needs of the organisation with regards to supporting wellbeing, and put key oversight groups and structures in place to identify and prioritize additional recommendations.

### Stage 1: Months 1-3

1. Explore options recommended for repairing ruptures for senior leadership. Identify, interview and select a skilled, external leadership development team to facilitate and assist this process.
2. SLT embark upon a leadership development and coaching program to assist them in understanding and managing team dynamics and help them clarify their vision and priorities for staff wellbeing moving forward.
3. Appoint a Staff Wellbeing Taskforce to oversee efforts made in this area during the next several years. Include more than one member of the SLT in this group. The group should develop a staff wellbeing policy and seek to further clarify and agree upon priorities and the timelines attached to them.
4. Explore options recommended for repairing ruptures with staff (Large Group Experience and Restorative Justice) by speaking to experts in each area to see what an ongoing consultative relationships would look like.

5. Discuss how to reorganize and strengthen People and OD to clarify the mission and role of People and OD, the quality of the services and advice being provided, and improve regional support. Review how to temporarily re-assign the grievance process and external reviews for recently mishandled cases. Consider appointing an internal team to oversee this process.
6. Identify and interview staff wellbeing providers that have a global presence and multi-lingual staff and that can help Amnesty envision and implement a more holistic Employee Assistance and Resilience Program (EARP).
7. Convey steps taken to staff and practice transparency about the processes involved with reaching decisions.

### Stage 2: Months 4-6

1. Decide on an expert team of group-process consultants to facilitate repairing ruptures and begin consultation on how to best repair ruptures at various levels in the organisation.
2. Review peer organisation approaches to People and OD / HR, consider renaming it, and map out a detailed plan for a more global decentralized HR office with a regional presence.
3. Review the staff wellbeing policy developed by the Staff Wellbeing Taskforce.
4. Appoint a staff wellbeing provider that will help Amnesty take a more comprehensive and integrated approach to staff care and resilience.
5. Convey progress to staff with transparent communication.

### Stage 3: Months 7-9

1. Meet with selected consultants regularly to develop a strong plan to repair ruptures.
2. Interview and begin to appoint the right people to staff the re-envisioned People and OD office.
3. Disseminate the staff wellbeing policy widely to staff and develop a process for regular distribution (i.e. recruitment, induction, Global Assembly, other key places and times to reference it.)
4. Collaboratively determine wellbeing services that will be offered to staff including yearly introductory webinar (to introduce both providers and services offered) and increase counselling session limit to 12 sessions per year or 10 sessions per event allowing multiple events per year.
5. Relay progress to staff.

### Stage 4: Months 10-12

1. Invite select teams to experience pilot of programs to repair ruptures and begin pilots that should be evaluated for fit and quality.
2. Newly appointed HR staff should collaboratively envision the restructuring of the office with the SLT.
3. Familiarize managers with staff wellbeing policy and encourage them to regularly discuss wellbeing with their teams.
4. Invite staff wellbeing providers on site to several key locations for a more globally represented Wellbeing Week.
5. Report progress to staff.