

THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TIMELINE

Since its foundation in 1961, Amnesty International has worked tirelessly worldwide to stop the abuse of human rights.

Amnesty International now has more than 3 million members, supporters and subscribers in over 150 countries and territories, in every region of the world.

The following short history highlights the milestones and successes of Amnesty International and the human rights movement since the organization's foundation 50 years ago.

1961

- Outraged after learning of two Portuguese students imprisoned for raising a toast to freedom in 1961, British lawyer Peter Benenson launches a worldwide campaign 'Appeal for Amnesty 1961' with the publication of an article, 'The Forgotten Prisoners', in The Observer newspaper in the UK. His appeal is reprinted in papers across the world and turns out to be the genesis of Amnesty International.
- The first international meeting is held, with delegates from Belgium, the UK, France, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland and the USA and decides to establish "a permanent international movement in defence of freedom of opinion and religion".
- A small office and library, staffed by volunteers, opens in Peter Benenson's chambers, in Mitre Court, London.
- The 'Threes Network' is established through which each group adopts three prisoners from contrasting geographical and political areas, emphasizing the impartiality of the group's work.
- The first Amnesty candle is lit in the church of St-Martin-in-the-Fields, London, on Human Rights Day 10 December.
- **National sections are established in the UK and Germany**

1962

- A conference in Belgium decides to establish a permanent organization that becomes known as "Amnesty International".
- The first research mission takes place to Ghana. This is followed by a mission to Czechoslovakia (on behalf of a prisoner of conscience, Archbishop Josef Beran), and by missions to Portugal and East Germany.
- The Prisoner of Conscience Fund is established to provide relief to prisoners and their families.
- An Amnesty International observer attends the trial of Nelson Mandela.
- The first annual report is published, highlighting the cases of 210 prisoners taken up by 70 groups in seven countries.
- The Prisoners of Conscience Library documents 1,200 cases.
- **New sections: Ireland**

1963

- Amnesty International's headquarters, the International Secretariat, are established in London.
- A Research Bureau, staffed by volunteers, is established and prepares background papers on political imprisonment in individual countries.
- 140 prisoners are released and 170 cases are ongoing. There are now 350 groups.

1964

- Peter Benenson is appointed President of Amnesty International.
- The United Nations (UN) grants Amnesty International consultative status.
- Amnesty International debates and rejects the proposal to recognize as prisoners of conscience people like Nelson Mandela, who use or advocate use of force in opposing oppressive regimes.
- Amnesty International is three years old, with 329 prisoners released and 1,367 new cases taken up since the organization's foundation.
- There are 360 groups in 14 countries.
- **New sections: Denmark, Israel, Norway, Sweden**

1965

- The first reports are issued, on prison conditions in Portugal, South Africa and Romania.
- Amnesty International sponsors a resolution at the UN to suspend and finally abolish the death penalty for peacetime political offences.
- Amnesty International's monthly Postcards for Prisoners campaign begins.
- The Council of Europe grant Amnesty International consultative status.
- **New sections: Faroe Islands**

1966

- Following resistance in the USA to military service in Vietnam, Amnesty International gives prisoner of conscience status to those who refuse to participate in particular wars, as well as those who refuse to fight in all wars.
- Amnesty International reaches its first milestone, with 1,000 prisoners released since the organization's foundation. There are now 1,500 prisoners with cases ongoing.
- **New sections: USA**

1967

- Eric Baker is appointed Director General of Amnesty International.
- Amidst fears that intervention could jeopardize a prisoner's chance of release, no prisoners of conscience are adopted in China.
- There are now nearly 2,000 prisoners with cases ongoing in 63 countries, and 550 groups in 18 countries.
- 293 prisoners are released.
- **New sections: Finland, New Zealand**

1968

- Amnesty International appoints its first Secretary General, Martin Ennals.
- The first Prisoner of Conscience Week is observed in November.
- Amnesty International clarifies its statute item 11, that it will oppose by all appropriate means the imposition and execution of the death penalty for political prisoners.
- There are now 850 groups and sections in 27 countries.
- **New sections: Netherlands**

1969

- The United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) grants Amnesty International consultative status.
- Amnesty International reaches a milestone, with 2,000 prisoners released since the organization's foundation.
- There are now 640 groups in 21 countries.

1970

- 520 prisoners are released. There are now 850 groups in 27 countries.
- **New sections: Austria, Japan, Luxembourg, Switzerland**

1971

- Amnesty International's 10th anniversary receives widespread publicity in international media, in a year when 700 prisoners are released and 1,050 new cases are taken up.
- **New sections: Mexico, South Korea**

1972

- Amnesty International launches its first worldwide campaign for the abolition of torture.
- Amnesty International is granted consultative status at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States.
- 727 prisoners are released and 1,271 new cases are taken up.
- **New sections: France, Nepal**

1973

- The first Urgent Action is issued, on behalf of Professor Luiz Basilio Rossi, a Brazilian arrested for political reasons. Luiz says of the appeal, *"I knew that my case had become public, I knew they could no longer kill me. Then the pressure on me decreased and conditions improved."*
- Chile's new regime under Pinochet agrees to admit a three-person Amnesty International mission to probe into allegations of massive violations of human rights.
- The UN unanimously approves the Amnesty International-inspired resolution (Resolution 3059) denouncing torture.
- 842 prisoners are released and 1,580 new cases are taken up.
- **New sections: Belgium, Canada, Ghana.**

1974

- Mumtaz Soysal of Turkey becomes the first former prisoner of conscience elected to the International Executive Committee, Amnesty International's most senior governance body.
- Amnesty International's Sean McBride, Chair of the International Executive Committee, is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his lifelong work for human rights.
- Amnesty International receives the Dag Hammarskjold Memorial Award of American Veterans Committee for work in the field of human rights.
- 1,059 prisoners are released and 1,867 new cases are taken up.
- **New sections: Australia, Iceland, Italy**

1975

- The UN unanimously adopts the Declaration against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, following Amnesty International's campaign.
- Amnesty International writes to each UK Member of Parliament when the House of Commons proposes to reintroduce capital punishment for murder. The proposal is defeated.
- Amnesty International now numbers 1,592 groups in 33 countries and more than 70,000 members in 65 countries.
- 1,403 prisoners are released and 2,458 new cases are taken up.

1976

- The first Secret Policeman's Ball comedy event is held in London featuring high profile British celebrities including John Cleese and other stars from Monty Python and Peter Cook. The Secret Policeman's Balls became famous worldwide as innovative and groundbreaking comedy and music charity benefit events, paving the way for the huge international music events such as 'Live Aid' and Comic Relief'.
- Amnesty International launches a worldwide campaign against torture in Uruguay.
- 167 trade unionists are listed as imprisoned in 16 countries.
- **New sections: Greece**

1977

- Amnesty International is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "having contributed to securing the ground for freedom, for justice, and thereby also for peace in the world".
- In the same year as the reinstatement of the death penalty in the USA, Amnesty International holds a conference on the death penalty in Stockholm, which results in the Stockholm Declaration on the death penalty and calling on all governments "to bring about the immediate and total abolition of the death penalty".
- Amnesty International calls 1977 the Year of the Prisoner of Conscience. Joan Miro, Elisabeth Frink, Alexander Calder and Roland Torpor are among the artists who create posters for the campaign.
- **New sections: Spain and Venezuela**

1978

- Amnesty International wins the UN Human Rights prize for "outstanding contributions in the field of human rights".

1979

- Amnesty International publishes a list of 2,665 cases of people known to have "disappeared" in Argentina after the military coup by Jorge Rafael Videla.
- Amnesty International broadens its mandate to include work against political killings.
- Amnesty International calls on President Carter to establish a commission on the use of the death penalty in the USA.
- **New sections: Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador**

1980

- Thomas Hammarberg is appointed Secretary General of Amnesty International.
- Amnesty International launches its first campaign against the Death Penalty.
- There are now 2,200 groups and sections in 39 countries.
- **New sections: Barbados, Senegal**

1981

- Amnesty International marks its 20th anniversary with a candle lighting ceremony in London.
- Amnesty International launches the Disappearance Campaign.
- 317 Urgent Actions are issued on behalf of thousands of prisoners in more than 60 countries
- Amnesty International reaches a milestone, now numbering over 250,000 members, subscribers and supporters in more than 150 countries or territories.
- **New sections: Peru, Portugal**

1982

- Amnesty International condemns and opposes laws and practices of apartheid, and reaffirms its opposition to inhumane treatment of people who are open about their sexuality.
- On Human Rights Day 10 December, Amnesty International launches an appeal for a universal amnesty for all prisoners of conscience. More than one million people sign petitions, which are presented to the UN the following year.

1983

- Amnesty International hands more than one million signatures to the UN on Human Rights Day in a global appeal for a universal amnesty for all prisoners of conscience.
- Amnesty International launches campaign Political Killings by Governments.
- **New sections: Chile, Hong Kong, Puerto Rico**

1984

- Amnesty International launches its second Campaign Against Torture, which includes a 12-point plan for the abolition of torture. Following Amnesty International's campaign, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment is adopted by the UN General Assembly.
- **New sections: Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago**

1985

- Amnesty International decides to broaden the organization's statute to include work for refugees.

- The first educational pack is published: *Teaching and Learning about Human Rights*.
- Amnesty International reaches a milestone, with more than half a million, supporters and subscribers and 3,433 groups in 50 countries,

1986

- Ian Martin is appointed Secretary General of Amnesty International.
- Amnesty International marks its 25th anniversary with the publication of anthology *Voices for Freedom* which reflects on the lives and work of human rights activists.
- Amnesty International USA launches the Conspiracy of Hope rock concert tour with U2, Sting, Peter Gabriel, Bryan Adams, Lou Reed, Fela Kuti, The Neville Brothers and others.
- Amnesty International members write to more than 10,000 Members of Parliament and people of influence in South Africa to protest against apartheid.
- 391 Urgent Action appeals are initiated on behalf of almost 2,000 people in 73 countries.

1987

- The UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment enters into force, following campaigning by Amnesty International.
- **New sections: Guyana, Tanzania**

1988

- The Human Rights Now! Concert tour, featuring Sting and Bruce Springsteen travels to 19 cities in 15 countries and is viewed by millions when broadcast on Human Rights Day. Human Rights Now! Concerts are held in London, Paris, Budapest, Turin, Barcelona, San Jose (Costa Rica), Toronto, Montreal, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Oakland, Tokyo, New Delhi, Athens, Harare, Abidjan, Sao Paulo, Mendoza (Argentina), and Buenos Aires.
- **New sections: Tunisia**

1989

- Amnesty International launches Campaign against the Death Penalty, following the publication of a major new study on the issue: *When the State Kills*.
- Following the fall of the Berlin wall people from all over Central and Eastern Europe write to Amnesty International requesting information and asking to take part in Amnesty International's work.
- Amnesty International prisoner of conscience and former President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel is released in Czechoslovakia, having been imprisoned for supporting a human rights manifesto.
- **New sections: Bermuda, Uruguay**

1990

- Amnesty International launches action on torture and extrajudicial executions in Brazil and receives immediate reaction in Brazil from President Collor.
- Amnesty International reports on human rights abuses in Kuwait following the Iraqi invasion, making headlines across the world.
- Amnesty International now numbers more than 700,000 members in 150 countries with more than 6,000 local groups in over 70 countries.

- **New sections: Sierra Leone, Hungary**

1991

- Amnesty International's 30th anniversary sees the organization adopt a new mandate pledging to promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The organization also broadens its scope to include work on abuses by armed opposition groups (as well as by the State), hostage taking, and considers people imprisoned due to their sexual orientation as prisoners of conscience.
- Amnesty International celebrates its anniversary with the campaign No More Excuses!
- More than 40 Amnesty International groups are set up in every country of Eastern and Central Europe, following dramatic political change.
- **New sections: Argentina, Mauritius, Philippines, Paraguay**

1992

- Pierre Sané is appointed Secretary General of Amnesty International.
- The UN Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, encapsulating many of Amnesty International's campaigning issues, comes into force.
- Amnesty International responds to human rights disasters in the Former Yugoslavia and Somalia with campaigning action.
- Amnesty International celebrates a milestone as membership reaches one million.
- **New sections: Algeria**

1993

- Amnesty International activists display Urgent Actions from around the world at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.
- Amnesty International launches an international campaign on political killings, disappearances and extrajudicial executions, The Lives Behind the Lies.
- The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human rights is established following campaigning by Amnesty International.
- New groups are set up in Gaza, the West Bank and Yemen.
- **New sections: Colombia**

1994

- Amnesty International launches major international campaign Human Rights are Women's Rights.
- Amnesty International's launches worldwide campaign against Disappearances and Political Killings.
- **New sections: Benin**

1995

- Amnesty International launches campaign Stop the Torture Trade.
- The Fourth World Conference on Women adopts the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action confirming that "women's rights are human rights", following Amnesty International's

campaign urging governments to act on the commitments they made to women's human rights at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women.

- **New sections: Slovenia**

1996

- Amnesty International launches a campaign for a permanent International Criminal Court.
- Amnesty International launches Prescription for Change, a campaign on the role of health professionals in exposing human rights violations.
- Amnesty International Ghana hosts the organization's first workshop on female genital mutilation.

1997

- Amnesty International launches international campaign Respect Refugees!
- Amnesty International brings human rights concerns to the attention of the UN Security Council under the "Arria Formula", a new informal arrangement that allows the Council greater flexibility to be briefed about international peace and security issues.

- **New sections: Taiwan, Costa Rica**

1998

- Amnesty International launches the Get Up, Sign Up! campaign to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, collecting 3 million pledges of support for the declaration which are presented to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The following day the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders is adopted by the UN General Assembly.
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is adopted following Amnesty International's longstanding campaign.
- A concert is held in Paris on Human Rights Day featuring Radiohead, Asian Dub Foundation, Bruce Springsteen, Tracey Chapman, Alanis Morissette, Youssou N'Dour and Peter Gabriel, with special appearances by the Dalai Lama and international human rights activists.
- Amnesty International is a party to the legal proceedings leading to the arrest in the UK of General Pinochet for crimes committed in Chile.
- Amnesty International campaigns internationally against land mines.

- **New sections: Togo**

1999

- Amnesty International broadens its scope to develop work on the impact of economic relations on human rights, empowerment of human rights defenders, impunity, refugee protection, and strengthen its grassroots activism.
- Amnesty International draws international attention to the plight of 300,000 child soldiers, and joins forces with five other international NGOs to launch the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women is adopted by the UN General Assembly, following campaigning by Amnesty International and its partner organizations.
- Amnesty International begins campaigning on the proliferation of small arms.

2000

- Amnesty International launches its third campaign against torture, Stamp out Torture, with its first digital campaign www.stoptorture.org.
- Amnesty International joins forces with Oxfam to campaign for tougher export laws for the arms trade.
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography is adopted by the UN General Assembly, following Amnesty International's campaign.
- **New sections: Morocco**

2001

- Irene Khan is appointed Secretary General of Amnesty International.
- Amnesty International marks its 40th Anniversary by adopting a new mission focusing on the indivisibility of human rights and changing the organization's statute to include work for economic, social and cultural rights.
- Amnesty International's Stop Torture website wins a Revolution Award, which recognises the best in digital marketing.
- Amnesty International reaches a milestone, with more than 47,000 prisoners released since the founding of the organization. There are now just 2,000 cases still open.

2002

- The 60th ratification of the Rome Statute takes place, paving the way for the International Criminal Court which Amnesty International has actively campaigned for.
- The UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict comes into force, following Amnesty International and its coalition partners' campaign.
- Amnesty International is granted access to Myanmar for the first time after many years of requests.
- Amnesty International is granted access to Sudan for the first time in 19 years.
- Amnesty International's work to combat torture in the context of the 'war on terror' begins.

2003

- Amnesty International, Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) launch a global Control Arms campaign, lobbying for an Arms Trade Treaty.
- Amnesty International undertakes its first research mission to Iraq in 20 years.
- Amnesty International brings international attention to the plight of the mothers of young women murdered in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.
- Amnesty International's inaugural Ambassador of Conscience award goes to released prisoner of conscience and former President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel.

2004

- Amnesty International launches international campaign Stop Violence Against Women.
- Amnesty International's research exposes the extent of mass rape, abduction and murder in

Darfur, Sudan.

- Amnesty International calls for respect for the human rights of those living with HIV/AIDS at the International AIDS Conference.
- Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award goes to Mary Robinson and Hilda Morales Trujillo.

2005

- Amnesty International launches the Make Some Noise campaign, harnessing the music world in support of the organization's work. Yoko Ono gives Amnesty International the recording rights to Imagine and John Lennon's entire solo songbook.
- Amnesty International launches the Counter Terror with Justice campaign.
- Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award goes to U2 and their manager Paul McGuinness.
- Amnesty International reaches a milestone, with 2 million members and many more supporters worldwide.

2006

- Amnesty International's Control Arms campaign achieves a major victory when the UN votes overwhelmingly to start work on a treaty.
- The millionth person to post a picture of on the Control Arms Million Faces web petition calling for an Arms Trade treaty presents the petition to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.
- Amnesty International launches an emergency campaign for Darfur, calling for a robust peacekeeping response from the UN.
- Amnesty International exposes human rights violations in the Israel/Lebanon conflict.
- Irene Khan accepts the City of Sydney Peace Prize on behalf of Amnesty International family and millions of human rights activists around the world.
- Nelson Mandela accepts Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award and congratulates Amnesty International for making the struggle against poverty its new focus.
- The UN International Convention for The Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance is adopted, following Amnesty International's campaign.
- The UN Human Rights Council is established to replace the Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International called on all governments, in particular the USA, to support the Council.

2007

- A benefit album of John Lennon cover songs goes on sale aiming to draw attention to the human rights situation in Darfur, and raises US \$2.5 million for Amnesty International.
- Amnesty International demonstrates against five years of unlawful detentions in Guantánamo and continues its call for the camp's closure, with actions taking place worldwide.
- The UN General Assembly adopts the first-ever resolution calling for a global moratorium on the use of the death penalty, following campaigning by Amnesty International and its partners in the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty.

2008

- Amnesty International's campaign on the Beijing Olympics provides an opportunity to review China's human rights record and assess China's progress.
- Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award goes to musician and humanitarian activist Peter Gabriel.
- Amnesty International celebrates the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with Fire Up! on Human Rights Day where people gather all over the globe to light a candle, fire or flame as part of a mass demonstration.
- The UN General Assembly adopts the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, following Amnesty International and its NGO partners' campaign.

2009

- Amnesty International launches the Demand Dignity campaign to end the economic, social and cultural rights violations which, with civil and political rights abuses, combine to drive and deepen poverty.
- Amnesty International assists local African NGOs in their work to hold governments to account by publishing *A guide to the African Commission Guide on Human and Peoples' Rights*.
- Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award goes to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the Myanmar opposition party the National League for Democracy.

2010

- Salil Shetty is appointed Secretary General of Amnesty International.
- Amnesty International works with the Dongria Kondh, an indigenous community in Orissa, India, to prevent the Vedanta mining company from evicting them from their traditional land. Following these efforts, the Indian government rejects plans for a mine project.

2011

- Amnesty International reaches a new milestone, with more than 3 million members, supporters and subscribers in over 150 countries and territories in every region of the world.
- Amnesty International celebrates its fiftieth anniversary with worldwide toasts to freedom, replicating the toast of the imprisoned Portuguese students who inspired Peter Benenson to found Amnesty International.