

**Amnesty
International
Doctors
& Health
Workers for
Human Rights**





Thousands of people are in prison because of their beliefs. Many are held without charge or trial. Torture and the death penalty are widespread. In many countries men, women and children have "disappeared" after being taken into official custody. Still others have been put to death without any pretence of legality: selected

and killed by governments and their agents.

These abuses—taking place in countries with widely differing ideologies—demand an international response. Founded in 1961, the Amnesty International movement, comprising members from all walks of life around the world, is working to expose and halt these violations of fundamental human rights—and to help the victims and their families. Doctors and other health workers are playing a vital role in this worldwide effort.

A MEDICAL PROGRAM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Health professionals working as members of Amnesty International focus particularly on prisoners with serious health concerns whose cases have been taken up under the organization's mandate (see box). Many of the prisoners are suffering as a result of torture, ill-treatment in custody or appalling prison conditions. Many of them will continue to suffer, physically and mentally, long after their release.

The need for medical attention is vital. Prompt action, supported by doctors in other countries simultaneously sending letters of concern in specific cases where prisoners are known to be in need of medical care, can save lives. There are now more than 4,000 doctors in nearly 30 countries involved in the work, ranging from letter writing campaigns to the care and rehabilitation of torture victims.

OUR MANDATE

Amnesty International's medical program is part of its contribution to the international protection of human rights. Its activities are focused strictly on prisoners:

- **It seeks the release of prisoners of conscience. These are people detained anywhere for their beliefs, colour, sex, ethnic origin, language or religion, who have not used or advocated violence.**
- **It works for fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners and on behalf of such people detained without charge or trial.**
- **It opposes the death penalty and torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of all prisoners without reservation.**

Through its network of members and supporters Amnesty International takes up individual cases, mobilizes public opinion and seeks improved standards for the treatment of prisoners.

You can add to the campaign: you can become a subscriber, join a local group, send in a donation and inquire about the growing medical program which needs support from the medical profession for special interventions on behalf of prisoners and their families.

DIRECT ASSISTANCE

The clinical consequences of torture can be severe. Amnesty International doctors have been able to provide practical and invaluable assistance to people who have suffered unbearable physical and mental pain and the stress of isolation and exile. Using their professional skills to counteract the work of the torturers, these doctors have been able to improve the health of a number of former detainees. One such victim was a 38-year-old woman who had suffered temporary paralysis as a result of beatings sustained in police detention. "You have given me a new life", she wrote to doctors in Copenhagen after they had restored her ability to walk.

WHAT IS HUMAN RIGHTS MEDICAL WORK?

Members of Amnesty International medical groups and other health professionals who participate in the movement's activities are involved in a range of activities. They make appeals on behalf of prisoners of conscience who need medical attention. Appeals are sent as well on behalf of members of the medical profession who are detained solely because of their beliefs or origins. The work also includes promoting professional and public awareness about human rights. Refugees who have fled, often with their families, from political persecution are given medical and psychiatric care by doctors and other specialists working voluntarily with Amnesty International. This direct experience enables the medical groups to contribute to the organization's policy on medical questions and professional ethics related to the care of prisoners.

A LIFE-SAVING OPERATION

At the International Secretariat of Amnesty International careful research is carried out into the cases of prisoners needing attention. The secretariat's medical office relays requests for urgent appeals to a worldwide network of doctors and other health workers. They are asked to send letters or telegrams in cases where:

- prisoners of conscience are suffering from serious medical problems.
- medical or paramedical professionals are illegally detained or threatened with torture.
- provision of health service in places of detention is absent or inadequate or is abused as punishment.
- amputations or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is inflicted with the help of doctors.
- doctors are involved in executions.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL POLICY

In the past few years, Amnesty International medical groups have discussed a number of questions which are relevant to the organization's work. These include:

- medical aspects of torture and its sequelae, and involvement of health professionals in torture.
- the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes.
- forcible feeding during hunger-strikes.
- floggings and amputations.
- medical involvement in the death penalty.
- international codes of medical ethics for health professionals.
- prison medicine.
- psychological effects of "disappearance" on families.

The views of medical groups have helped to shape Amnesty International policy in these areas and have contributed, in turn, to major Amnesty International campaigns against the death penalty and "disappearances".

CARE FOR REFUGEES

Victims of torture and those who are forced, for reasons of conscience, to flee their own country frequently need medical help for problems arising from their experiences. Amnesty International doctors can play a valuable role in this field either by treating the refugees themselves or by referring the patient to another sympathetic doctor. A number of Amnesty International doctors have played a part in the rehabilitation of former torture victims.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT:

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INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION



Amnesty International's work is based on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The organization has formal relations with the United Nations (ECOSOC), UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the Organization of American States.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Amnesty International was awarded the United Nations Human Rights Prize for "outstanding achievements in the field of human rights".

Amnesty International received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977 for its contribution to "securing the ground for freedom, for justice, and thereby also for peace in the world".

In recognition of the medical work of Amnesty International, the Council of Europe awarded the organization the European Human Rights Prize in 1983.