

number 1 june 1977

AI in Asia is an internal newsletter published by and for the Amnesty International movement in Asia. The views expressed are those of the contributors. The newsletter is edited on a co-operative basis by AI members in Australia, Japan and Sri Lanka and is published by the Australian section of AI, 277 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, Victoria, Australia 3182 (Telephone - Melbourne 94 3727)

Ever since it was founded in 1961, the Amnesty International (AI) movement has received significant support from individuals and institutions in Asia. The idea of a voluntary association of people from all lands and all walks of life working together peacefully to protect individual human rights around the world is a vision which AI is transforming into a practical reality. Today, just under a third of AI's national sections are in Asia and Australasia: in Australia, Bangladesh, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In addition there are individual members in Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

This participation in the work of AI is vital, coming as it does from that part of the world in which much of world culture has its roots and where by the end of this century 70% of the world's population will live. Until recently however, this participation in AI has been very loosely organized. This is changing: following two regional conferences and continuing consultations within Asia and within the International Executive Committee of AI the possibilities for AI action from within Asia have increased.

Responsibility for the protection of human rights transcends geographical boundaries. But there are other boundaries which AI must cross as well: the need for multilingualism and multiculturalism in the AI movement has never before been so clear. The increasing development of AI has resulted in a dialogue between different views of priorities for human rights action and between people who share a common respect for human rights but whose vision is inevitably shaped by the social, political, economic and cultural differences of their own societies. In practical terms, it is also a dialogue about new ways for organizing AI work and for communicating AI information in the languages of the majority grass-roots population of each country. In this dialogue over the past two years the voices of people from the different societies of Asia have become stronger.

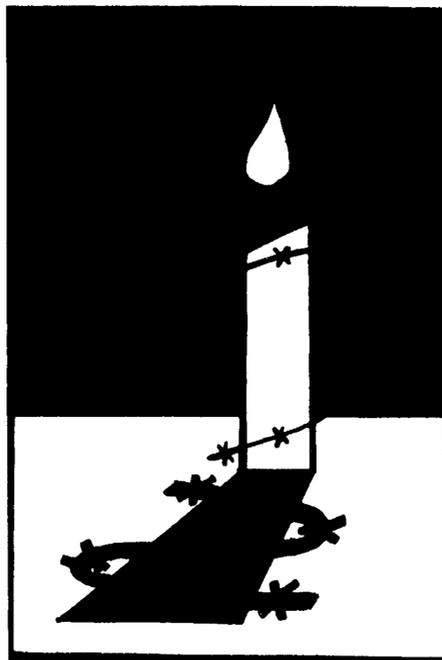
Communication between the traditional center of AI and the rest of the movement is of course important; however, it is also important to encour-

age the exchange of ideas and experience among AI workers within different regions. In Asia, the South Asia Regional Conference (Delhi 1975) and the Pacific Regional Conference (Gotemba 1976) were important steps in this direction. The initiation of this internal Newsletter, "AI in Asia" is another. Through this Newsletter, originally in English but certain to be translated into other languages, it may be possible for AI in countries as widely separated as Japan and Pakistan to come to know each other better and to improve their own work for the protection of human rights and the release of prisoners of conscience throughout the world.

For this inaugural issue of "AI in Asia" six of the national sections in the region have contributed general articles ranging from descriptions of the work they are currently doing to the role of AI in their societies.

Richard Reoch

Field Secretary (Asia)



In June 1976, AI convened its First Pacific Regional Conference in Gotemba, Japan. Participants from 12 countries attended to discuss ways and means for people in the region to participate more fully in the work for the release and protection of prisoners of conscience throughout the world. The Conference prepared a detailed report for submission to the International Council of AI and issued the following public statement, known as the "Gotemba Declaration."

WE, as participants to the first Pacific Regional Conference of Amnesty International, meeting in Tozanso, Japan,

AFFIRM that the struggle for respect and protection of human rights is an international endeavour and that implementation of the principles of human rights is essential to the development of a just and democratic society;
DEPLORE the fact that, wherever we look in our region, we witness gross violations of human rights, arbitrary detention and torture, suspension of such fundamental rights as freedom of speech and association the right to dissent, as well as the imposition of severe restrictions on the free flow of information both inside countries and to the outside world, particularly by governments invoking emergency powers, martial law and other extraordinary measures, constitutional or extra-constitutional;

MAINTAIN that the use of such repressive measures for the curtailment of basic human rights creates a situation in which the use of violence by the oppressed becomes inevitable and believe that the consistent resort to institutional violence in order to crush dissent and deprive the people of their freedom creates an explosive situation for any state;

CALL upon the peoples and upon the governments in our region to prepare the way towards the creation of a truly just and humane society by:

1. Working for the ratification of the United Nations International Covenants on human rights and, wherever these Covenants are ratified, to ensure the implementation of their provisions in the life of each country and the introduction of the necessary legislation for the protection of human rights;

2. Developing a regional appeal machinery for defendants who believe that their rights have not been properly protected by the existing legal structures in their own countries;

3. Ensuring the independence and impartiality of the judiciary and the freedom of the legal profession;

4. Abolishing the use of torture and the imposition of the death penalty in all cases and without reservation.

CALL on Amnesty International to:

1. Concern itself not only with the release of prisoners of conscience but also with the systems that create such prisoners;

2. Realize that an understanding of human rights must be seen in the socio-economic, cultural and religious context of the region;

3. Recognize that in order to raise the level of awareness of human rights and thereby channel the people's consciousness toward the development of a truly just and democratic society, it must be a high priority in the region to develop regional, national and local programs of education about human rights designed to raise the level of awareness in the region, particularly among the majority, grass-roots population of each and every country;

4. Assist us, within the context of our region, to formulate a just definition and set the criteria for the application of terms such as "national security", "public order", "national stability", and "national development" and to indicate clearly the cases where these terms have been abused by authoritarian governments for the curtailment of human rights;

5. Create a regional consultative body linked to Amnesty International, so as to strengthen us in our struggles for human rights in the region and the establishment of just and democratic societies for our peoples.

adopted 5 June 1976

Very few people in Nepal were aware of the objectives and functions of Amnesty International in 1972, although government officials as well as their detainees were already receiving floods of letters of concern from different parts of the world. This organization had started to play an unprecedented role to uphold the cause of human rights. Some time ago it was difficult to imagine such an impact on human rights issues made by this kind of non-governmental and non-political organization. It has mobilized public opinion in defence of human rights and it has, to a large extent, influenced the policies of governments for the implementation of basic human rights. Now in Nepal AI has become quite a familiar organization.

In 1972 a national section of AI was formed in Nepal under the chairmanship of Mr. Rishikesh Shaha who had received a large number of letters from members of AI from many countries when he himself was a prisoner of conscience. Despite the fact that the political situation was not wholly favourable for the proper activation of the section and that situation continued for a long time, the national section participated in several regional and international meetings. The first preparatory meeting of the South Asia Regional Conference of AI was held in Kathmandu in December 1974. During that meeting the chairman of the section was arrested on a political charge and the presence of the Field Secretary and other AI representatives was used to pursue the government for his release from prison.

In March 1975, the secretary general of AI, Mr. Martin Ennals, visited Kathmandu for high-level talks concerning the release of prisoners of conscience which at that time were large in number. His discussions helped to remove misconceptions about AI. It was widely realized that this organization is strictly confined to its objectives of realizing concepts of human rights which every member country of the United Nations has accepted in principle.

Members of the national section of AI in Nepal then effectively part-

icipated in the South Asia Regional Conference in Delhi and the outcome of that conference helped considerably to familiarize people with the role of AI. It was after this conference that the South Asia Publications Service started to function and hundreds of Newsletters began to inform the public in Nepal about the plight of human rights in different countries of the world. This project began successfully to convince people of different political beliefs that AI has no governmental, political, ideological or religious bias while working for the promotion of human rights.

On the international level, Nepal had the privilege of being the first Asian country to sponsor a resolution against torture in the United Nations. The national section in Nepal subsequently planned to organize a seminar on the problem of torture in 1976 but this had to be postponed due to unavoidable local circumstances.

The national section of Nepal for the first time participated formally in the International Council meeting of AI held in Strasbourg in 1976. That participation has created a great awareness in the members of the national section about their role in AI. The national section has decided to modify its constitution to broaden the participation of the people in its activities. It is seriously devoted to bring the people of different trades and professions into its fold, creating a strong apolitical and neutral image. The national section at present has planned to obtain a maximum number of signatures for the 1977 international petition for the release of prisoners of conscience. It has recently decided to work upon other programmes of AI which had not been dealt with. The public in general in Nepal have a greater enthusiasm and support for A.I.'s objectives and activities. Now the national section feels a challenge for a greater effort in this respect. It hopes to meet this with full zeal and vigour.

The Japanese Amnesty Section has a carefully thought out fourfold plan of activities for Prisoners of Conscience Year designed to involve a wide section of the community. These are the plans:

A POC EXHIBITION from 18 April to 24 April at Nantenshi Gallery, Tokyo. Posters exhibited will be sold to the public.

Similar exhibitions are being planned for Kyoto, Osaka, Nagoya and other cities.

POC INTERNATIONAL PETITION CAMPAIGN will be initiated on 18 April, when the Japanese Section will hold a press conference to publicise the significance of POC Year. Politicians, writers and other well-known people have been invited to the initial signing party to follow the press conference.

A CARAVAN WALKATHON is being planned by young people in the section for June and August from Tokyo to Osaka. A group of these young, ambitious and energetic people will walk all the way between the two cities, a distance of 547 km. They plan to make about six stops holding various programs with local people to promote AI activities in respective areas. The young people will also collect contributions by charging their sponsors so much per kilometer. They have already held a preliminary walkathon between Tokyo and Odawara, a distance of 90 km. This gave them confidence that they will be able to complete the planned July-August walkathon.

AN EVENT TO WIND UP POC YEAR will be held later in the year. It is still in the planning stage but is scheduled for 10 December, designated by the United Nations as "Human Rights Day".

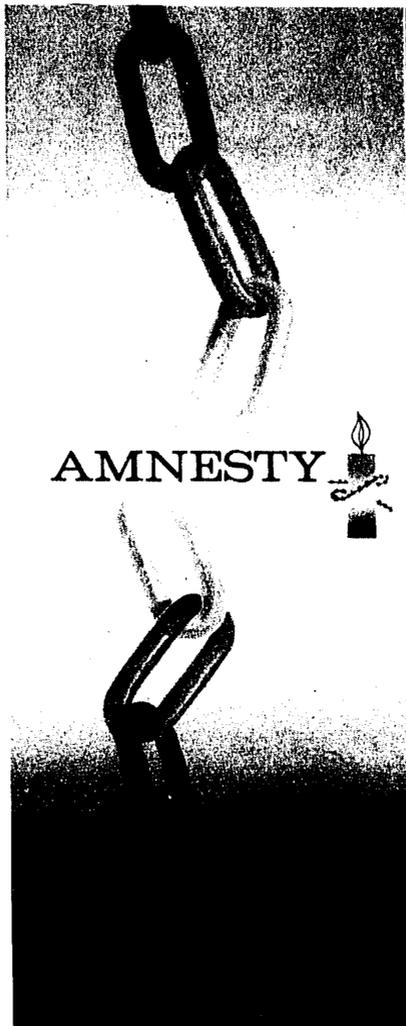
Through these activities the Japanese Section hopes to achieve three objectives:

- a. To publicise widely human rights violations in different parts of the world and urge the need for human rights protection. To gain more understanding by the public of AI objectives, increase membership and organisational activities.
- b. Overcome financial difficulties and build a solid financial base for

the section's activities.

c. Make an effort to strengthen the section's structure and functions of its organisation, with special emphasis on groups and their functional operations.

POC Year activities in the Japanese Section have been planned and will be put into practice by a great number of devoted and conscientious workers, who spend many unpaid hours working in our office.



Amnesty International Indian Section was founded in 1968. The initiative to start it was taken by the late Miss Mridula Sarabhai, a leading social worker of India. Amnesty International was introduced to her through several greeting cards she received while in prison for her espousal of the cause of human rights in the Indian State of Kashmir. On her release, she decided to start the Indian Section of a movement that did so much to her during a difficult period. Leading citizens with whom she discussed the idea were struck by the framework of Amnesty which has as its focus of attention the "Prisoners of Conscience" - those who neither use nor advocate the use of violence in furtherance of their beliefs. With the Gandhian tradition of non-violence, India offered a fertile field for propagation of the Amnesty ideals.

While Amnesty found general support, it was not easy to translate this into concrete shape in terms of impressive membership, adoption work for prisoners, etc. This was particularly so because the Indian Section, as a matter of policy, has been always opposed to accepting financial help from outside the country for organizational purposes. The membership fee also was pegged down to a low level so that no one with genuine interest in human rights would be kept out. It was also decided that during the initial years, the stress may not be on a large scale membership because of political and other problems.

Unlike the general pattern of organizing members into groups, the Indian Section decided, in the light of existing conditions in the country, to have individual members constituting branches in different cities of the country. This pattern of working has however received acceptance in the Amnesty Statute.

The initial period was used to give publicity to Amnesty International material in the local press and explain Amnesty to kindred organisations in the country. Besides, the Indian Section participated in the 1973-74 Special Signature Campaign for Abolition of Torture. This was with a view to publicising Amnesty in the various parts of the country through this short and dramatic campaign. The support it evoked from organizations and individuals alike showed that there was enormous goodwill for Amnesty.

The individuals who supported the campaign included Members of Parliament, leading advocates, academicians, social workers and doctors. Numerous social welfare agencies, trade unions and peoples organizations in India actively participated in the campaign by passing resolutions by their Executive Committees as well as General Body. The time seemed ripe for a concerted drive for large scale membership.

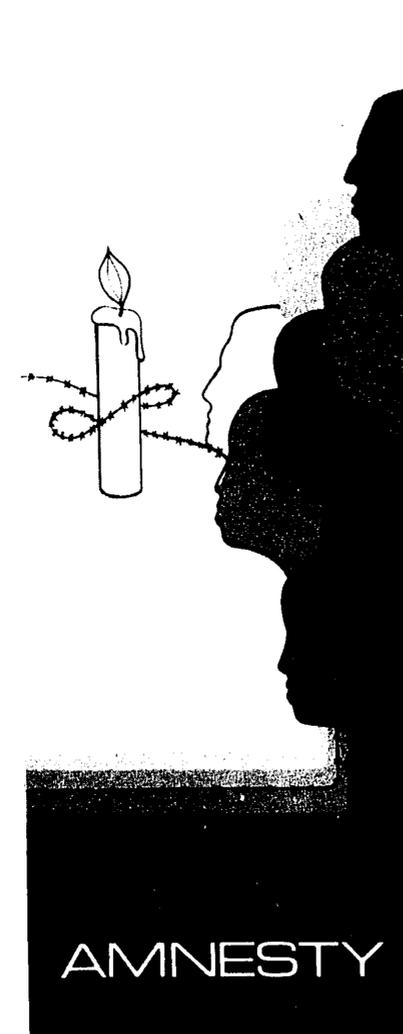
Before launching such a drive, the Indian Section felt that it was necessary to demonstrate clearly, that Amnesty movement was very relevant to all developing nations like India in the Asian region. This idea of the Indian Section was accepted by the International Council of Amnesty in 1973 and reiterated by it during 1974. Accordingly, the Indian Section hosted a South Asia Regional Conference of Amnesty in Delhi during March, 1975. Amnesty Sections from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Srilanka participated in this meeting besides Indian Section. Problems of organizing Amnesty Section in these countries were discussed at depth. The report of the conference has been lauded and accepted by the following International Council Meeting of Amnesty International. The Delhi Meet also recommended the starting of a South Asia Publications Service. The ground for expanded activities of the Indian Section was fully prepared through this Conference.

Then came the Emergency 1975-77 and denial of all human rights, a situation which Indians thought would never come to pass in their country! To the credit of the Indian Section it must be pointed out that only one member requested to be dropped out during this period. The Indian Section today has thus a 100 odd well-tested members who have an extremely receptive notion in which to launch a large scale Amnesty work. The Indian Section is now working to this end.

The role of Amnesty International during the 1975-77 Emergency has been quite significant. All the important prisoners in India were adopted by Amnesty which launched a relentless drive throughout the world for their release. In a recent cable to Amnesty International, the new Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai, himself an adopted prisoner until January 1977, had this to say:

"..... My colleagues and I warmly recall the efforts made by Amnesty International for the restoration of fundamental freedoms and civil liberties".

By its work during Emergency, Amnesty's image has firmly been imprinted in the minds of Indian people as a pivotal Human Rights crusade. It would not be long before the Indian Section grows into one of the large Sections of Amnesty International.



"The expression Prisoners of Conscience itself, as well as the work of Amnesty International on their behalf, has deep significance. The very term reveals the state of our present world".

This was said by Stephen Cardinal Kim in an address in Seoul on 7th January this year, praising and supporting AI and its activities for 1977 - Prisoners of Conscience Year.

Amnesty Korean Committee has chosen a summary of this address as its article for this issue of "AI in Asia".

Stephen Cardinal Kim continued: "The term Prisoners of Conscience means that, as far as humanity is concerned, man's most inviolable interior, his very conscience, is being infringed upon by inhuman forces.

"It is a fact that all over the world, especially under repressive political structures, that such things are happening more frequently and, to that extent, the number of prisoners of conscience is increasing.

"It is this problem that is the problem of modern society. Conscience in this sense is not the normal meaning but rather it means man's personality. To say that someone has sold his conscience is to say that he has sold his personality.

"Today humanity is at crisis point. The problem of the basic significance of the word Prisoners of Conscience is the same problem as asking ourselves whether or not we are going to live truly human lives.

"Let us defend the Prisoners of Conscience, those who are in prison for the sake of conscience. In saving them we are restoring today's dying humanity. It is with this in mind that Amnesty International designated this year "Prisoner of Conscience Year".

"I earnestly desire that all your sacrifice, all your labour, will see this meaningful work accomplished for all mankind."

Earlier in his address Stephen Cardinal Kim had quoted a statement he had made in a discussion on "Justice and Politics" with the Reverend Kang Won-Yong and published in the monthly magazine "Dialogue".

He said: "One cannot say the Holy Spirit works only in the Church. We can also see the Holy Spirit working outside the Church. One example is Amnesty International. Although it does not label itself Christian it stands ahead of Christians in witnessing to Christian love, to love of neighbour".

He continued in his address: "I have always looked on the spirit and activities of Amnesty International with great respect, but I was particularly moved by their efforts in early 1974 on behalf of the defendants in the so-called Five Writers Trial. Nobody paid any attention to the writers. Even if someone was concerned, they did not show it openly. Hard as it was for anyone to make an attempt to understand their position, it was even harder to make a public plea on their behalf. In spite of that a non-Korean delegate from Amnesty International came all the way to Korea to show concern for them and attempt to understand their position. This greatly impressed me. Truly my respect for AI was greatly deepened.

"Internationally the noble spirit of Amnesty International is recognised. Transcending all artificial and sociological distinctions like race, nationality, religion or ideology, you go beyond merely human concern to show your interest in understanding the position with all suffering prisoners of conscience. Furthermore, you show your concern in a very special way by initiating concrete programs to help those prisoners and their families."



Asian countries have so many features in common that this article based on facts and experience in Sri Lanka may be relevant to them too.

The more striking similarities of these societies:

- They are old and have an ancient culture and are largely governed by tradition.
- The presence of a new intelligentsia springing from the ranks of the middle class and having a vital influence on political life. The new intellectuals are concerned with the solutions of the prevailing problems of poverty, inequality and injustice.
- The strong influence of religion on the day to day life and on the social outlook of the people. The actions and reactions of the average Asian must be understood in the light of this strong religious background.

In Sri Lanka we have followers of the principal world religions - Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Christians. All these religions right through the ages have stressed the importance of freedom from fear, they have preached and fought against injustice, and they believe in the total development of man.

In addition, in our country, we have a strong sense of justice coming from the Singhalese Kings, of which history has recorded many incidents.

Against this background AI can perform a very useful service in our country, and perhaps in other Asian countries, for the aims and objectives of AI often reflect the same values found in religions. From any point of view, is it not a clear injustice for a person to be imprisoned for his beliefs, colour, language, ethnic origin or religion, provided he has not used force or advocated violence to put his beliefs into operation? Is it not equally wrong for a person to be kept in prison for an unreasonable length of time without a fair trial? Could a people bred with compassion and love towards fellow beings tolerate torture or the State killing of fellow beings - the death penalty?

The present anxiety of our Government and the people is to be self-sufficient and eliminate poverty and misery.

Political emphasis is on development and our people, with their religious upbringing, could easily be made to understand that development is not solely material progress but a process of growing self-reliance, increasing self-determination, restoring opportunities for direct participation in public life. In this way they could exercise full responsibility for working out their destiny, emancipation and development.

This is a question of justice and is intimately linked with freedom from fear, which by extension means freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, freedom from torture and freedom from being murdered by the Police or military.

If AI keeps these facts in mind it will integrate automatically with the thinking and wishes of the people. This approach will be more useful and advantageous than merely speaking of "human rights" or the United Nations charter.

Our programme should not merely consist of the development of AI as an organisation but should be a sustained attempt to harness opposition to torture, injustice, unjust imprisonment, degrading treatment of humans, and sympathy for prisoners of conscience wherever they are to be found. Such feelings exist as strongly in socialist and third world countries as anywhere else. A way must be found by us to enable all those who so desire to play their full part in the work of AI in the way most convenient and satisfactory to them.



As recently as two years ago there was no Australian National Section of Amnesty International. True, there were members and groups- in fact there were members and groups working in Australia since 1962, but these were working independently in each State. The reason is simple- Australia is a vast wide country and the distances between States make travel and communications very difficult and expensive. The concentration of population in a few large cities favours the growth of local centres of activity. The Australian Section was formed with some trepidation, but our problems are gradually being sorted out- the function of the National Section is to co-ordinate the work of the State Branches and to speak of the movement as a whole in Australia.

The most striking development over the last year is the almost unbelievable upsurge of interest in the work of Amnesty International - the membership has more than doubled and now has reached a figure of close on 3,000 members. The media are now widely covering the violations of human rights in so many countries. Radio and television interviews by leading Amnesty members are very frequent now and a recent article on torture in one of our leading daily papers brought over 1200 enquiries from all over Australia- in fact, this particular paper has pledged its support in its editorial comments and recently donated \$2000 for our work. Another paper has run a full page advertisement (free of cost) to help us raise funds.

We also have the support of Parliamentarians (from all sides of the political spectrum) - there are Federal and State Parliamentary Amnesty groups operating - they have quite a different function from the ordinary groups as they prefer to work on behalf of Parliamentarians and other specialised cases of people who are imprisoned or are suffering persecution. We also

have the support of the Law Council of Australia, the Trade Union movement is behind our work and the medical profession has become interested particularly since the campaign for Bukovsky.

On the practical level, about 40 adoption groups persist in their work for individual prisoners of conscience- many members take part in the Prisoner of the Month campaign and others take part in urgent action appeals when torture or persecution threatens a victim in some part of the world. The Australian section produces its own greeting cards and thousands of these were sent this year as in other years- we have been delighted by responses and we hope in this way the prisoners will feel that even as far away as Australia, they are not forgotten.

Of grave concern to the Section is the failure of the Australian authorities to appreciate in all cases, the danger to a person who is forcibly repatriated to a country where human rights are not respected- even though the Australian government respects Amnesty's voice and have made several moves at the United Nations , e.g. it was one of the co-sponsors of the Resolution on torture in 1975. As recently as November 1976 it was also a co-sponsor to a Draft Resolution on Human Rights in Chile. It is with sadness that the Section is intervening with the Government on behalf of illegal immigrants from Chile- two have been deported back and another thirty are in immediate danger of being deported.

The Section is very keen to expand ,not only within Australia, but also to participate with other countries in this region- we hope through this Newsletter to get to know our neighbours and strengthen our bonds.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL is a worldwide human rights movement which is independent of any government, political faction, ideology, economic interest or religious creed. It works for the release of men and women imprisoned anywhere for their beliefs, colour, ethnic origin, language or religion, provided they have neither used nor advocated violence. These are termed "prisoners of conscience".

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL opposes torture and the death penalty in all cases and without reservation. It advocates fair and early trials for all political prisoners and works on behalf of persons detained without charge or without trial and those detained after expiry of their sentences.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL seeks observance throughout the world of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL has 1,665 adoption groups and national sections in 33 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America and Latin America and individual members in 78 countries. Each adoption group works for three prisoners of conscience in countries other than its own. The three countries are balanced geographically and politically to ensure impartiality. Information about prisoners and human rights violations emanates from Amnesty International's Research Department in London.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL has consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC), UNESCO and the Council of Europe, has cooperative relations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and has observer status with the Organization of African Unity (Bureau for the Placement and Education of African Refugees).

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL is financed by subscriptions and donations of its worldwide membership. To safeguard the independence of the organization, all contributions are strictly controlled by guidelines laid down by AI's International Council, and income and expenditure are made public in an annual financial report.