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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
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HANDBOOK FOR GROUPS

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LIST OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
OBJECT OF THE ORGANISATION	1
PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE	1
THE STRUCTURE OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL	1
THE SELECTION OF PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE	2
THE PRACTICE OF TORTURE	2
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT	3
CASE SHEETS	3
SECURITY	3
GROUP ACTION	3
1. Letters to Governments	4
2. Letters to Embassies	4
3. Letters to Amnesty Contacts	4
4. Letters to International Organisations	5
5. Exile Organisations	5
6. Letters to Prisoners	5
7. Parcels to Prisoners	6
8. Letters and Relief to Prisoners' Families	6
9. Visits Abroad	7
10. Publicity	7
11. Double and Multiple Adoptions	7
ORGANISING AN AMNESTY GROUP	
1. Organisation	8
2. Visits to International Secretariat	8
3. Finance	8
4. Reports	8
5. Releases	9
6. Suspension of group work.	9

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL is an independent organisation which is not associated with any government, political party, or religious creed. It seeks to ensure that everyone has the right freely to hold and express his convictions and that the provisions of Articles 5, 9, 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are observed throughout the world.

From The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed at the United Nations, 10 December 1948:

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International works for the release of persons who are 'imprisoned, detained, restricted or otherwise subjected to physical coercion or restraint by reason of their political, religious or other conscientiously held belief or by reason of their ethnic origin, colour or language, provided that they have not used or advocated violence'. These persons are 'prisoners of conscience'.

The movement functions through the adoption of individual prisoners of conscience by Amnesty groups. Each group adopts three prisoners drawn from contrasting political backgrounds, holding different political or religious beliefs. This system is designed to ensure that Amnesty's intervention is not partisan. Groups do not work for prisoners arrested by their own government. The effectiveness of Amnesty International rests on mobilizing public opinion on an international and impartial basis. Political balance and the exclusion of prisoners who have engaged in, or advocated, acts of violence are the key factors in Amnesty's successful attempts to secure the release of prisoners of conscience and to assist them and their families. Persons who can be proved to have engaged in espionage are excluded from the category of 'prisoners of conscience'. No prisoner is adopted if his position would be in any way jeopardized by outside interest.

THE STRUCTURE OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International was founded as the result of an appeal launched in London on 28 May 1961. There are now nearly 1,000 Amnesty groups in 27 countries, linked in NATIONAL SECTIONS. The largest National Sections are in Germany, Sweden, the U.K. and Holland. There are groups in Norway, Denmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Switzerland, Italy, Luxembourg, Austria and Belgium. Amnesty is well established in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Ireland. The movement is also represented in Asia (Japan, India, Pakistan and Ceylon), Africa (Ghana and Gambia), the Americas (USA, Peru and Mexico) and the Middle East (Israel and Lebanon).

The National Sections have proportional representation at the INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL, which meets annually to take policy decisions for the movement as a whole. The International Council elects an INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE consisting of at least five members and meeting at least twice a year to supervise the conduct of the organisation. Sean MacBride, S.C., is Chairman of the International Executive Committee. The Executive appoints the SECRETARY-GENERAL, who is responsible for running the INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT in London. Martin Ennals was appointed Secretary-General in 1968. The International Secretariat carries out research on prisoners, provides information for groups, organises publicity, arranges missions, and carries out the day-to-day administration of Amnesty's work.

Amnesty has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The candle surrounded by barbed wire is the internationally recognised symbol of Amnesty International.

THE SELECTION OF PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

The Research Department in the International Secretariat is responsible for obtaining information about prisoners and for preparing case sheets which are distributed to the adopting Amnesty groups. By a decision of the Executive Committee in May 1970 a new post of the HEAD OF RESEARCH was created. In July Dr. Zbynek Zeman was appointed to this post. The Research Department is organised on a broad geographical basis, with Research Officers and their assistants responsible for carrying out investigations on particular areas. Information reaches the International Secretariat from a number of sources: newspapers and periodicals (in a variety of languages), reports of exile organisations, consultations with experts in particular fields, visits from exiles and the relatives of prisoners, letters from prisoners (sometimes smuggled out of prison) and from their families, and Amnesty missions. Each Research Officer attempts to evaluate information about arrests, trials, and detention in the light of political and legal developments in the country concerned, and to provide the adopting Amnesty groups with the fullest possible information about the political background and the individual prisoner.

The Research Department seeks to ensure that all cases adopted by Amnesty are genuine prisoners of conscience who have not taken part in violence or espionage. Each case must be decided on its merits. There are countries where trumped-up charges of espionage or violence are used to charge or discredit prisoners, and such charges can only be evaluated on the basis of a knowledge of the country concerned. The case sheet will always explain why a prisoner so charged is being adopted. If the Secretariat believes that a particular individual is a prisoner of conscience but lacks conclusive information, the case may be allocated to an Amnesty group as an INVESTIGATION CASE, and the group should attempt to obtain the information required for determining the prisoner's status.

THE PRACTICE OF TORTURE

The definition of prisoners of conscience excludes those who have used or advocated violence, but article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'no-one shall be subjected to torture, cruel or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'. The prisoner who has engaged in violence is not excluded from this

protection, and in recent years Amnesty has issued reports on a number of countries concerning allegations of torture. These reports are the responsibility of the International Secretariat, and do not affect the principle that only prisoners of conscience are adopted.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

In addition, the Statute of Amnesty International lists as one of the aims of the organisation that it shall 'oppose by all appropriate means the imposition and execution of death penalties for political prisoners'.

CASE SHEETS

Groups receive a case sheet in respect of each adopted prisoner. The case sheet is a printed form, showing personal details of the prisoner (age, profession, marital status, state of health), details of arrest, charges, trial and sentence, the place and conditions of imprisonment, and addresses of heads of state, government departments (usually the Ministry of Justice or Ministry of the Interior) and other individuals or organisations whom the group should contact in attempting to help the prisoner. All case sheets provide a brief account of the political situation in the country concerned and of the laws under which the prisoner is detained. In many cases, the International Secretariat will provide a more detailed background paper on the country or on a particular group of prisoners. Books for further reading are often suggested, and group members should make every effort to familiarise themselves not only with the information provided by the Secretariat but with some of the literature on the countries concerned - such information helps groups to write to governments on an informed level. The volume of information reaching the Secretariat in respect of individual prisoners varies considerably. In some cases, full biographical details will be available (for example, if the prisoner is a well-known politician or writer) and, in other cases, an Amnesty mission may have been able to investigate prison conditions or an Amnesty observer may have attended a trial. But often very little is known about the prisoners - they may be held incommunicado in a military prison - and the adopting group must endeavour to obtain the required information from the contacts suggested on the case sheet. Groups will be informed by the Secretariat if further information about their prisoners comes to light, and it is essential that the groups pass on any news they received immediately. Such information may affect not only their own prisoners but other held in the same circumstances.

SECURITY

The information provided for groups by the International Secretariat is classified as (a) Open - may be shown to anybody, and used for publicity; (b) Restricted - may be used within the group and for selected contacts; and (c) Confidential - should not be disclosed except to group members directly involved with the case. This system is designed to protect Amnesty's informants and prisoners and their families. The family and friends of a prisoner will almost invariably come under police surveillance, and Amnesty groups must always be aware of the serious consequences which may ensue from rash publicity or indiscreet letters.

GROUP ACTION

We assume that political imprisonment is an expression of political, social or economic instability. Nevertheless, the government may feel that the prisoner's detention is either unjust or bad politics. It is the purpose of group action to reinforce that feeling by the most suitable means.

1. Letters to Governments

The case sheet will always give a list of names and addresses of Heads of State and responsible Ministers, such as the Minister of Justice or Minister of the Interior, the Chief Public Prosecutor or Attorney-General, or (in a one-party state) the Party Secretary. Letters should be written on official Amnesty paper to every Minister or official mentioned, since this increases the chances of some letters getting through to the responsible individuals concerned. Letters should be brief, polite and factual. They should always include mention of Amnesty's aims, i.e. Amnesty's object of ensuring the observance of Articles 5, 9, 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and its attempt to assist prisoners of conscience who have been imprisoned because they have expressed their beliefs. Groups should compose their letters on the assumption - unless instructed to the contrary - that the individual they are addressing has never heard of Amnesty and must be informed of its international and impartial character. They should specify their work for other adopted prisoners. Letters should also be written on the assumption that the authorities are open to discussion. An attempt should be made to find basic points of agreement, such as constitutional guarantees. Experience has shown that even the most repressive governments may be anxious to maintain a reputation for apparent fairness. Abusive language and rhetoric must be avoided. It is important, where possible, to stress a country's reputation for moderation and justice, to show respect for its constitution and its judicial procedure, and an understanding of current difficulties (for example, when protesting against the detention of members of the outgoing government after a coup d'etat). The correct forms of address must always be followed (Your Excellency, your obedient servant, etc.)

Letters should be sent to governments regularly - on making an adoption, on receiving further news of a prisoner, when a partial amnesty has been announced, on Human Rights Day (10 December), during Prisoner of Conscience Week, on national holidays, at religious festivals, on a President's birthday, on the anniversary of the formation of a government, and so on. Groups should not expect to receive replies to these letters, although they are sometimes received. But members should never be discouraged if their letters are unanswered - the important point is that governments receive regular reminders that their prisoners are not forgotten, and there have been striking examples of the cumulative effect of letter campaigns in securing the release of prisoners, even though the writers of the letters never received any acknowledgement from the government concerned.

2. Letters to Embassies

These letters should follow the lines of the letters to governments, but they can go further in emphasizing trading and cultural relations between the group's country and the foreign government concerned. In addition to the occasions mentioned above, letters should be sent to embassies on the occasion of visits from trade delegations, sporting teams, ministerial tours, and international cultural events. Groups are more likely to receive a reply from an Embassy than from a foreign government, and should be persistent in writing letters and attempting to obtain an interview with the Ambassador, Charge d'Affaires or First Secretary. Some of the occasions mentioned above provide a useful opportunity for trying to arrange an Amnesty deputation to a foreign Embassy. Such deputations are most effective when a number of Amnesty groups with prisoners in the same country are involved, and are often organised by National Sections. Groups should take the initiative and consult their National Sections and the International Secretariat for material to support their case.

3. Letters to Amnesty contacts

The case sheet will often suggest the name of an informant who may be able to help the group by providing information about a trial or a prisoner's family. In some countries, the informant may be a defending lawyer or a politician actively concerned with human rights. Groups must bear in mind the fact that letters to such individuals may be opened by the security police, and security precautions must be observed. The case sheet will sometimes specify that official paper should not be used. Letters must always be tactfully phrased; it is best to be cautious in an

initial approach and to ask for limited information only. All information received from contacts must be sent immediately to the International Secretariat as it may affect several prisoners. It is best to send a photocopy of the letter and envelope; if this is not possible, the group should send the original, which will be copied in the Secretariat and returned. Groups should not be disappointed if they do not receive an immediate reply as the informant may be extremely busy. It is advisable to send an International Reply Coupon.

4. Letters to International Organisations.

Most prisoners have a trade or profession and these usually have a national or international organisation, which will be concerned to protect the interests of their members - steelworkers, schoolteachers, journalists, as the case may be. Groups should attempt to contact the national body representing this trade or profession in their own countries, in an attempt to associate them with protesting against the imprisonment of the individuals concerned, and groups should also contact international organisations of such trades and professions. Names and addresses will frequently be provided on the case sheet and, in some cases, the international organisation will be able to put the group in touch with its branch in the prisoner's country and provide additional information. Groups should note, however, that all correspondence to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the International Committee of the Red Cross must go through the International Secretariat. Both organisations work closely with Amnesty but have requested that, to avoid confusion, groups should not write to them directly. All enquiries and replies will be forwarded by the International Secretariat.

5. Exile Organisations

Groups or individuals in exile provide an important source of information for Amnesty work, and group members may wish to attend their public meetings and establish contact with them. Their names and addresses will often be provided on the case sheet. All information so obtained, whether from correspondence with exile organisations, pressure groups, or individuals, must be forwarded to the International Secretariat.

6. Letters to Prisoners

Prisoners usually welcome letters from groups, but the conditions under which prisoners are allowed to receive letters vary considerably. In some countries prisoners are not allowed to receive letters at all; in others, they are rationed to, say, one letter every three months, and it would be tragic if a prisoner were deprived of a letter from his wife because his allocation had been used up by an Amnesty group. The case sheet will inform the group whether it is safe to write to the prisoner, and the Secretariat can be contacted in cases of doubt. From the point of view of the authorities, the most acceptable way to write to a prisoner may be to send an open post-card. The case sheet will specify the languages to be used; English or French are suggested if the group cannot write in the prisoner's own language. It is important (particularly if the prisoner's native language is used) to stress that you are a group of well-wishers; make it clear that you are not exiles, be careful to explain your own nationality, and write only the most general enquiries about the prisoner's wellbeing. There are exceptional countries where prisoners are allowed to correspond with Amnesty groups, and you will be informed if your prisoner falls into this category. Amnesty's annual Christmas Card scheme helps to encourage prisoners by the knowledge that they are not forgotten; the cards are often shared among prisoners. The Postcards for Prisoners Campaign, which is conducted by individual members rather than groups, is intended to exert additional pressure on governments on behalf of the prisoners.

7. Parcels to Prisoners

It is most heartening for the prisoner if the group is able to arrange to send a regular parcel. But there are many countries where gift-parcels are not allowed, or can only be brought in by relatives. In some cases the best way to help is to send money to a relative who can buy something the prisoner really needs, thus saving heavy postage and possible customs dues. A campaign to send a parcel to a prisoner can be an effective means of protest. Unless you are otherwise instructed, write to the following, asking whether they will deliver or accept parcels and, if not, whether they can recommend any way of sending a parcel: The Director of Prisons (c/o Ministry of the Interior); the Prison Governor; the Prison Chaplain (where appropriate); the Chief Postmaster. The same procedure may be followed in attempting to arrange to send letters. Although the group will probably not receive a reply, the letters will have had an important effect. If you are able to send a parcel, its contents will depend on the information you can obtain from the authorities or the prisoner's relatives. Remember that heavy customs duties may make it impossible for the prisoner to accept a gift - this is commonly the case when parcels of clothing are involved. Many prisoners feel the deprivation of reading matter very seriously, and will welcome gifts of books; where you are able to send them, make sure they are in a language the prisoner understands, and are non-political; poetry, philosophy, classics, magazines of a non-political nature, and occasionally history may get through the prison censor. In some countries, prisoners are allowed to follow educational courses if the fees are paid and the necessary arrangements made. Centralized schemes on these lines are organised through the International Secretariat using funds provided by the groups. Always enclose an international reply coupon with parcels so that the prisoner has a chance of writing an acknowledgement. In many prisons, cigarettes are a form of general currency, and may be an appropriate gift.

8. Letters and Relief to Prisoners' Families

The case sheet will give the name and address of the prisoner's family (if known), and an indication of whether the family is in financial need. Groups may sometimes be able to discover family details from contacts. The general security provisions already outlined must always be applied: make it clear that you are not an exile organisation, explain your nationality, and emphasise that you are acting solely from humanitarian motives. Do not use Amnesty paper in the first instance; if the family indicates that it is happy to correspond with you, you can mention in the body of the next letter that you are an Amnesty group. It is best to write in the family's native language; English or French are usually suggested as alternatives. Always remember that a prisoner's family are likely to be under police observation and in danger of arrest themselves, and make sure that any letter you write could not be open to misinterpretation. Picture postcards containing greetings only are likely in many countries to escape censorship altogether, and would be welcomed by families who are financially secure.

The provision of relief for prisoners' families varies from country to country. In some countries, centralised relief programmes are organised from the International Secretariat; in others, groups send gifts or money directly to the families. The case sheet will advise you of the appropriate procedure. The provision of relief for prisoners and their families is a most important aspect of Amnesty's work. A sum which seems small by Western European standards may enable a family deprived of its breadwinner to keep alive; it may provide for school fees for the children of the family, it may help to subsidise an inadequate prison diet, it may pay fares to visit a prisoner, it may provide medical help. In general, it is far better to send money than parcels (other than token gifts) unless the group receives a specific request from a family and knows that the gift will not be liable to customs dues and import quotes. The best way to send money is by bankers' draft or money order. Groups will be advised on this point by their National Section office or the International Secretariat.

Never press a family with letters if you do not receive a reply: it may not be safe for them to write or receive letters.

9. Visits Abroad

Group members who in the course of business or pleasure travel to countries where they have adopted Amnesty prisoners may be able to meet prisoners' relatives and sometimes even visit prisoners. Members on these visits cannot speak or negotiate on behalf of their organisation. Such visits are quite separate from Amnesty's official missions to observe trials or investigate prison conditions: these missions can be authorised by the International Secretariat only. Group members anxious to conduct such visits must consult fully with the Secretariat for briefing. No family should be visited without their express consent in advance; a sudden visit from a foreigner may attract unwelcome attention.

10. Publicity

Publicity is one of Amnesty's most powerful weapons. In some cases, a vigorous publicity campaign initiated in the local press by an Amnesty group has developed into a national protest, and had an identifiable effect on a government's actions. International public indignation can force a repressive government to re-assess its policies, and publicity has in many countries contributed to individual or partial amnesties, to better prison conditions, to open trials, and to the suspension of the death penalty. But groups must remember that there are also cases where more is accomplished by discreet negotiation than by rash publicity, and that premature publicity may antagonise a government which is actually trying to improve matters. Sometimes, the case sheet will carry a warning not to engage in publicity for a prisoner - it may be that publicity would endanger him, it may be that the Secretariat is engaged in negotiation with the government concerned. But if publicity is advised, groups should make every effort to carry out a sustained campaign on a prisoner's behalf. The methods of conducting such campaigns start with letters to local newspapers and may develop into campaigns in the national press, television and radio. Groups should try to persuade persons of influence to support their campaigns, remembering that the most effective criticism often comes from people known to be in general sympathy with the regime rather than those whose positions are fundamentally opposed. It is important that publicity campaigns should be sustained, with follow-up letters reporting progress - or a Government's recalcitrance. Use all the events in the Amnesty calendar and the national calendar - National Days, official birthdays, religious festivals - as well as the prisoner's birthday, the anniversary of his trial, as occasions for obtaining publicity. Publicity is important in many ways: it spreads knowledge of persecution, it increases support for Amnesty, and it has a cumulative effect on governments. Remember that governments and embassies maintain press-cuttings libraries, and that frequent publicity for a prisoner will bring his name to their notice. It may be helpful if groups, or individuals outside groups, sent copies of relevant press-cuttings to the Embassies concerned. Publicity campaigns are often co-ordinated by the National Sections in order to make them more effective.

11. Double and Multiple Adoptions

Many prisoners are now 'double adopted': two groups are briefed on the same case and work separately for the prisoner while co-ordinating some of their activities. Double adoption means that pressure can be exerted on governments from two different countries, that the financial responsibility for providing relief is shared, and that the International Secretariat can provide enough cases for the rapidly increasing number of groups. When writing to prisoners, families, or contacts, groups should always make it clear - unless instructed to the contrary - that they are one of two groups working for the prisoner, or the recipient may be confused by being asked the same questions by different persons. Groups should consult each other on the best course of action and on the way in which they may share the work. The system of 'multiple adoptions' is used in cases where there is virtually no chance of negotiation with the authorities and where there is no doubt about the prisoner's status as a prisoner of conscience. The groups' main task - in the case of multiple adoptions - is to send appeals to the authorities, to approach people in their own country who would have influence with the governments concerned,

and - where advisable - to organise publicity as widely as possible. If there is contact with the prisoner's family or lawyer, this remains the task of one or two groups. Multiple adoption is principally used for prisoners in communist countries. It is very rare for groups to receive any replies from the authorities in communist countries, but it is clear that approaches by a number of groups have a cumulative effect which is more powerful than single appeals.

ORGANISING AN AMNESTY GROUP

1. Organisation

The over-riding object of Amnesty group work is to secure the release of adopted prisoners, and it is up to groups to organise themselves in the most effective way towards this end. The number of people in a group varies, but is usually not less than six; some groups have as many as 50 members. If the group is over-organised, its members may feel inhibited from taking action, but each group should appoint a Secretary and Treasurer. Individual members will also take responsibility for writing to embassies and governments, for organising publicity and press relations, for sending money and parcels, and for organising fund-raising activities. All groups work out the system that suits them best, and can consult the National Section or the International Secretariat if advice is needed.

2. Visits to International Secretariat

The staff of the International Secretariat enjoy contacts they have with Amnesty members visiting London, although the time allotted to such visits may be limited. We should like to ask intending visitors to telephone or write in advance, mentioning the area they wish to discuss, thereby enabling staff members to organise their work schedules accordingly.

3. Finance

The International Secretariat is to a high extent financed by the National Sections and by group contributions, and in this way the Secretariat can continue its work of obtaining information on prisoners. A National Section decides on the amount it expects to receive from its groups. A Section is committed to an amount payable to the Secretariat of £40 per group, and should ensure that this minimum contribution reaches the Secretariat regularly and promptly. Where there exists no National Section this is the responsibility of each individual group.

Groups are urged to send more if they can as the Secretariat can only operate effectively if its financial basis is secure. In most National Sections, contributions will be forwarded through the Section's Treasurer. Each group will decide on the method of fund-raising that suits it best. Exhibitions, concerts and talks can publicise your prisoners as well as raise funds.

4. Reports

It is important that groups send a quarterly report to the Secretariat. The report should give a full list of all group action, and a record of all letters written, even if no replies have been received. However, groups should inform the Secretariat immediately if they obtain news of a prisoner - do not wait for a quarterly report. Send the original document if you are unable to make a photocopy. The Secretariat is also anxious to obtain copies of all letters received from prisoners and their families, and always needs photographs of prisoners and prisons: the

Secretariat is constantly receiving requests from National Sections and the press for material illustrating Amnesty's work. Copies of prisoners' letters and photographs are especially useful for exhibitions, publications and publicity.

5. Releases

The Secretariat should be informed immediately if the group hears that a prisoner has been released. It would be helpful if groups could indicate at the same time whether they require a replacement - some groups do not want to take on a new case immediately. For some time after a prisoner's release, until he finds employment a group may assist him in various ways, including financial assistance, advice regarding education, employment etc.

6. Suspension of group work

It sometimes happens that a group is either temporarily or permanently unable to continue working on behalf of its adopted prisoners. If this happens, it is vital to notify the Secretariat immediately; otherwise it will be assumed that the prisoners and their families are being looked after. If the Secretariat is notified that a group has closed down it will be possible to arrange for the adoption of its prisoners by other groups.

Please include your group number or name and the name and country of your prisoner in all letters and reports.