

**Amnesty
International
Against Abuses
by Opposition
Groups**



WHAT IS THE MANDATE OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL?



Amnesty International plays a specific role in the international protection of human rights. Its activities are focused 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.

This mandate is based on human rights principles proclaimed by the international community through the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies. These international standards define the obligations of governments in protecting the rights of individuals. Amnesty International's main task is to ensure that governments respect these commitments.

DOES AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TAKE SIDES IN POLITICAL CONFLICTS?

Amnesty International is impartial. It does not support or oppose any government or political system. Nor does it support or oppose the views of the prisoners whose rights it seeks to protect. It is concerned solely with the protection of human rights, within its mandate in each case, regardless of the ideological, political or other conflicts involved.

WHAT IS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S STAND ON ABUSES BY OPPOSITION GROUPS?

Amnesty International, as a matter of principle, condemns the torture or execution of prisoners by anyone, including opposition groups. It makes this position known through its publications and the news media.

DOES AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TAKE A STAND ON VIOLENCE?

Amnesty International takes no position on the question of violence. It does not identify itself with any of the parties to a particular conflict, violent or non-violent, nor does it presume to judge in any situation whether recourse to violence is justified or not. It deliberately restricts itself to working for the protection of the human rights that fall within its mandate and does not comment or act on issues that fall outside those terms of reference.

DOES AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ACT AS A MEDIATOR?

Amnesty International has sometimes been asked to act as a mediator between governments and opposition groups. It cannot do so. It works by making clear its opposition to specific human rights violations, publishing details about these wherever they occur and making recommendations to the responsible authorities. The organization does not negotiate either with governments or with those in opposition.

WHAT ABOUT OPPOSITION GROUPS THAT CONTROL TERRITORY?

Some groups in opposition to governments have acquired characteristics that in practice make them similar to governments. Amnesty International expects them to respect international human rights standards and appeals to them to do so. When considering whether a group has such characteristics, several factors have to be taken into account. For example, does the group control people in its territory in a way similar to the exercise of government jurisdiction? Is it able to implement procedures for the protection of human rights and humanitarian law in its territory? Is it recognized by governments and international organizations? An appeal from Amnesty International to such a group or to a government does not imply any legal or international status or recognition; it is aimed strictly at securing the protection of the human rights that Amnesty International seeks to defend everywhere. It should also be noted that it is governments that are the subject of international human rights standards. Non-governmental entities do not, in general, have the international obligations or recognized responsibilities to which Amnesty International can refer.

WHAT DOES AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ASK GOVERNMENTS TO DO?

When governments infringe the human rights Amnesty International defends, the organization urges them to take all necessary steps to restore these rights. It also holds governments responsible when they act indirectly through, or in complicity with, "death squads" and assassins. Where offences are committed by opposition groups, Amnesty International considers that it is within the jurisdiction of governments to determine criminal responsibility and to bring those responsible to justice. The exercise of such authority by states must conform to their commitments in international law.