REPORTING ON COVID-19

GOT HER LOCKED UP
WRITE FOR RIGHTS

20 YEARS OF WRITING LETTERS THAT CHANGE LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

Twenty years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. Over the following years, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world’s biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to 4.5 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2020, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. Together, these individuals have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, freeing them from torture, harassment or unjust imprisonment.

This year’s campaign channels this support towards people targeted for their peaceful activism, views or personal characteristics. This includes LGBTI activists, environmental defenders and peaceful protesters. These individuals have variously been beaten, jailed, shot at, harassed and intimidated. Through Write for Rights, they will receive individual messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. They and their families know that their situations are being brought to public attention and they are not forgotten.

Alongside the letter writing actions, Amnesty also speaks to those who have the power to change these people’s situations, such as politicians in their countries. Write for Rights also gives visibility to these injustices through public events, and garners international attention on social media.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals, and other people and groups in a similar situation, by the country’s authorities. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

BEFORE YOU START

This human rights education activity can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity and any limitations. When participants want to take action on a case, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on participatory learning methods in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyze and question issues relating to the cases. This methodology allows participants to:

- DEVELOP key competences and skills
- HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY to form their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented
- TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns
- HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.


Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the Write for Rights campaign: https://academy.amnesty.org/learn

- Read about the people we’re fighting for: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights
- Contact the Amnesty team in your country: www.amnesty.org/countries
- Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R21
YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

ACTIVIST FREED IN SAUDI ARABIA

Nassima al-Sada, a campaigner for women’s freedom, was arrested in 2018 for peacefully defending human rights. While in jail, guards beat her and banned everyone – even her lawyer – from visiting her. But thanks to supporters worldwide who wrote a massive 777,611 letters, tweets and more, Nassima walked free in June 2021, and is back with her family and friends.

FATHER OF THREE REUNITED WITH FAMILY

In April 2018, NGO worker and human rights defender Germain Rukuki was found guilty of a slew of sham charges and sentenced to 32 years in prison in Burundi. He was jailed before getting a chance to hold his youngest child, born just weeks after he was arrested. His family fled the country for fear of reprisals. On 30 June 2021, Germain was finally freed and reunited with his family, thanks in part to the more than 436,000 actions calling for his release.

ONE STEP CLOSER TO JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Friends Popi Qwabe and Bongeka Phungula were murdered while heading for a night out in May 2017. Until recently, their families had been distressed by irregularities and delays in the police investigation. However, in March 2021, police revived the case after receiving 341,106 petition signatures from the families’ supporters worldwide. The police have completed their investigation and handed over the case to the country’s National Prosecuting Authority. “I feel optimistic,” said Popi’s sister Thembelihle. “I feel like finally, something is about to change.”
ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed that they are bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that they will abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up on the basis of its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.
# Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## Civil Rights and Liberties
- Article 1: Freedom and equality in dignity and rights
- Article 2: Non-discrimination
- Article 3: Right to life, liberty and security of person
- Article 4: Freedom from slavery
- Article 5: Freedom from torture

## Legal Rights
- Article 6: All are protected by the law
- Article 7: All are equal before the law
- Article 8: A remedy when rights have been violated
- Article 9: No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile
- Article 10: Right to a fair trial
- Article 11: Innocent until proven guilty
- Article 14: Right to go to another country and ask for protection

## Social Rights
- Article 12: Privacy and the right to home and family life
- Article 13: Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders
- Article 16: Right to marry and start a family
- Article 24: Right to rest and leisure
- Article 26: Right to education, including free primary education

## Economic Rights
- Article 15: Right to a nationality
- Article 17: Right to own property and possessions
- Article 22: Right to social security
- Article 23: Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union
- Article 25: Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being

## Political Rights
- Article 18: Freedom of belief (including religious belief)
- Article 19: Freedom of expression and the right to spread information
- Article 20: Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way
- Article 21: Right to take part in the government of your country
- Article 27: Right to share in your community's cultural life

## Cultural Rights, Solidarity Rights
- Article 28: Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized
- Article 29: Responsibility to respect the rights of others
- Article 30: No taking away any of these rights!
LEARNING ABOUT OUR HUMAN RIGHTS
ACTIVITY: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

**KEY CONCEPTS**
- Freedom of expression

**ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY**
This activity examines the right to freedom of expression and relates it to the participants’ lives, using the real case of Zhang Zhan. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write a letter in support of Zhang Zhan and show solidarity with her.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**
Participants will:
- understand the concept of freedom of expression and its importance and connect it to their own lives;
- feel empathy with those whose right to freedom of expression has been violated;
- learn about Amnesty International’s Write for Rights campaign;
- write letters in support of and showing solidarity with Zhang Zhan

**AGE:** 13+

**TIME NEEDED**
60 minutes.

**MATERIALS**
- Handout: UDHR Article Cards (page 10)
- Handout: Daily Action Cards (page 11)
- Simplified UDHR (page 5)
- Background information: Freedom of Expression (page 12)
- Handout: Zhang Zhan’s story (page 13)
- Paper and pencils
- Pens, envelopes, stamps

**PREPARATION**
- Copy the handouts for each participant/group.

**FOLLOW COVID-19 MEASURES**
Be sure to comply with public health advice in your area during the Covid-19 pandemic. Conduct your activity in a way that ensures the safety of all participants and respects any necessary physical distancing measures.

If you are doing the activity online:
- Choose a platform that provides participation and interaction while being secure
- Adapt the activity to allow for relevant reflections and debriefing (in small groups)
- Provide technical support for participants to allow for good participation.

1. **MATCH RIGHTS WITH DAILY ACTIONS**

Open the discussion by asking participants whether they have ever heard about human rights and what human rights they may know.

Introduce human rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) using the information on page 4.

Explain that they will be exploring how human rights are a part of our daily lives. Divide participants into small groups and distribute the eight UDHR Article Cards and eight Daily Action Cards on pages 10-11 to each group.

Ask the groups to match the rights with the actions (that is, which Daily Action Card is relevant to which UDHR Article).

Regroup and ask participants to discuss their answers.

They could look like this: (There is more than one possible solution for some of the rights)

Article 3: I walk freely in my town without fearing for my life
Article 12: I do not have to disclose my personal life to my teacher
Article 13: I can go wherever I want in my country freely
Article 18: I speak freely and practice my religion and beliefs
Article 19: I use social media and say what I think on different topics
Article 24: I play with my friends
Article 25: I go to see a doctor if I am sick
Article 26: I can go to school and study
LEARNING ABOUT OUR HUMAN RIGHTS
ACTIVITY: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Ask the participants to pick one or two rights and discuss what would be different in their lives if this right was denied.

Explain that human rights are universal and interconnected. Removing one right can have an impact on other rights. Share the simplified version of the UDHR (page 5).

2. EXPLORING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Ask participants to share their ideas about the following questions:

- What are some ways in which young people express themselves in your country?
- What are some of the ways that you like to express your ideas?

Ask participants to share what they understand by “freedom of expression”. Explore a little more with the following questions:

- Should there be any limits to what people can say or how they express themselves?
- If you were the government, how would you decide what should be allowed to be said, and what should not be allowed?
- Does it make a difference whom you’re criticizing? Why or why not?
- What do you think about criticizing the government itself?

Give participants some information on the right to freedom of expression using Background Information: The Right to Freedom of Expression (page 12).

3. ZHANG ZHAN’S STORY

Hand out Zhang Zhan’s story (page 13) and give participants a few minutes to read it.

Explain that, in countries all over the world, there are governments that try to control what a person says or expresses. By doing this, they are limiting the right to freedom of expression for people living in their country.

Split participants into pairs and ask them to discuss the following questions:

- What surprises you most about Zhang Zhan’s case?
- What human rights violations has Zhang Zhan been subjected to?
- What impact does government censorship, and other violations of the right to freedom of expression, have on people?
- How does censorship change society?

Ask participants to share responses from their discussions and highlight any other rights that may have been violated along with Zhang Zhan’s right to freedom of expression.

If you have internet access, watch this three-minute YouTube video explaining the right to freedom of expression: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7I1bdA9XLq0 (available in English)

Learn more about Zhang Zhan and freedom of expression through our online game, Rights Arcade, available in English. Search for “Rights Arcade” in the Google Play Store or IOS App Store.
4. **TAKE ACTION FOR ZHANG ZHAN**

Explain that Amnesty is encouraging people to demand justice for Zhang Zhan. Give examples from last year’s campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be.

If there isn’t enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

**WRITE A LETTER**

- Encourage participants to write to the President of China, Xi Jinping, using the contact information in the box to the right.
- Participants can use the template letter on page 14 or you can give them the following guidelines to write a more personal letter:
  - Tell the president what shocks you about the case of Zhang Zhan.
  - Tell him why you think it is important that governments respect the right to freedom of expression.
  - Tell him to immediately release Zhang Zhan.
  - Ask that his government repeals or amends all laws that violate the right to freedom of expression.

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**WRITE FOR RIGHTS**

- If you have time, you can share this five minute introductory video about Write for Rights: https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide
- Show participants the video of Zhang Zhan which can be found here: www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).

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Xi Jinping,
President of the People’s Republic of China,
Zhongnanhai,
Xichang’anjie,
Xichengqu, Beijing Shi 100017,
People’s Republic of China

Salutation: Dear President Xi

Email address: english@mail.gov.cn,
content@mail.gov.cn

Fax number: +86108805087
Encourage participants to show solidarity with Zhang Zhan directly. They can write letters and post online messages expressing their support or any encouraging words to Zhang Zhan. Explain to the participants that their words will not only contribute to lifting Zhang’s spirit but also alert the detention centre where she is being held that the world is concerned about her.

Encourage participants to send Zhang Zhan a postcard or letter that includes a landmark or scenery from their own country to the following address:

Zhang Zhan,
No 1601, Zhangjing Road, Sijing Zhen,
Songjiang Qu, Shanghai 201601,
People’s Republic of China

Please note that all letters to Zhang will be opened and may be read by prison authorities. It is advised NOT to mention Amnesty International in these letters to increase the likelihood of them actually being delivered to Zhang Zhan.

**SUGGESTED MESSAGE:**
Zhang Zhan, your dedication to reporting the truth will continue to inspire others. We will continue to support you and look forward to the day you regain freedom. Keep your spirits up!

**Simplified Chinese:**
张展，您对报导真相的坚持将会继续激励他人。我们会继续支持和关注您，我们期待您重获自由的一天。加油！

Take pictures of your actions, and post them on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram using the hashtags #ZhangZhan #FreeZhangzhan for your action to be captured on social media.
### UDHR Article Cards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 19:</th>
<th>Article 3:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right to freedom of expression</td>
<td>Right to life and to live in freedom and safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 12:</th>
<th>Article 13:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right to privacy</td>
<td>Right to freedom of movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 25:</th>
<th>Article 18:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and wellbeing</td>
<td>Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 24:</th>
<th>Article 26:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right to rest and leisure</td>
<td>Right to education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEARNING ABOUT OUR HUMAN RIGHTS

ACTIVITY: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

DAILY ACTION CARDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I use social media to say what I think on different topics</th>
<th>I walk freely in my town without fearing for my life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not have to disclose my personal life to my teacher</td>
<td>I can go wherever I want in my country freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I go to see a doctor if I am sick</td>
<td>I speak freely about my beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play with my friends</td>
<td>I can go to school and study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Citizen journalist Zhang Zhan has been detained in China since May 2020.

To learn more about freedom of expression, check out the Amnesty Academy’s online courses: https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/100/speaking-out-for-freedom-of-expression (available in English)

ARTICLE 19, UDHR

“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.”

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) protects the right to freedom of expression. Freedom of expression guarantees your right to hold your own opinions and to express them freely, without unjustified government interference. This includes the right to express views through public protests or through written materials, media broadcasts, the internet and works of art. This right is regarded as a very important feature in any society. We need a free flow of ideas in order to ensure that different opinions are taken into account and different ideas are aired. Limiting the right to freedom of expression also undermines transparency and accountability and makes the fight for human rights more difficult.

Freedom of expression is important not just to society as a whole, but also to individuals. Our opinions, thoughts and ways to make them known are a fundamental part of what makes us human, and stopping people from expressing themselves is equivalent to cutting off a part of their personality!

Legally, the right to freedom of expression can only be restricted in some very limited cases. Most countries, for example, have laws against racist or other discriminatory speech. However, limits to the right to freedom of expression are only permitted where these are necessary for the protection of specific public interests, such as public health, national security or the rights of others.
When Wuhan – then the centre of the Covid-19 outbreak in China – first went into lockdown, Zhang Zhan was one of the few citizen journalists to report on the unfolding crisis.

Determined to get the truth out, the former lawyer travelled to Wuhan in February 2020. She took to social media, reporting how government officials had detained independent reporters and harassed the families of Covid-19 patients. Citizen journalists were the only source of uncensored, first-hand information about the epidemic.

Working independently of state-controlled media, citizen journalists face constant harassment for exposing information the government would rather keep quiet.

Zhang Zhan went missing in Wuhan in May 2020. Authorities later confirmed that she had been held by police in Shanghai, 640km away. In June 2020, she began a hunger strike to protest against her detention. In December, her body was so weak she had to attend her court hearing in a wheelchair. The judge sentenced her to four years in prison for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”.

Zhang Zhan was transferred to Shanghai Women’s Prison in March 2021. The authorities continue to refuse her visits from her family.

“We should seek the truth and seek it at all costs. Truth has always been the most expensive thing in the world. It is our life,” Zhang Zhan says.
Zhang Zhan typifies the courage of investigative journalists who speak truth to power. Citizen journalists like her were the only source of uncensored, independent, and first-hand information about the coronavirus outbreak, publishing reports on social media and the internet despite constant harassment and repression. Yet, instead of being praised, Zhang Zhan received four years’ imprisonment for daring to report what she saw. If the Chinese authorities are serious about combating Covid-19 and preventing similar outbreaks from happening again, they must stop censorship and respect freedom of expression – free Zhang Zhan immediately and unconditionally.

Yours sincerely
ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 10 million people who take injustice personally. We are campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees’ and migrants’ rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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