ABDUCTED, ASSAULTED AND JAILED FOR PROTESTING

JOANAH MAMOMBE, NETSAI MAROVA AND CECILLIA CHIMBIRI

ZIMBABWE
WRITE FOR RIGHTS
MORE THAN 20 YEARS OF WRITING LETTERS THAT CHANGE LIVES

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

Some 20 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 1991 to close to 4.7 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2021, 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 to protect their right to protest and express themselves freely. This includes women human rights defenders, trans rights activists, artists 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. By acting in solidarity and ensuring that everyone – including those most discriminated against – can participate in protests equally without fear of violence, we can create a more just and equal world.

Alongside the letter-writing actions, Amnesty 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 of 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 context and 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, delivering it in-person or online, 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 competencies and skills
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
YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

REUNITED WITH HIS FAMILY
On 30 June 2021, human rights defender Germain Rukuki was released after serving more than four years in prison in Burundi. He had been arrested, prosecuted and convicted simply for his human rights work.

During Write for Rights 2020, supporters from around the world took more than 436,000 actions calling for Germain’s freedom. Unable to leave the country following his release, Germain was finally reunited with his family in Belgium in February 2022. He said: “Write for Rights really does have a positive impact. [The] support has made me, Germain Rukuki, come out of prison even more committed to defending human rights.”

Magai Matiop Ngong from South Sudan was just a schoolboy when he was sentenced to death on 14 November 2017 for murder. Magai recounted how he told the judge the death was an accident and that he was only 15 years old at the time. Yet Magai was tried for capital murder without any access to a lawyer. Over 700,000 actions were taken for Magai during Write for Rights 2019. In March 2022 the High Court agreed that, because he had been a child at the time, he should be released. Magai is now safely out of the country and determined more than ever to help people like him.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER FREED
Bernardo Caal Xol, a teacher and father, worked tirelessly to defend communities affected by hydroelectric projects on the Cahabón river, in northern Guatemala. In November 2018 he was sentenced to more than seven years in prison on bogus charges aimed at preventing his human rights work. During Write for Rights 2021 over half a million actions were taken for Bernardo and, in March 2022, he was released.
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.
### 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

### CULTURAL RIGHTS, SOLIDARITY RIGHTS

- **Article 27**: Right to share in your community's cultural life
- **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!
ACTIVITY
CRIMINALIZING PROTESTERS

KEY CONCEPTS
- freedom of expression and peaceful assembly
- women activists
- enforced disappearance
- sexual violence, intimidation and harassment
- arbitrary arrest and detention

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY
Participants will learn about the right to freedom of assembly as a fundamental human right enabling peaceful protests, and the role of the government and security forces in protecting this right through the real-life story of three women. Joanah, Cecillia and Netsai were assaulted and jailed and are now on trial for ‘faking’ their own abduction. Participants will take action to demand justice for Joanah, Cecillia and Netsai.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
Participants will:
- explore the concept of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, how it relates to protest and how it connects to other rights;
- understand the duty of governments and law enforcement to uphold these rights;
- feel empathy with those whose right to freedom of peaceful assembly has been violated, through the story of Joanah, Cecillia and Netsai;
- learn about Amnesty International’s Write for Rights campaign;
- write letters in support of and showing solidarity with Joanah, Cecillia and Netsai.

AGE: 15+

1. LEADING FOR CHANGE: THE STORY OF CECELLIA, JOANAH AND NETSAI

As you are diving right into the story of Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai, make sure to set the right mood. You can do this by playing some calming music and asking participants to close their eyes and think of a moment in their life where they showed leadership skills and created positive change together with or for others. Invite them to try to remember how this made them feel. Have they helped other people? Taken the lead and changed something for the better? After a couple of minutes, ask participants to open their eyes, and allow time for participants to share their thoughts, either in plenary or in pairs with the person next to them.

Tell them that we are exploring the story of three strong women who lead change in Zimbabwe. Warn the group that this story might be upsetting as it contains details about violence against women, allowing anyone to step out of the room if necessary. Read the following excerpt aloud:

**TIME NEEDED**
60 minutes – you may want additional time for the Take Action section.

**MATERIALS**
- Handout: Joanah, Cecillia and Netsai’s story (page 11)
- Background information on protests, criminalization and arbitrary arrests (pages 9-10)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) simplified version (page 5)
- Paper, pens and envelopes (if sending letters)
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: Video of Joanah, Cecillia and Netsai from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).

**PREPARATION**
Print the handout, background information and copies of the UDHR for each participant.
Read the background information on pages 9-10.

**MORE INFORMATION**
- Take the Write for Rights short course at academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide
- Take our Right to Protest short course at academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/201/the-right-to-protest
- Read Amnesty’s briefing on the right to protest at amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT30/5856/2022/en/

**IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER**
Tell participants that this activity includes references to sexual violence and specific practices of torture which can be disturbing and may cause them to feel uncomfortable. Please check in with them during the activity to see how they are coping. Explain that if at any moment anyone wants to stop participating due to the subject matter, that is OK.
In contexts where using the word protest is too controversial and might put participants at risk, you may want to replace it with an alternative such as the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.
Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai are three women with a lot of things in common. They like playing board games, watching Netflix and getting involved in politics. They are pro-democracy activists who are active members of Zimbabwe’s main opposition party. Sadly, they went through a horrific situation together and now share terrible memories of a degrading attack.

On 13 May 2020, Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai were arrested at a police roadblock in Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital, for leading an anti-government protest over the authorities’ response to the Covid-19 pandemic and widespread hunger in the country. While in police custody, they were forced into an unmarked car and forcibly disappeared. With hoods over their heads, they were driven out of the city. Scared for their lives, the women were thrown into a pit, beaten, sexually assaulted and forced to eat human excrement during their abduction. They were found two days later, 87km from Harare. Covered in cuts and bruises, with their clothes torn, they were taken to the hospital.

Take some initial reactions from the group on how they feel after hearing this story. Discuss the story through the following questions:

- Why do you think the police picked out Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai? Do you think they were singled out for a specific reason?
- Do you think they were treated differently because they are women? What are some of the risks and dangers that women activists or protesters may face?

2. THE DUTY TO PROTECT AND RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS

Disclose that there is more to the story. Read the following aloud:

While hospitalized, Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai were charged with criminal offences related to the protest. Prison guards and police officers were at the hospital to prevent them from talking to journalists. After stating that they recognized some of their attackers, the women were re-arrested on 10 June 2020 and charged with faking their abduction. They were given bail on 26 June 2020. Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai’s trial began in January 2022 and was ongoing at the time of writing. To date, no investigation has been initiated into their enforced disappearance or their allegations of torture and no one has been held accountable.

Hand out copies of the women’s story (page 11), the background information (pages 9-10) and the summary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (page 5).

Divide the participants into small groups and give them about 10 minutes to read the handouts. Ask them analyse the story using these questions:

- From the background information, what are the relevant elements that apply to this story?
- Which of Cecillia, Netsai and Joanah’s human rights do you think may have been violated?
- What kind of message do you think the treatment of Cecillia, Netsai and Joanah sends to other protesters?
- What should government and law enforcement officers have done, and what should they not have done?

To close, bring the participants back together and reflect as a group on the following questions:

- How do you feel after having heard the full story?
- What do you think gives these three women the strength and courage to continue?
- How could you take action to support them?
3. **TAKE ACTION**

Explain about Amnesty’s Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty is encouraging people to demand justice for Joanah, Cecillia and Netsai. 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 Zimbabwean authorities using the contact information on the right.

Explain that a personal message to the officials can have the most impact. You can give the participants the following guidelines to help them write their letter:

- Tell the authorities something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell them what shocks you about the case of Joanah Mamombe, Cecillia Chimbiri and Netsai Marova.
- Tell them why you think it is important that governments respect and uphold the right to protest.
- Tell them to immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai and end the harassment they face for peacefully exercising their right to protest.

**SHOW SOLIDARITY**

Show Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai that you believe in them. Send them your message of solidarity and hope. Draw pictures of butterflies and flowers to accompany your message, take a photo of your message, and post it to your social media, tagging them when you do. Then, mail your message to the address on the right. Don’t forget to follow them on Twitter!

Cecillia: @ceechimbiri2
Joanah: @JoanaMamombe
Netsai: @MarovaNetsai

Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai speak English and Shona. Here are some example messages to include:

We stand with you during this time of persecution by the Government of Zimbabwe. You will overcome.  
(In Shona: Joanah, Netsai and Cecillia, tinomira nemi panguva ino mukushungurudzwa kwamurikuitwa neherumunde yeZimbabwe. Muchakunda.)

Joanah, Cecillia and Netsai, you are strong women and an inspiration to many. Don’t give up!

Never give up. #Justice for Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai
BACKGROUND INFORMATION
THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Peaceful protest is a dynamic and public way of exercising our human rights. Throughout history, protests have allowed individuals and groups to express dissent, opinions and ideas, expose injustice and abuse, and demand accountability from those in power, through collective mobilization, creativity and defiance. But protesters may be considered a menace to people in power, especially when the ideas or opinions expressed challenge the status quo and power dynamics. Instead of addressing pressing concerns and promoting dialogue to find solutions to injustice, abuses and discrimination, states often respond by stigmatizing and cracking down on peaceful protesters.

People participating in protests do not all face the same barriers. Women, LGBTI people and gender non-conforming people face specific challenges to participation in protests and more generally in the civic space, as their rights are restricted by societies that use different types of violence, marginalization, social norms and sometimes even legislation to repress them and to maintain a status quo dominated by patriarchy and heteronormativity.

CRIMINALIZATION OF PROTESTERS

Peaceful protests often have an element of disruption, whether it is slowing or blocking traffic, making noise, or even trespassing on private spaces. Even if protests seem to have a disorderly, chaotic or disruptive manner, they should be allowed to go on if they remain peaceful. However, human rights defenders are facing a higher level of threat in the context of peaceful assemblies, both as organizers and participants. Tactics used to police demonstrations continue to be one of the main threats to the safe and free exercise of the right to peaceful assembly, with many governments using unlawful force, intimidation and arbitrary arrests against protesters.

When peaceful protesters are called criminals and troublemakers, or when they are charged with criminal offences and sued, for example for ruinous damages, or accused of very serious crimes such as terrorism or sedition, this not only silences individuals; it also delegitimizes specific groups of protesters and their causes. This process of stigmatization and criminalization of protesters is an attempt to stop them and others from joining in with their actions or sympathizing with their calls. Arresting, detaining and prosecuting peaceful protesters are also tactics used by governments to ‘make an example’ of them, and thus silence criticism and instil fear in the wider population to discourage them from joining further protests or direct actions.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Policing Protests and Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

Law enforcement agencies have various responsibilities to protect and respect human rights. For example, the police have the following key roles:

- making sure people obey the law (enforcing the law);
- protecting people and keeping public order;
- investigating crimes and making arrests.

Everyone has a right to liberty. The right to liberty does not mean that people can never be detained or imprisoned, but it does say that there must be a very good reason for locking someone up, and that certain safeguards must be met. There are specific rights and safeguards designed to protect people being held in detention from abuses. Some of these rights and safeguards include:

- An arrest or detention must be carried out according to the law.
- It must not be arbitrary. For example, an arrest or detention is arbitrary if there is no due process or basis in law, or where the law is vague, over-broad or incompatible with other human rights such as the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly or belief.
- The person arrested must be immediately told why they are being held, and which crime they are accused of committing.

If any of these safeguards are not observed, there has been a violation of the right to liberty.

Furthermore, the person arrested has the rights:

- to a lawyer from the moment of arrest;
- to inform their family of their situation;
- to know which authority is holding them and to have their detention registered immediately;
- to challenge the lawfulness of their detention in court.

Joanah, Netsai and Cecilia in court.
Joanah, Netsai and Cecillia are three women with a lot of things in common: they love playing board games, watching Netflix and are passionate about politics. Sadly, they now share horrific memories of a terrible and degrading attack.

On 13 May 2020, after leading an anti-government protest, Joanah, Netsai and Cecillia were arbitrarily arrested in Harare, taken to a police station and forced into an unmarked car. With hoods over their heads, they were driven out of the city. Scared for their lives, the women were thrown into a pit, beaten, sexually assaulted and forced to eat human excrement. They were found two days later, miles from Harare. Their clothes torn, covered in cuts and bruises, they were taken to hospital.

While still hospitalized, Joanah, Netsai and Cecillia were charged with criminal offences relating to the protest. Prison guards and police officers were at the hospital to prevent them from talking to journalists. After stating that they recognized some of their attackers, the women were re-arrested on 10 June 2020 and charged with faking their ordeal. They were detained until 26 June 2020, when they were given bail.

Joanah, Netsai and Cecillia’s trial began in January 2022 and continues. To date, no one has been held accountable for their terrible trauma.

“Young people must never give in to fear. We must confront and overcome those things we fear most.”

Joanah Mamombe
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.