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## **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AT 50: GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION AIMS TO TIP SCALES AGAINST REPRESSION AND INJUSTICE**

Amnesty International is marking its 50th anniversary on 28th May with the launch of a Global Call to Action designed to help tip the scales against repression and injustice, with events held in more than 60 countries in every region of the world.

The anniversary comes against the backdrop of a changing human rights landscape, as people across the Middle East and North Africa courageously confront oppression, tyranny and corruption – often in the face of bloodshed and state violence.

With these protests dramatically demonstrating the need for international solidarity on human rights, Amnesty International's new Global Call to Action includes a digital "Earth Candle" – a significant online breakthrough that allows activists for the first time to see an overview of the organization's worldwide actions, and how their own actions add to this force for change.

This is accompanied by a new drive – "Be one more, ask one more, act once more" – that aims to achieve a huge collective impact worldwide. It urges everyone – including Amnesty International's three million members and supporters in more than 150 countries and territories – to encourage at least one other person to take action for human rights.

The launch of the global initiative will see dozens of countries from Argentina to Ghana to Turkey to New Zealand holding a symbolic toast to freedom. This global event pays tribute to the tale of two Portuguese students imprisoned for raising their glasses to liberty – an injustice that so outraged British lawyer Peter Benenson that he launched Amnesty International on 28 May 1961.

Amnesty International candle first shone a light on the world's hellholes, there has been a human rights revolution. The call for freedom, justice and dignity has moved from the margins and is now a truly global demand," said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International Secretary General.

But despite progress, human rights violations are at the heart of key challenges facing the world today.

Governments are failing to uphold the promises of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and are fuelling or ignoring violations. Almost two-thirds of humanity lacks access to justice; abuses are driving and deepening poverty; discrimination against women is rife; and in the last year alone Amnesty International has documented torture and ill-treatment in at least 98 countries.

Salil Shetty said that activism is a powerful force for change, as shown by the brave protestors in the Arab Spring.

“We can offer something that the forces of repression can never contain or silence: people united in common action; the sharp and powerful rallying of public opinion; the lighting of one candle at a time until millions of candles expose injustice, and create pressure for change,” he said.

Amnesty International will this year focus on six areas where people power can create real improvements: freedom of expression, abolition of the death penalty, reproductive rights for women and girls in Nicaragua, ensuring international justice in the Democratic Republic of Congo, corporate accountability in the Niger Delta, and ending injustice and oppression in the Middle East and North Africa.

For half a century Amnesty International – the world’s largest human rights organization – has borne witness to abuses and atrocities, has offered hope to the oppressed and forgotten, and has campaigned with innovation and determination for justice.

It has played a leading role in making torturers international outlaws, in ending the untouchable status of leaders accused of human rights crimes, in the creation of the International Criminal Court and in achieving unstoppable momentum towards a death penalty-free world.

In 1977, Amnesty International was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Throughout its history, Amnesty International has evolved and adapted to meet the challenges presented by a rapidly changing world. Its on-going work for prisoners of conscience – tens of thousands of whom have been released since 1961 – is now accompanied by action to uphold the whole spectrum of rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“Today people worldwide are increasingly expressing their desire for both political and economic rights – showing that despite the claims of some governments, rights cannot be ranked or traded. All rights – whether socio-economic or political – must be respected together if we are to achieve freedom from fear and want,” said Salil Shetty.

The challenge remains above all to hold states – which have ultimate responsibility for delivering human rights – accountable. But corporations and armed groups must also fully respect human rights and be held accountable for their actions.

“50 years of standing up to tyranny and injustice has shown that change is possible and that people united in common action across borders and beliefs can achieve extraordinary things. Every individual can make a difference, but millions standing together and uniting against injustice can change the world,” said Salil Shetty.

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