

UNCLE PABAI AND UNCLE PAUL

FIGHTING TO SAVE

THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS

WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



Australia



## 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 2001 to more than 5.3 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2022, 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.

Once again, this year's campaign features people from around the world, all connected because their human rights have been violated. Some by their governments, others by the police, or even big corporations. All because of who they are or because they simply exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for their rights. Through Write for Rights, they will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And by writing directly to the authorities to demand they take immediate action to remedy injustice we can create a more just and equal world.

Alongside the letter-writing actions, Amnesty International 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.

*“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there”*

Jani Silva,  
environmental defender, 2021

## 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, analyse 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.



Letter writing event in Antwerp, Belgium, for Write for Rights 2022.

Read about the people we're fighting for:  
[amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country:  
[amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R23

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

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



# YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

## ACTIVISTS ACQUITTED

After leading an anti-government protest in May 2020, Cecillia Chimbir, Joanah Mamombe and Netsai Marova were arrested, taken to a police station, forced into an unmarked car, and driven out of the city of Harare, Zimbabwe. They were subsequently beaten, tortured and left on the side of the road. While hospitalized, the women were charged with criminal offences relating to the protest. Later, they were also charged with communicating falsehoods and obstructing the course of justice, for speaking about their ordeal. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After featuring in Write for Rights 2022, where more than half a million actions were taken on their behalf, Cecillia and Joanah were acquitted by the High Court on 4 July 2023.



© Amnesty International/Vongai Chikwanda/Kuvanah Moodley



## FREED FROM DEATH ROW

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. More than 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, more than half a million actions were taken for Bernardo and, in March 2022, he was released from prison.



© Simone Dalmaso

# 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 to be 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

 <p><b>CIVIL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES</b> Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p><b>Article 1</b> Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p><b>Article 2</b> Non-discrimination</p> <p><b>Article 3</b> Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p><b>Article 4</b> Freedom from slavery</p> <p><b>Article 5</b> Freedom from torture</p>
 <p><b>LEGAL RIGHTS</b> Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p><b>Article 6</b> All are protected by the law</p> <p><b>Article 7</b> All are equal before the law</p> <p><b>Article 8</b> A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p><b>Article 9</b> No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p><b>Article 10</b> Right to a fair trial</p> <p><b>Article 11</b> Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p><b>Article 14</b> Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p><b>SOCIAL RIGHTS</b> Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p><b>Article 12</b> Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p><b>Article 13</b> Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p><b>Article 16</b> Right to marry and start a family</p> <p><b>Article 24</b> Right to rest and leisure</p> <p><b>Article 26</b> Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p><b>ECONOMIC RIGHTS</b> Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p><b>Article 15</b> Right to a nationality</p> <p><b>Article 17</b> Right to own property and possessions</p> <p><b>Article 22</b> Right to social security</p> <p><b>Article 23</b> Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p><b>Article 25</b> Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p><b>POLITICAL RIGHTS</b> Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion</p>	<p><b>Article 18</b> Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p><b>Article 19</b> Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p><b>Article 20</b> Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p><b>Article 21</b> Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p><b>CULTURAL RIGHTS, SOLIDARITY RIGHTS</b> Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p><b>Article 27</b> Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p><b>Article 28</b> Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p><b>Article 29</b> Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p><b>Article 30</b> No taking away any of these rights!</p>

## ACTIVITY

## CLIMATE JUSTICE

## KEY CONCEPTS

- Rights of First Nations Peoples
- Climate justice
- Rights to life, health, housing, water and food
- Cultural rights

## ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the real case of Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul, two community leaders from the Torres Strait Islands in Australia. They are fighting against the impacts of climate change on their livelihood, community and culture and the failure of the Australian government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write a letter calling on the Australian government to take adequate and human rights-consistent climate action and to show solidarity with Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul.

AGE: 14+

## TIME NEEDED

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

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **explore** the human rights implications of climate change.
- **understand** how climate change is a global crisis, but its impacts are unequally experienced.
- **recognize** the importance of cultural identity and of movements led by Indigenous Peoples in the fight for climate justice.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul.

## MATERIALS

- **Handout: Pictionary Game Cards** (page 12)
- **Handout: First Nations in Australia** (pages 13-14)
- **Handout: Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul's story** (page 15)
- **A whiteboard or large sheet of paper** for the Pictionary game
- **Paper and coloured pencils**
- **Pens, paper and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Video of Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul: [amnesty.org/w4r-videos](https://www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos)
- Optional: Template letters from [amnesty.org/writeforrights/](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/)

## PREPARATION

- Read the handout (pages 13-14) and Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul's story (page 15)
- Print one copy of the Pictionary Game Cards (page 12) and cut out the cards
- Print copies of the other handouts
- Optional: Print copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (page 5)

## MORE INFORMATION

- For more workshop materials on climate justice, Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul: [amnesty.org.au/climate-justice-hre-resources/](https://www.amnesty.org.au/climate-justice-hre-resources/)
- For more information on climate change and human rights: [amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/)
- For more information on Indigenous Peoples' rights: [amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/indigenous-peoples/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/indigenous-peoples/)
- 20-minute course on Write for Rights: [academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide](https://www.academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide)

## PRECAUTIONS

This activity explores climate change, a topic that resonates deeply, affecting lives and cultures globally. It addresses a growing anxiety about our collective future, hence facilitators should be equipped to handle various emotional responses with sensitivity. To foster resilience and understanding, facilitators are encouraged to create a supportive environment that promotes open dialogue and offers reassurance to participants. Facilitators play a crucial role in ensuring that participants leave feeling informed, empowered and inspired to contribute positively to this pressing global issue.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: CLIMATE CHANGE Pictionary

Prepare cards showing different effects of climate change, or alternatively, print/copy and cut out the **Pictionary Game Cards** from page 12. Divide the participants into two teams. Tell the teams they will engage in a drawing and guessing game around the issue of climate change. Each round, a new player from Team A will select a card and proceed to sketch the concept on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper, while the other members of their team attempt to guess the climate change impact being depicted. Each turn will be limited to one minute, and the player who is drawing is not allowed to use letters or words. Following Team A's turn, it will be Team B's opportunity to select a player to draw, while the remaining team members guess.

Play a couple of rounds. The team with the highest number of correct guesses within the set time, wins.



If this is the first time that participants have been introduced to human rights, you should start by explaining what they are, using the information on page 4. Likewise, establish a basic understanding of climate change for participants who are exploring this issue for the first time.

After the Pictionary game, gather the participants and initiate a discussion on how the drawn effects of climate change relate to human rights. For example: Melting snow and ice, higher temperatures and sea-level rise affect the availability and quality of water resources. You can use some of the following prompts to guide the discussion. Optionally, you can print out copies of the **simplified UDHR** (page 5) for each participant.

**Melting glaciers: How does the melting of snow and ice affect the rights of Indigenous Peoples living in the Arctic regions?**

*One possible answer: It threatens their right to culture because their way of life, which is heavily dependent on the ice environment, is disrupted.*

**Rising sea levels: How do rising sea levels affect people's rights?**

*One possible answer: It can lead to displacement of people, infringing on their right to a safe and secure home.*

**Forest fires: How do forest fires relate to human rights?**

*One possible answer: Forest fires can destroy homes and livelihoods, affecting the right to an adequate standard of living.*

**Droughts: How do droughts affect human rights?**

*One possible answer: Droughts can lead to food and water shortages, threatening the right to food and water.*

**Floods: How do floods infringe on human rights?**

*One possible answer: Floods can lead to loss of life and can destroy homes, affecting the right to life, and the right to a safe and secure home.*

**Tidal floods: How do floods affect human rights?**

*One possible answer: Tidal floods can contaminate gardens and farmland and make the soil salty, which affects the ability to grow food. This can disrupt livelihoods and infringe on the right to food.*

**Soil erosion and degradation: How do soil erosion and degradation affect human rights?**

*One possible answer: Soil erosion and degradation can threaten food security, agriculture and the livelihoods of small-scale farmers, affecting their rights to food and work.*

**Heatwaves: How do heatwaves affect human rights?**

*One possible answer: Heatwaves can lead to health issues and even death, affecting the rights to health and life.*

**Stronger storms and hurricanes: How do stronger storms/hurricanes affect human rights?**

*One possible answer: They can lead to loss of life, displacement and destruction of communities, affecting multiple rights including the rights to life, housing and health.*

**Displacement of people ("climate refugees"): How does the displacement of people due to climate change infringe on their human rights?**

*One possible answer: Displacement affects a range of rights including the rights to a safe and secure home, work and health. It can infringe on the rights to culture, way of life and self-determination of Indigenous Peoples if they are displaced permanently from their ancestral land.*

## 2. REFLECTION: DRAWING MY COMMUNITY

 10 MINUTES

Invite participants to close their eyes and picture their homes, communities and the beauty in the natural environments that surround them. Prompt them to think about how these places might transform because of climate change and how they might contribute positively to protect and sustain them.

Supply participants with paper and coloured pencils. Ask them to express their homes or communities through their drawings. Encourage them to add elements that showcase the potential challenges of climate change (for example changing weather patterns, altered landscapes), but place a stronger emphasis on incorporating symbols of resilience, adaptation and positive transformation.

While participants are drawing, introduce the concept of “climate justice”. What would climate justice look like in participants’ communities? Who would be affected and how? For example, by the ability to go to school or work, access safe drinking water for consumption and washing, and so on. Who currently is most at risk? For example, people with disabilities, older people, women and children.

**Climate justice** is about more than emissions reductions and our physical environment. It’s about acknowledging the root causes of the climate crisis and its impacts and how climate change increases inequalities between and within countries. Climate justice is an approach that focuses on addressing such imbalances and injustices, starting by putting climate action at the centre of the perspectives, knowledge and demands of groups and communities most affected by the climate crisis. It ensures that the impacts and solutions of climate change are shared in ways that are fair and equitable, for example by providing financial aid and technological support to countries and communities most affected by climate change despite their minimal contributions to the problem.

Invite a few volunteers to share their drawings and articulate how they envision their homes or communities proactively adapting and thriving amid climate change.

## 3. MY ISLAND, MY HOME:

 20 MINUTES

### UNCLE PABAI AND UNCLE PAUL’S STORY

Explain that, all over the world, people are taking action to protect their communities against climate change, and that we are going to look at one particular story from Australia where two community leaders are taking the Australian government to court for failing to prevent climate change from destroying their islands and their culture.

Share copies of **Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul’s story** (page 15) and **First Nations in Australia** (pages 13-14) with the participants. Give participants a few minutes to read these.

Reflect on their story by taking responses to the questions:

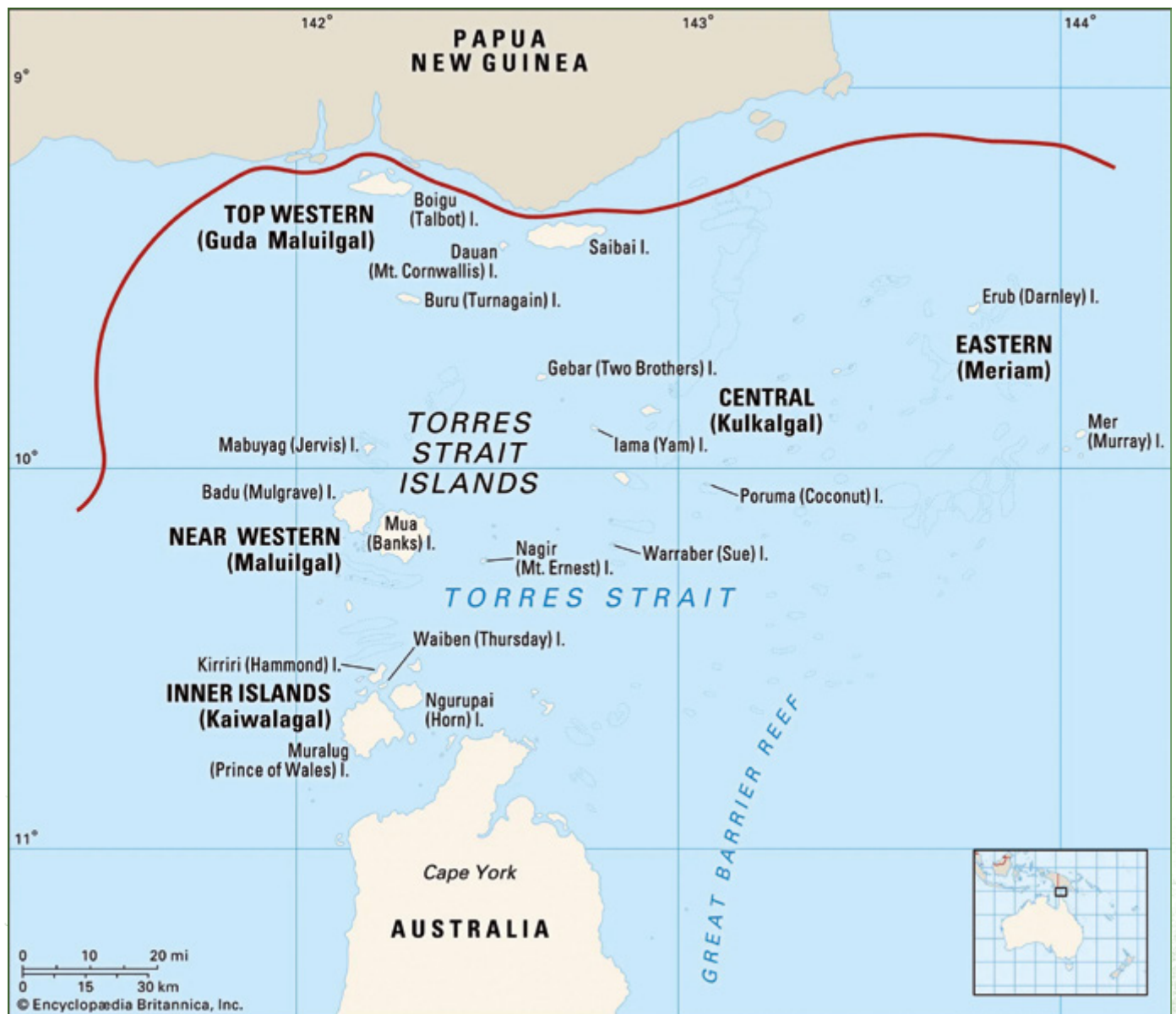
- **How do you feel after hearing about Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul?**
- **Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul are First Nations people. How is that relevant when we are discussing climate change and human rights?**
- **Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul have said that “if we win, it won’t just protect our communities – we’ll be keeping everyone safe”. What do you think they mean by that?**
- **How is the fight of Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul relevant to us, and to the rest of the world?**
- **What gives you hope from this story?**





End the activity by explaining that, while climate change is a global phenomenon, its impacts are experienced unequally. First Nations and Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis and are at risk of losing their ancestral lands and their cultural identity. They are also leading the fight to push back against fossil fuel projects and to demand stronger action from governments across the world. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to not be subjected to the destruction of their culture, to practise their cultural traditions and customs, and to maintain their distinctive spiritual relationship with their lands. The effects of climate change – including the submergence and loss of sacred cultural sites to severe weather events, frequent tropical storms with increasing intensity, and rising sea levels – pose a severe threat to these rights. This is why it is so important to pay specific attention to the link between climate justice, human rights and the impact on First Nations and Indigenous Peoples.

Optional: if you have extra time, use the **geographical map** below to show where Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul live, and the **pictures** on page 11 to show what their lands look like.



## 4. TAKE ACTION



Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to stand in solidarity with Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul and to demand urgent climate action. Give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch this one-minute video from Moses Akatugba who was freed from death row thanks to the actions of people during Write for Rights 2014: [youtu.be/8cU6EPY5r\\_c](https://youtu.be/8cU6EPY5r_c) (available in English only).

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.

Show participants the video of Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul which can be found here: [www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos](http://www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos) (available in English).

## WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Prime Minister of Australia using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the prime minister something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell him what shocks you about the case of Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul.
- Tell him why you think it is important that governments take adequate and human rights-consistent climate action.
- Tell him to **protect the rights of First Nations communities in the Torres Strait, by rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with the international commitment to limit global warming to 1.5°C in line with the best available scientific research.**

**Prime Minister of Australia**

PO box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Email: [pm.gov.au/contact](mailto:pm.gov.au/contact)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/AlboMP](https://facebook.com/AlboMP)  
Twitter / X: [@AlboMP](https://twitter.com/AlboMP)  
Instagram: [@albomp](https://www.instagram.com/albomp)

Hashtags: #PabaiVCmth #W4R23

## SHOW SOLIDARITY

Show Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul that you believe in them. Send them your message of solidarity and hope to show the Peoples of the Torres Strait that you support them in their fight to protect their island homes. Post your message to the address to the right. Say a little about who you are, where you are from, why you care and what climate impacts you worry about. Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul will feel so excited to receive support from all over the world.

Some creative ideas:

- Use your drawing from the previous activity to create your letter.
- Uncle Paul and Uncle Pabai's totems are the crocodile, the dog and the yam leaf – which is also the symbol for peace. Feel free to use these symbols respectfully in your artwork and creative ideas. Other symbols include water, waves, islands and canoes. Blue, green, white and black are the colours of the Torres Strait.

Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul speak English and Kalaw Kawaw Ya, the language spoken on the islands of Boigu and Saibai. You could include this example message:

**Mura kalmel sipa** (Kalaw Kawaw Ya)

**Together we unite** (English)

**Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul**

c/o Amnesty International Australia  
Locked bag 23  
Broadway, NSW, 2007  
Australia



© Talei Elu



© Pabai Pabai



© Talei Elu



© Talei Elu

Above: Uncle Pabai's flooded garden, Boigu island.

Left, top to bottom: Boigu island from the air; cracked and flooded roads on Boigu island.

Uncle Paul describes how the changes in the landscape are threatening the community's way of life:

*"The weather patterns have changed, the seasons have changed.... There's no land left.... the places that are at risk [from flooding] are our cemetery, our houses, our garden beds, our land.... for us its already happening."*



**HANDOUT**

**PICTIONARY GAME CARDS**

**MELTING GLACIERS**

**RISING SEA LEVELS**

**FOREST FIRES**

**DROUGHTS**

**FLOODS**

**HEATWAVES**

**STRONGER STORMS  
AND HURRICANES**

**DISPLACEMENT OF PEOPLE  
("CLIMATE REFUGEES")**

**TIDAL FLOODS**

**SOIL EROSION AND  
DEGRADATION**

## HANDOUT

## FIRST NATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Uncle Pabai Pabai and Uncle Paul Kabai are First Nations (Indigenous) men and Traditional Owners of the islands of Boigu and Saibai in the Torres Strait. Their island homes form the most northerly part of Australia and sit just 4km off the southern coast of Papua New Guinea. Their families have thrived on Country (the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected) for thousands of years. But now they risk losing everything. Both islands are small and low-lying and therefore particularly exposed to the harmful impacts of climate change.

Rising seas, increasing temperatures and biodiversity loss are already preventing communities from enjoying their rights to a healthy environment, self-determination, culture, health, housing, food and water. In the near future, climate change poses a high risk for the right to life and the survival of Torres Strait Islanders.

The case of Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul and their communities is emblematic of the situation faced by many First Nations communities in Australia and Indigenous Peoples around the world. Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul are standing shoulder to shoulder with First Nations leaders and activists across the Pacific, who are fighting to protect their rights and communities.



© Blanka Csenki

Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul at the COP27 climate change conference in Egypt, November 2022.

## HANDOUT

## A FIGHT FOR PRESERVATION

Unless urgent and serious action on climate change is taken by the Australian government, it is highly likely that, within the lifetimes of Uncle Pabai, Uncle Paul and their children, many Torres Strait Islanders will be forced to leave their homelands, as large parts of it become uninhabitable.

Having to leave will inevitably mean the severing of their connection to Country, and thus the destruction of thousands of years of tradition and connection belonging to the oldest living culture in the world and resulting in the destruction of self and identity for Torres Strait Islanders.

Together, Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul are among the thousands of people who call the Torres Strait Islands home, all of whom live on the frontline of the climate crisis in Australia. They are determined to protect their human rights and their communities before it's too late. They worry deeply about what will be left for future generations and how their culture, which has been practised and handed down through ancestors for thousands of years, will be lost if their islands disappear beneath the ocean.

**Country:** This term is often used by Aboriginal Peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity.

**First Nations:** When Australia was invaded by the British in 1788, Indigenous Peoples did not give up their sovereignty. There are hundreds of Indigenous nations in Australia. Each has a name, a language and cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices. Some of these are distinct and some overlap between Nations and Peoples.

**Traditional Owners:** These are people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who have spiritual or cultural affiliations with a site or area, or are holders of native title with that site or area, and have rights and interests in the land and sea under traditional law and customs. Uncle Pabai is a Traditional Owner of Boigu and Uncle Paul is a Traditional Owner of Saibai.

**Uncle:** This is a term of respect for community leaders in the Torres Strait and other First Nations communities in Australia.

*“Our sacred sites where we do ceremonies, and the knowledge and connection to Country that our ancestors have passed down for thousands of years, could be lost. If the government doesn’t change course, our homes could disappear beneath the rising seas and we will lose who we are, our culture and spirituality.”*

**Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul**



© Ruby Mitchell / Grata Fund



© Ruby Mitchell / Grata Fund

Top: Uncle Paul holding a traditional woven mat.

Bottom: Uncle Pabai holding a bu shell, used for ceremonial purposes among Torres Strait Islanders.

# UNCLE PABAI AND UNCLE PAUL'S STORY

WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



Australia

Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul are community leaders from the Guda Maluyligal Nation in the northernmost part of Australia in the Torres Strait. Their Indigenous ancestors have lived on the islands for thousands of years.

Now, because of climate change, their way of life, traditional knowledge systems, cultural practices and spiritual connections that have been passed down from generation to generation could be broken forever. Rising sea levels are causing more destruction each year by eroding beaches, destroying sacred cultural sites and cemeteries where their ancestors are buried, wrecking food gardens and putting the islands' infrastructure at risk.

Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul – who are referred to as “uncle” by their communities as a sign of respect – have turned to the courts. They argue that the Australian government is taking insufficient action to prevent harm from climate change, resulting in the destruction of their lands and culture.

Unless urgent action is taken, many Torres Strait Islanders will be forced to leave their homelands in the coming years as large parts become uninhabitable. This would be devastating to the communities. As Uncle Pabai says: “We are born to these islands, they are our mothers, our identities, who we are. For thousands of years, our warrior families fought off anyone who tried to take our homelands from us. But now, we could lose the fight to climate change.”



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© Bianka Osanki



© Talei Elu

Top: Uncle Pabai (l) and Uncle Paul (r).

Centre: Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul at the COP27 climate change conference in Egypt, November 2022.

Bottom: Uncle Pabai and Uncle Paul.

# ABOUT

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. 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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