

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



**DON'T TELL US
WHO WE ARE**

YREN ROTELA AND MARIANA SEPÚLVEDA

 **PARAGUAY**

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 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.

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Amnesty Nigeria activists participate in Write for Rights 2021.

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 #W4R22

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.

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start
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: <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.

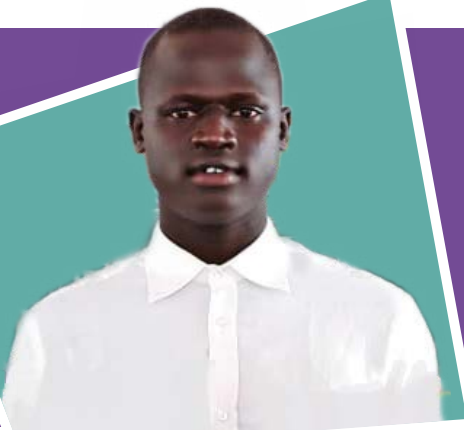
During Write for Rights 2020, supporters from around the world took more than 436,000 actions calling for Germain's freedom. Unable to leave the country following his release, Germain was finally reunited with his family in Belgium in February 2022. He said: "Write for Rights really does have a positive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



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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. 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.



© 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.



Amnesty Switzerland activists participate in Write for Rights 2021.

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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

Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.

- 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

Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.

- 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

Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.

- 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

Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.

- 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

Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion

- 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

Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

- 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

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

KEY CONCEPTS

- trans people's rights
- gender identity
- equality and the right to non-discrimination
- right to identity
- freedom of expression

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

In this activity, participants explore how trans people are being discriminated against and what consequences this has on their lives through the real-life story of Yren and Mariana in Paraguay. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write a letter to the state to demand that their right to an identity is guaranteed and to show solidarity with them.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- understand** the concept of exclusion and discrimination and what affect this might have on people's lives;
- explore** how exclusion based on the right to identity poses threats to the fulfilment of other rights;
- recognize** the role of the state in guaranteeing the right to identity and non-discrimination;
- learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign and write letters in support of and showing solidarity with Yren and Mariana.

AGE: 12+

TIME NEEDED

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

MATERIALS

- Handout:** Identity and rights (page 9)
- Background information** on rights of LGBTI people (page 10)
- Handout:** Yren and Mariana's story (page 11)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- Paper, pens, envelopes (if sending physical letters)
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: Video of Yren and Mariana from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).

PREPARATION

- Print Yren and Mariana's story, the handout on identity and rights, and copies of the UDHR for each participant.
- Read the background information on page 10 and Yren and Mariana's story on page 11.

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

- 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*.

1. LET ME PARTICIPATE!



Tell the group that you are going to do a little experiment. Without any further explanations, ask the group to divide themselves in two by a general distinctive feature. For example: green eyes versus other colours, short hair versus long hair, first letter of their name starting with A until M versus those starting N until Z, those wearing black shoes versus those wearing other colours of shoes.

Once divided, give one group a benefit over the other group (receive candy, play a short game, give them praise or let them watch a funny video) while others have to face the wall, close their eyes and stand idle.

While participants are still separated into their groups, debrief with everyone using the following questions:

- Was it fair that some could participate, and others could not?**
- How did it feel to those who were being excluded based on something that is either a part of who they are or a part of how they express their identity?**

- How did it feel for the other group to be enjoying something while seeing others being actively excluded?
- Do you think there are specific groups or individuals in your community that are more likely to be excluded from participation in similar ways?

Finish by ensuring that everyone is included (hand out candy to the others, do another round of the game, praise everyone or play the funny video once more). If there is time, ask how they feel now. What's the difference?

2. WHAT IT TAKES TO PARTICIPATE: YREN AND MARIANA'S STORY

Tell participants that they are now going to get a glimpse into the lives of Yren and Mariana in Paraguay. Tell participants that you will read out a series of activities that Mariana and Yren like to do. After reading out each activity, ask participants to raise their hand if they like the same activity.

Mariana likes:

- dancing
- playing volleyball
- reading romantic novels
- recording videos for TikTok

Yren likes:

- acting
- theatre
- singing
- cooking

Hand out **Yren and Mariana's story** (page 11) and the **handout on identity and rights** (page 9). Give participants a few minutes to read both handouts. Ask for initial reactions upon reading their story, and reflect together on the questions:

- How is their story related to the activity you did on exclusion and participation?
- How do you think Yren and Mariana feel, knowing that they are being discriminated against?
- We all have the 'right to an identity'. How is this related to Yren and Mariana's story?

If participants are unfamiliar with concept and identities of transgender people, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what this means first, using the **background information** on page 10.

Explain that our legal identity is closely related to many of the things we need to live a joyful and equal life based on rights, dignity and respect and to be able to participate fully in society.

On a flipchart or board, start a list of instances where you need to show a legal identity (an identification card, passport or birth certificate). Ask for input from the participants. What are the milestones or important moments in a person's life for which you need proof of your identity? Answers might include: enrolment in school, getting your diploma, going to the doctor, opening a bank account, voting in elections, signing a job contract, travelling abroad, getting your driver's licence, renting or buying an apartment or house, and so on.

Divide participants into pairs and invite them to look at the complete list. Select one milestone and ask the pairs to discuss how their life would be different if they could not access this milestone simply because their legal identity did not match their real identity. Then discuss in plenary:

- Is there anything that grabs your attention?
- How would not having the right to an identity effect your life?
- Why is it important for Yren and Mariana to be able to change their legal names?
- What should the government do? What difference can they make for trans women like Yren and Mariana?





15 MINUTES

3. TAKE ACTION

Explain about Amnesty's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty is encouraging people to demand justice for Yren and Mariana. 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.

Show participants the video of Yren and Mariana which can be found here: www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).

WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Paraguayan authorities using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the authorities something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell them what shocks you about the case of Yren Rotela and Mariana Sepúlveda.
- Tell them why you think it is important that governments respect the rights of transgender people.
- Tell them to **legally recognize the identities of transgender people** so that they can exercise their right to freedom of expression, association and protest under their self-perceived identities.

President of the Supreme Court of Justice
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Mariano Roque Alonso y Testanova
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C.P. N°001001 Asunción
Paraguay

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Fax: +595 21 439 4000

Twitter: [@PoderJudicialPY](https://twitter.com/PoderJudicialPY)

Facebook: facebook.com/PoderJudicialPY

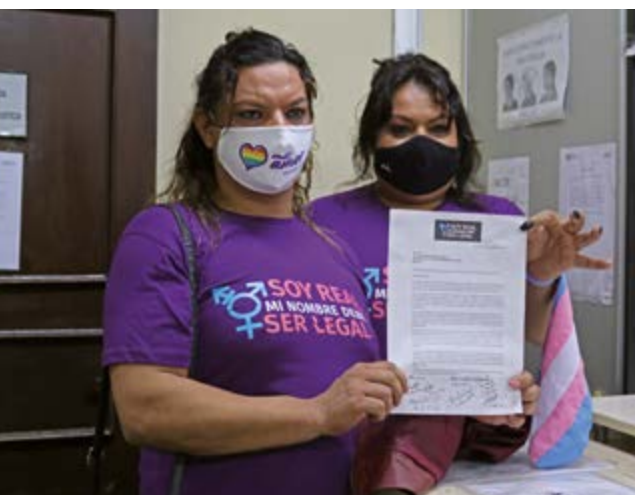
PoderJudicialPY

Salutation: Dear Mr. President

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Show Yren and Mariana you're with them! Send your messages of friendship and hope to Yren and Mariana to continue in their fight. Tell Yren and Mariana a little bit about yourself and where you are from. Be creative and artistic. Send your letter to the address on the right.

Amnesty International Paraguay
Hassler 5229 entre Cruz del Defensor y
Cruz del Chaco
Asunción
Paraguay



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Far left: Mariana (l) and Yren (r).
Left: Mariana, Yren and others
take part in a demonstration
outside the Supreme Court of
Justice in Paraguay.

HANDOUT

IDENTITY AND RIGHTS

THE RIGHT TO AN IDENTITY

We all have a **right to an identity**, from the moment we are born. At its most basic level, our identity is our name, date of birth, gender and nationality – everything that's recorded on our birth certificate, our passport and in the census. With a legally registered identity we become citizens of society, able to enjoy essential social services such as healthcare, education and legal protection. Without an identity we are invisible to the state and cannot access basic services that enable us to live our daily lives. In fact, without proper identification documents, we are not considered “people before the law”.

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND THEIR IDENTITIES

A **transgender person** is an individual whose gender identity and/or gender expression is different from the social expectations attached to the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people who wish to change their legal gender so that it matches the gender they identify or express themselves with, often experience a variety of human rights violations. Many governments still base the legal gender recognition in their laws and practices on stereotypical norms of masculinity and femininity and traditional social expectations of what it means to be ‘a woman’ or ‘a man’. This results in **discrimination** against and **exclusion** of transgender people. And when the right to an identity is not upheld, further bigotry and abuse can prosper.

TRANS PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

In the case of Paraguay, the lack of legal recognition of the identities of trans people leads to further violations of other fundamental rights and forms of discrimination, which then silences their voices and undermines participation in other areas of life. For example, the rights to housing, employment, health and education are put at risk, meaning that people's access and opportunities to fully participate in these areas of life might be compromised. Other rights that might be violated include the rights to private and family life, to recognition before the law and to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment without discrimination on grounds of gender identity and expression.



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Yren and Mariana outside Paraguay's Supreme Court of Justice

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RIGHTS OF LGBTI PEOPLE

In many countries, being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or otherwise diverse (LGBTI) means living with daily discrimination. This discrimination could be based on:

- your sexual orientation (who you're attracted to);
- your gender identity (how you define yourself, irrespective of your biological sex);
- your gender expression (how you express your gender identity through your clothing, hair or make-up);
- your sex characteristics (for example, your genitals, chromosomes, reproductive organs, or hormone levels).

It is important to understand the difference between **sex** and **gender**. Sex refers to biologically determined differences, whereas gender refers to differences in social roles and relations.

A **transgender person** is an individual whose gender identity and/or gender expression is different from the social expectations attached to the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Some people may choose to modify their biological sex to match their gender identity, either through surgery or hormonal treatments, and some may not. The term can include a wide range of other identities, such as members of third genders, as well as individuals who identify as more than one gender or no gender at all. The term transgender is often shortened to "trans".

In parallel, the term **gender identity** refers to a person's unique experience of self-expression in relation to social constructions of masculinity or femininity (**gender**). A person may have a male or female gender identity, with the physiological characteristics of the opposite sex.

Now that we have understood these concepts, we can say that transgender people are those who in their own experience find that their gender identity or the way they feel, the way they express themselves, or the way they dress and behave, differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. It is in this context that we can understand why transgender people want to change their legal identity, because from their individual experiences the documents in which they have been named do not represent the gender identity by which they perceive themselves.

From name-calling and bullying, to being denied a job or appropriate healthcare, the range of unequal treatment faced by LGBTI people is extensive and damaging. It can also be life-threatening. Sometimes, LGBTI people are harassed in the streets, beaten up and even killed, simply because of who they are. Violence against transgender people led to the deaths of at least 375 people worldwide in 2021; 70% of these murders happened in Central and South America.

WHY ARE THE RIGHTS OF LGBTI PEOPLE IMPORTANT?

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects everyone's right to express themselves freely. Everyone should be able to express their pride in who they are. Life expectancy for transgender women in many countries in Latin America ranges from 33 to 38 years, mainly because of the violence they face, which in many cases results in their deaths. Bringing an end to transphobia will therefore save lives. Discrimination against LGBTI people puts them at increased risk of physical and psychological harm. Everyone has the right to an identity and to a life lived in freedom and safety, free from discrimination.

People who do not identify as LGBTI can become allies by understanding the realities and being empathetic to the challenges faced by LGBTI people. It also allows them to learn how to remove many of the limitations imposed by gender stereotypes. These stereotypes limit the ways in which LGBTI people are perceived by defining and limiting how people are expected to live their lives. Removing these stereotypes sets everyone free to achieve their full potential, without discriminatory social constraints.

LGBTI people, especially transgender and gender non-conforming people, often experience economic and social exclusion. Fighting for the enactment and full implementation of laws that are more inclusive of people regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity will allow LGBTI people to access human rights, such as the rights to health, education, housing and employment.

HANDOUT

YREN AND MARIANA'S
STORY

Yren and Mariana want to live their lives freely and do things they love, like playing volleyball, dancing and going to the theatre. However, as trans women, Yren and Mariana are busy defending themselves against discrimination. They've been bullied, physically attacked and prevented from speaking out about the issues they face in their daily lives.

Trans people in Paraguay cannot legally change their names or obtain identity documents that match their gender identity, among other discriminatory practices. This means trans students cannot get school certificates in their chosen names, which makes finding a job difficult. This inequality has motivated Yren and Mariana to become activists, to demand change.

But protesting isn't easy for trans people in Paraguay. Paraguay is a very conservative country which treats trans people and the wider LGBTI community unfairly. It tries to make them invisible. Because of this, protests by trans groups are often banned and, in some cases, demonstrations have been attacked.

Yren and Mariana have been fighting for years to change their legal names. If they could get documentation that matches who they are, it would mean the state had started to recognize their existence as trans women.



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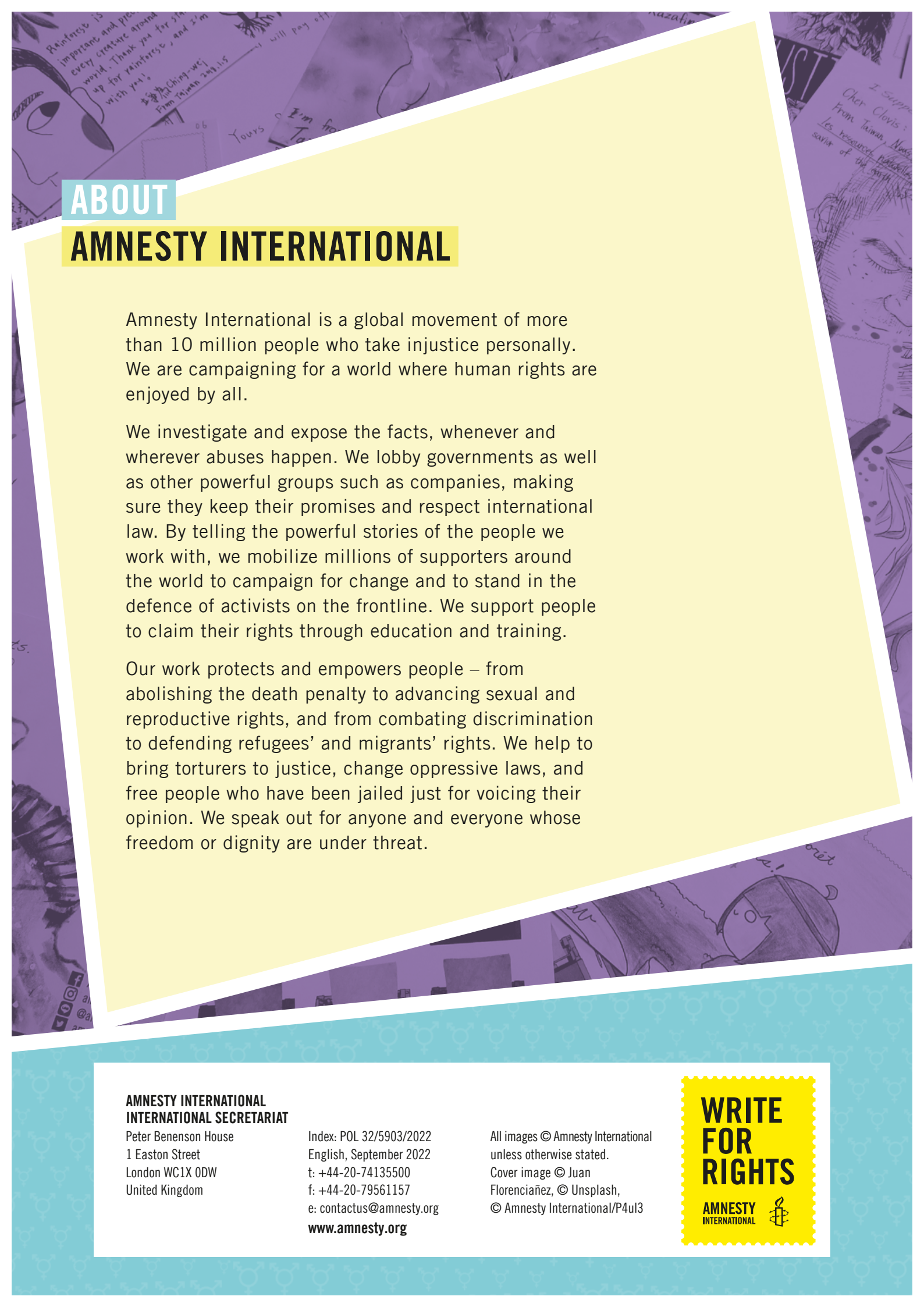


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*"I came into the world to show who I am,
not to be told who I am"*

Yren Rotela.

Top to bottom: Yren and Mariana outside Paraguay's Supreme Court of Justice; Mariana holds a giant identity card; Yren speaks at the offices of Amnesty Paraguay; A demonstration outside Paraguay's Supreme Court of Justice for recognition of trans people's identities.



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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