

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

40th ANNIVERSARY

EXTERNAL DOCUMENT

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## **Amnesty International Timeline**

### *Key Moments*

*The following are selected moments, and assorted facts, about Amnesty International (AI) taken from a range of campaigns and reports which the organization has launched over its 40-year history.*

- 1961 British lawyer, Peter Benenson, launches an **Appeal for Amnesty '61** with the publication of an article, "The Forgotten Prisoners" in The Observer newspaper, London, United Kingdom (UK), on May 28th. The imprisonment of two Portuguese students who had raised their wine glasses in a toast to freedom moved Benenson to write this article which proved to be the genesis of AI. The appeal was reprinted in other papers across the world.
- In July, the first international meeting with delegates from Belgium, UK, France, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland and the United States decides to establish "a permanent international movement in defence of freedom of opinion and religion."
- Office and library staffed by volunteers opens in Mitre Court, London.
- "Threes Network" is established whereby each AI group adopted three prisoners from contrasting geographical and political areas, thus emphasizing impartiality of the group's work.
- The first AI groups are founded in the UK, West Germany, Holland, France, Italy and Switzerland.
- On Human Rights Day, 10 December, the first Amnesty candle is lit in the church of St-Martins-in-the-Fields, London.
- 62 AI takes its first mission to Ghana in January, followed by Czechoslovakia in February (on behalf of a prisoner of conscience, Archbishop Josef Beran), and then to Portugal and East Germany.
- A Prisoner of Conscience Fund is established to provide relief to prisoners

and their families.

First Annual Report 1961/62.

210 prisoners have now been adopted by 70 groups in 7 countries. There are 1,200 cases documented in Prisoners of Conscience Library.

The first year's expenditure is £6,040.

AI groups are started in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Greece, Australia, Ireland, and the United States.

At a conference in Belgium, all the groups decide to set up a permanent organization that will be known as "Amnesty International".

AI sent observer to trial of Nelson Mandela

63

AI comprises 350 groups.

Two-year total of 770 prisoners adopted, 140 released.

Sean MacBride, the Irish human rights advocate, is elected Chairman of the newly established International Executive Committee (IEC).

The International Secretariat (AI headquarters) is established in London. Income and expenditure: £8,608.

Research Bureau, consisting of volunteers, is established to prepare background papers on political imprisonment in individual countries.

64

**Peter Benenson, who by now has been secretary to the IEC, is named President of AI.**

Three-year totals of 1,367 prisoners adopted, 329 released.

360 groups in 14 countries.

United Nations gives AI consultative status in August.

65

AI issues its first reports simultaneously on prison conditions in Portugal, South Africa and Romania.

AI sponsors a resolution at the United Nations (UN) to suspend and finally abolish capital punishment for peacetime political offences.

The Council of Europe grant AI consultative status.

Monthly postcards for Prisoners Campaign starts.

66

Peter Benenson gives up his day-to-day involvement with AI.

**Eric Baker takes over the running of AI.**

1,500 prisoners under adoption, 1,000 released since AI was founded.

67

There are 550 groups in 18 countries.

AI is now working for nearly 2,000 prisoners in 63 countries, 293 prisoners released.

68

**Martin Ennals is appointed AI Secretary General.**

The 1st Amnesty International Week - Prisoner of Conscience Week - is observed in November.

69

In January, UNESCO grants AI consultative status.

- 4,000 prisoners adopted since AI was founded, 2,000 released.  
There are now 640 groups in 21 countries.
- 70 520 prisoners were released during the year.  
There are 850 groups in 27 countries.
- 71 AI's 10th Anniversary receives widespread publicity in international press, radio and television.  
1,050 new cases adopted, 700 prisoners were released.
- 72 AI launches its first worldwide campaign for the abolition of torture.  
AI is granted consultative status at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States in October.  
1,271 new cases adopted, 727 prisoners released.
- 73 AI issued its first full **Urgent Action**, on behalf of Professor Luiz Basilio Rossi, a Brazilian, on March 19th. He was arrested for political reasons. Luiz himself believed that AI's appeals were crucial: *"I knew that my case had become public, I knew they could no longer kill me. Then the pressure on me decreased and conditions improved."* His wife later became one of the founding members of AI Brazil's health professionals network.  
1,580 new prisoners are taken up and 842 prisoners released.  
New regime in Chile agrees to admit three-man AI mission for on-the-spot probe into allegations of massive violations of human rights.  
UN General Assembly unanimously approves AI-inspired resolution formally denouncing torture and calling on all governments to adhere to existing international instruments with provisions forbidding practice.
- 74 Sean McBride (Chair of the International Executive Committee) is awarded Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his lifelong work for human rights in October.  
On the first anniversary of Chile's military coup on 11 September AI publishes report exposing political oppression, executions and torture in Pinochet's Chile, following its fact-finding mission.  
In June, AI receives Dag Hammarskjold Memorial Award of American Veterans Committee for work in the field of human rights.  
1,867 new prisoners taken up and 1,059 prisoners released.  
International Council Meeting (ICM) in Askov, Denmark, sees Sean MacBride retire as Chairman of IEC. IEC expands from seven to nine members and former prisoner of conscience Mámtaz Soysal of Turkey becomes first ever prisoner of conscience elected to it.  
IEC recognizes first-ever AI adoption group in Soviet Union.
- 75 UN unanimously adopts a Declaration Against Torture.

- There are now 1,592 groups in 33 countries and over 70,000 individual AI members in 65 countries.
- 2,458 new prisoners are taken up and 1,403 prisoners are released.
- 76 First of the famous “*Secret Policeman’s Ball*” comedy events, featuring John Cleese and the Monty Python crowd amongst many others. The series continued in 1977, 1978, 1981 and 1987, featuring other comedians and also musicians such as Peter Gabriel, Duran Duran, Mark Knopfler, Bob Geldolf, Eric Clapton, Phil Collins etc. Innovative and ground-breaking comedy and music charity benefits (paving the way for the huge international music events such as ‘Live Aid’ and Comic Relief). AI launches worldwide campaign against torture in Uruguay in February.
- 77 AI lists 167 trade unionists imprisoned in 16 countries in November. AI is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October for having “contributed to securing the ground for freedom, for justice, and thereby also for peace in the world.”
- 78 AI wins the UN Human Rights prize for “outstanding contributions in the field of human rights.”
- 79 AI publishes a list of 2,665 cases of people known to have “disappeared” in Argentina after Videla’s military coup.
- 80 **Thomas Hammarberg of Sweden becomes AI Secretary General.**
- 81 In London, AI holds a candle-lighting to mark its 20th Anniversary.
- 82 On Human Rights Day, (10 December) AI launches an appeal for a universal amnesty for all prisoners of conscience. More than one million people sign petitions which were are finally presented to the UN in December 1983.
- 83 AI publishes a special report on political killings by governments.
- 84 AI launches its second Campaign Against Torture, including its 12-point plan for the abolition of torture.
- Adoption of the UN Convention Against Torture on Human Rights Day, 10 December.
- 85 AI publishes its first educational pack, “Teaching and Learning about Human Rights”.
- At AI’s International Council Meeting in Helsinki, Finland (27 August – 1 September), AI decides to broaden its statute to include work for refugees.
- There are 3,433 groups in 50 countries, and over 500,000 members, supporters and subscribers.

- 86 AIUSA launches *Conspiracy of Hope* rock concert tour with U2, Sting, Peter Gabriel, Bryan Adams, Lou Reed, the Neville Brothers and others. **Ian Martin becomes Secretary General.**
- 87 AI reports that the death penalty in the USA violates treaties, is racially biased and arbitrary.
- 88 The *Human Rights Now!* Concert tour (featuring Sting and Bruce Springsteen amongst others) performed in 19 cities in 15 countries and was viewed by millions when broadcast on Human Rights Day, to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a direct result, AI membership rose in many countries.
- 89 AI publishes major study, "When the State Kills", on the death penalty.
- 90 There are 700,000 members in 150 countries and more than 6,000 volunteer groups in 70 countries.
- 91 AI marks its 30th anniversary.  
AI's International Council Meeting (ICM) in Yokohama, Japan (31 August to 7 September); AI adopts a new mandate, pledging to promote all the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. AI expands its mandate to include work on abuses by armed opposition groups (as well as by the State); hostage-taking, and considers people imprisoned due to their sexual orientation as prisoners of conscience.
- 92 AI membership passes the 1 million mark, with 6,000 local groups in over 70 countries.  
**Pierre Sané, from Senegal, becomes Secretary General.**
- 93 UN World Conference on Human Rights is held in Vienna.
- 94 AI launches major international campaign on women's rights: "Human Rights are women's rights".  
AI's campaign against "Disappearances" and Political Killings is launched worldwide.
- 95 AI campaigns on "Stopping the Torture Trade".  
AI's International Council Meeting (ICM) in Ljubljana, Slovenia (12 - 20 August)
- 96 AI campaigns for a permanent International Criminal Court, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 1998.
- 97 Human Rights of Refugees worldwide is the main focus of AI's campaigning.
- 98 AI launches campaign - "Get Up, Sign Up!" - to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), collecting 13 million pledges in support of the Declaration. To mark the

50th anniversary of the UDHR, AI holds a concert in Paris on Human Rights Day featuring Radiohead, Asian Dub Foundation, Bruce Springsteen, Tracey Chapman, Alanis Morissette, Youssou N'Dour and Peter Gabriel, amongst others, with special appearances by the Dalai Lama and international human rights activists. General Pinochet is arrested in London on 16 October, on a warrant from Spain requesting his extradition, and by the end of the year the UK's highest court rules he is not immune from prosecution because he is a former head of state. AI is a party to the legal proceedings.

AI launches "Rights for All" campaign on the USA

99 The ruling of UK Magistrate, Ronald Bartle, that the extradition of Pinochet should be allowed to proceed, represents a historical step towards the acceptance of universal jurisdiction in cases of human rights violations.

AI's International Council Meeting (ICM) is held in Portugal. The ICM decisions lead AI to, for example: develop its work on the impact of economic relations on human rights; to work to empower human rights defenders; to campaign against impunity; enhance its work to protect refugees, and strengthen its grassroots activism.

2000 AI launches its third Campaign Against Torture.

2001 AI marks its 40th Anniversary.

AI wins The Revolution Awards 2001, for "best use of email", with its stoptorture-site ([www.stoptorture.org](http://www.stoptorture.org)).

AIUK's new 40th Anniversary Comedy Event in Wembley Arena, London, "We Know Where You Live" featuring Eddie Izzard and friends.