

# Letter Writing Guide

for Amnesty International USA  
and the Urgent Action Network



**Quick & to the point:  
Write and send it now.  
Don't put it off.  
Make it short.  
Be polite.  
Thanks.**

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Revised July 2004

# URGENT ACTION



# Why write letters?

## Amnesty International's Mission

Amnesty International's vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

Amnesty International undertakes research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.



## The International Urgent Action Network

Amnesty International's headquarters, the International Secretariat (IS), is located in London. All Urgent Action appeals are researched and written in the IS office and sent to the Urgent Action offices around the world.

## The Urgent Action Network (UAN) in the United States

In the US, the UAN consists of approximately 10,000 individuals, AI chapters, schools, faith groups, professional and special interest groups. Individuals can work on any specific types of appeals such as those listed on page 10 of this guide.

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### Why write letters?

*It's simple.*

*It works.*

***This guide will provide you with the tools to write an effective letter.***

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### It can free a Prisoner of Conscience (POC):

"I am writing to inform you that after 6 years, 4 months, 17 days in prison, I am now free. I walked out of the prison gate... with my shoulders unbent, with my head unbowed. I feel great to be free again, to walk, once again, in the sunshine of freedom."

-- university lecturer in history and former POC Maina Wa Kinyatti, Kenya

### It can strengthen an individual:

"... Messages of solidarity that have been sent to me from many parts of the world, reach my cell. It feels like every time a letter of solidarity arrives, the rose in my cell blossoms. This is a very warm feeling."

-- POC Dita Sari, Indonesia

### It can stop torture:

"You are not dead, because too many people are concerned about you"

-- a security agent to a political prisoner, Argentina

### It can bear witness:

"Although the official investigations still have not turned anything up, the letters and faxes you sent to our offices and to government agencies have been very important. They have assured us that we are not alone and they have shown the government that an entire international network is aware of anything that might happen to us, and is ready to respond."

-- human rights defender Victor Manuel Quintana, Mexico

### It can improve prison conditions:

"We could always tell when international protests were taking place... the food rations increased and the beatings were fewer. Letters from abroad were translated and passed around from cell to cell..."

-- a released POC, Vietnam

### It demonstrates that there is a global community concerned for human rights:

"That is the magic of AI, its ability to gather a community of peoples all over the world for the common cause of humanity and dignity of man and woman—not only to lend hope to prisoners of conscience, but also give human fellowship and warmth."

-- Member of Parliament and former POC Lim Guan Eng, Malaysia

# Tips for Effective Letter Writing

## Using shortcuts

Do whatever is necessary to make your letter writing as quick and easy as possible. This way, letters will not be put off and they can be sent out sooner. Start by making a generic file for each type of concern; paragraphs on torture, the death penalty, disappearances, denial of medical care and so on, can be copied into your working file and edited as needed. You may find it useful to refer to the sample passages on page 7 to get your letter started and shake "writer's block."

## Salutations

There is no international standard for addressing authorities. These formalities vary according to different governmental structures in each country. Urgent Actions and other AI appeals will usually give you a suggested form of salutation for each official. In general, you may safely use:

- **Your Majesty** – to Kings, Queens, and other monarchs.
- **Your Excellency** – to all heads of state, cabinet level ministers, prime ministers, ambassadors and governors.
- **Your Honor** – for judges and procurators.
- **Dear Sir/Madam** – for local authorities, prison commanders, police chiefs.
- **Dear Admiral, General, Captain, etc.** – for military officials.

## Closings

Close your letter in a formal style by using:

- Respectfully, or Yours respectfully,
- Sincerely, or Yours sincerely,
- Yours truly,

## Online Resources

### AIUSA'S HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION CENTER

<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/action/>

The Human Rights Action Center is AIUSA's central hub for online actions. At the center, you will find pending US legislation and urgent human rights cases in the US and around the world where your action can make a difference. Actions in the Action Center come from all networks and programs of AIUSA.

### AIUSA'S URGENT ACTION NETWORK ONLINE

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent/>

The Urgent Action Network online is the central location for current Urgent Actions and information about the program in the US. From this page, you can link to the monthly newsletter (updates on all Urgent Actions, as information is available), a form for joining the UAN, this letter writing guide, Frequently Asked Questions, and other information about the program. We appreciate your ongoing suggestions for making this site more useful.

## In the beginning...

AI launched its Urgent Action Network in 1973 during its first Campaign Against Torture. This speedy technique relied heavily on telexes and telegrams to communicate urgent concerns about torture. To learn more about the history of urgent actions, contact the UAN office to request the "UA Bio."



Today, AI's Urgent Action Network is the world's largest letter writing program. Other organizations, such as Global Response (an environmental letter writing organization) have modeled their program after this technique.

## AI Library Online

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/engindex>

The AI library contains an archive of most reports, news releases, and urgent actions published from 1996 to date. Documents are available in English, French, and Spanish.

## Online Human Rights Documents

For an extensive list of United Nations human rights treaties, visit the UN office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/intlinst.htm>

For an abbreviated list of UN documents, see page 12 of this guide.

# Writing Appeals Based on an Urgent Action

Below are some guidelines to help you navigate around an Urgent Action case sheet when you are writing a letter to a government official. These recommendations can also be applied to any other Amnesty International action. The most effective appeal you can write on any action is *simple, quick, and to the point*.

**Write as soon as you can.** Try to write as close as possible to the date a case is issued, rather than to the “stop action” date at the end of the case sheet.

**Be factual in your appeal.** Relay the details of the case as you know them. Do not discuss ideology or politics. Your message must be for the benefit of the victim and not a vehicle for political opinions.

**Keep your letters within Amnesty International’s mission.**

## URGENT ACTION

UANetwork Office POBox 1270 Nederland CO 80466 T. 303.258.1170 F. 303.258.7881 E-mail. uan@aiusa.org www.amnestyusa.org/urgent/

**25 February 2003**

**UA 56/03 Fear of torture/Prisoner of Conscience**

**TOGO Marc Palanga (m), leader of the *Union des forces du changement* (UFC),  
Union of Forces for Change**

Marc Palanga, a local leader of the *Union des forces du changement* (UFC), Union of Forces for Change, is being held at Kara Gendarmerie (Police station) in northern Togo, following his arrest on 22 February. There are concerns for his safety as he has received medical treatment at Camp Landja, military barracks, possibly for injuries sustained whilst being tortured.

On 9 February, Marc Palanga and five other UFC members were arrested by police officers from Kara. On at least two occasions they were taken to Camp Landja and tortured by Togolese military personnel. No reason was ever given for their arrest and they were released without charge on 17 February.

Shortly after his release Marc Palanga went to Sokodé, central Togo, where he received treatment for the injuries sustained while in detention from 9 to 17 February 2003. He was re-arrested on 22 February on suspicion of having held a meeting in Sokodé. Amnesty International believes that Marc Palanga has been arrested solely on account of his peaceful involvement with the UFC and considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International receives regular reports of the arrest, torture, intimidation and harassment of members of the opposition in Togo, especially in the north of the country which is the stronghold of President Gnassingbé Eyadéma's ruling party. Marc Palanga was previously arrested in October 2001 and sentenced to six months' imprisonment after being convicted of the defamation of the President's son, Ernest Gnassingbé. During the past decade, the organization has documented scores of cases where victims have been targeted because of their political or human rights activities, particularly around the time of important elections. The Togolese Presidential elections are due to take place later this year.

Amnesty International has repeatedly raised its concerns with the Togolese authorities about the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment, and about the lack of safeguards provided to people held in detention. Police are allowed by law to detain people in custody for up to 48 hours, before bringing them before a judge. The period of detention is renewable once, with the authorization of the Public Prosecutor. In its concluding observations on Togo in October 2002, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, considering its periodic report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, noted “with concern the many allegations that torture is common practice in Togo, particularly on arrest, during police custody and in places of detention.....” Amnesty International believes that the principal reason for the persistence of torture in Togo is the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators.

***Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.***

Call, write, fax, or email the AIUSA Urgent Action office with any questions.

If you receive a reply from a government official to one of your appeals, please send the reply to the Urgent Action office. The UA office tracks all replies to its cases and forwards the information to AI researchers in London and country specialists in AIUSA, thus helping them learn what the official response is to a given case and design better actions.

**You may refer to Amnesty International in your letter, unless otherwise stated in the case sheet. Appeals written in a personal or professional capacity show the diversity of concern regarding the particular victim(s) of human rights abuses.**

In order to keep your letters fast, short, and to-the-point, choose one or two recommended actions to focus your letter around. It is not necessary to cover all recommended actions in each letter.

Use the recommended salutation for officials.

Often actions within Amnesty International will change, particularly Urgent Actions: a person is freed, a family receives more threats, new details arise that can help in your appeal. Please do not send appeals past the suggested stop date. If you would like to continue action past this date, contact the Amnesty office listed on the case sheet.

**Never send the Urgent Action case sheet, or any other Amnesty casesheet, to a government official or a press organization. These case sheets are meant for your information only. It may prove harmful to the victim(s) of human rights abuses for government officials to obtain UA casesheets.**

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:**

- urging the Togolese authorities to take immediate measures to prevent Marc Palanga being tortured or ill-treated and to guarantee his safety;
- stating that Amnesty International considers him to be prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release;
- requesting that a thorough investigation be conducted into the reported beatings of the six detainees held from 9 to 17 February 2003 and that those responsible be brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to end arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment of members of opposition parties in Togo.

**APPEALS TO:**

**President of the Republic of Togo:**

His Excellency/Son Excellence  
Monsieur le Général Gnassingbé Eyadéma  
Président de la République  
Palais présidentiel, Avenue de la Marina  
Lomé, TOGO

Telegrams: **Président, Lomé, Togo**

Fax : 011 228 221 32 04 (Please specify : « À l'attention du Président de la République »)

Email : [presidence@republicoftogo.com](mailto:presidence@republicoftogo.com)

Salutation : Dear President/Monsieur le Président

**Minister of Interior:**

Monsieur Akila Ezzo Boko  
Ministre de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité  
Ministère de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité  
Rue Albert Sarraut  
Lomé, TOGO

Telegram: **Ministre de l'Intérieur, Lomé, Togo**

Salutation : Dear Minister / Monsieur le Ministre

**Minister of Justice:**

Katari Foly-Bazi  
Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux  
Ministère de la Justice, Avenue de la Marina  
Rue Colonel le Roux  
Lomé, TOGO

Telegram : **Ministre de la Justice, Lomé, Togo**

Fax : 011 228 221 22 06

Salutation : Dear Minister/ Monsieur le Ministre

**COPIES TO:**

Ambassador Akoussoulelou Bodjona  
Embassy of the Republic of Togo  
2208 Massachusetts Ave. NW  
Washington DC 20008  
Fax: 1 202 232 3190

Please send appeals immediately. Check with the Colorado office between 9:00 am and 6:00 pm, Mountain Time, weekdays only, if sending appeals after April 8, 2003.

It is not expected that you send letters to every address listed, but rather that you choose one or more.

Addresses are not listed in order of priority, so if you do not send appeals to all, pick some at random knowing that other Amnesty activists will choose the others. Sending copies to the media (when listed) may spark their own investigations as well as obtain beneficial publicity for the victim(s) of human rights abuses.

If the title of the official is set apart (italics, underlined, bold), it does not need to be included in the address of the official.

“I would like to thank you sincerely and cordially for the work you do as a member of the United States section of Amnesty International and for your interest in securing the exercise of our citizens’ human rights and freedoms. In this connection I assure you that the work you do is not wasted, because each expression of international solidarity helps considerably in reparation of injustice committed upon citizens of our country.”

-- excerpt of a letter from the Chairman of the Supreme Court in Czechoslovakia. The letter goes on to inform the Urgent Action letter writer that the Prisoner of Conscience for whom she wrote was released by presidential pardon.

# A Sample Letter

Use respectful language throughout your letter.

Do not discuss political ideology or politics.

Write in English, unless you are completely fluent in the language of the country concerned.

Be sure your mailing address is on your letter so the official can respond.

Use professional or personal letterhead when available.

Write the official's complete address.

Use the proper salutation.


If not typed, make sure your letter is written clearly. You may boldface, capitalize, or italicize the victim's name.

Use one paragraph to give background and details.

Consider using a personal, friendly comment in your letter.

Wrap up by restating your concerns and expectations of the official.

If using a computer, use spell check before sending your appeal.



123 Activist Avenue  
Nederland CO 80466  
USA

February 25, 2003

Monsieur Akila Ezzo Boko  
Ministre de l'Interieur et de la Securite  
Ministere de l'Interieur et de la Securite  
Rue Albert Sarraut  
Lome, TOGO

Dear Minister Boko:

I am writing to you because I am concerned about reports that *Marc Palanga* was arrested on February 22 and may be at risk of torture. Please act immediately to ensure that Mr. Palanga is protected from ill-treatment while in detention at the Kara Police Station in northern Togo.

*Marc Palanga*, a local leader of the Union des forces du changement (UFC), has not used violence to express his views and has apparently been detained several times for his peaceful involvement with this group. Reports here indicate that many other opponents of your government have also been intimidated, ill-treated and detained without charge. I urge you to end arbitrary arrests and detention in Togo and to allow Togo citizens, including *Marc Palanga*, the opportunity to peacefully express themselves.

I would like to visit your beautiful country someday and hope to do so when it appears that the human rights of all citizens in Togo are respected. Thank you for looking into this matter and quickly, unconditionally releasing community activist Marc Palanga. Please let me know when you have allowed Marc Palanga his freedom.

Sincerely,  
*Stephanie Moore*  
Stephanie Moore

cc: Embassy of Togo, Washington D.C.

Always include the date.

Begin by stating your main concern.

Use the person's name throughout the letter.

Ask for a response.

Use your name *and* signature.

Use the term "cc:" and the title of the agency or official to indicate that you are sending a copy of your letter there as well.

Keep your letter brief, no more than one page when printed.

# Suggestions for Writer's Block

Writer's block happens to all of us. Keeping a file of your messages can help give you a jumping off place to start a new letter, both by providing inspiration and speeding up the process. Below are some phrases and sentences that may also help get you writing again when your mind draws a blank. But remember to use them only as suggestions – it is always better to use your own heartfelt language.

## Starting

I wish to appeal to you on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_, who is the subject of my deepest concern . . .

My family and I are worried about \_\_\_\_\_, who is reportedly detained unjustly in your country . . .

I am dismayed to hear that \_\_\_\_\_ has received several death threats recently.

I would like to take the opportunity to call your attention to the case of \_\_\_\_\_ . . .

We are calling on you to ensure the fair treatment of \_\_\_\_\_ . . .

## Ending

. . . I hope to hear from you in the very near future.

. . . I, and all here who share my concern, would appreciate a reply from you as soon as possible. Our concern for the basic rights of individuals in your country is not of a political nature, it is simply a concern for the dignity and well being of all humans.

. . . Thank you in advance for your time on this urgent matter.

. . . Finally, in view of the above information, we urge you to act quickly to remedy this situation and ask that you inform us of the outcome of your investigation.

## Death threats to a union leader:

I was concerned to learn of recent death threats made against \_\_\_\_\_, a member of the United Confederation of Workers in Colombia on August 4. She was told that she would be killed for her trade union activity. I urge you to ensure that a full and impartial investigation is made into the threats, that the results are made public, and that those responsible are brought to justice.

## “Disappearance” of a teacher:

I am a high school teacher from the U.S. I have been greatly disturbed by the news of the “disappearance” of fellow teacher, Mr. \_\_\_ in Ankara on June 7. I would be grateful if you would inform me of his whereabouts and give assurances that he is being treated well while in detention. I would also be grateful for news of his legal status.

## Inadequate medical treatment of a prisoner:

I write this letter to you as a physician, to ensure that Professor \_\_\_\_\_, a prisoner held in \_\_\_\_\_ Prison, is given adequate diet and medical treatment. I have been informed that he is suffering from pneumonia and urgently needs to be transferred to a hospital for immediate attention. My colleagues and I here at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital would be pleased to hear from you as soon as you are able to ensure treatment for this serious respiratory illness.

## Torture of student leaders:

I was gravely concerned by reports of the arrests of a number of student leaders at the University of \_\_\_\_\_ in October. I was particularly concerned that some of the detainees, who are being held at the

\_\_\_\_\_ Detention Center, are reported to have been tortured and I seek your assurances that these students and other detainees held at \_\_\_\_\_ will be treated humanely.

## Death in detention and “disappearance”:

I am writing to express my concern over the reports of the death in custody of \_\_\_\_\_, following his arrest in Baku on January 19<sup>th</sup>. I urge an immediate investigation be conducted into the circumstances of his death and that results be made public. At the same time, I write to ask you for information on \_\_\_\_\_’s whereabouts, who was also arrested on January 19<sup>th</sup>, and I seek assurances that her physical safety be guaranteed while in detention.

## Death penalty:

As a long time member of Amnesty International, an organization that opposes the death penalty in all cases on humanitarian grounds, I urgently request that you commute the death sentence of \_\_\_\_\_. His execution violates the right to life as proclaimed in the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I appeal to you to ensure that no further executions are carried out in your [country/state].

## Arrest of a colleague:

It has come to the attention of [this law firm] that three well respected lawyers in Khartoum were recently arrested for their advocacy for the human rights of your citizens. We, [your names], believe them to be prisoners of conscience, detained because of their work as legal professionals in Sudan. Although we strongly urge that these three well known attorneys be immediately and unconditionally released, until that happens, we seek assurances of their physical safety and guarantees that they will not be subjected to torture or ill treatment.

# Sending your Appeals

## Email

It is extremely easy to send your appeals via email and doesn't really cost anything. A problem with email, however, is that many government officials either do not have email addresses or do not make their email addresses known to the public. Thus, Amnesty actions will not always list email addresses for all government officials.

If you receive your Urgent Actions via email, you might find it useful to cut and paste brief portions of the action into your own message. However, please do not send or forward the original Urgent Action directly to the official. A message composed by you and reflecting your concerns in your own words, is most effective. Carefully consider how you compose the subject line of your email: it should encourage the official to open your email, so be polite and thoughtful when choosing your words. An example is: "Asking for Your Help to Find Roberto Daman Lopez."

If you want to forward the Urgent Action itself to a friend, colleague or fellow Amnesty International activist, please send the complete text of the UA as it was sent to you without editing its content.

## Fax

Most actions will include the fax numbers of one or more government officials. This is an immediate, fairly inexpensive way to communicate your concerns to governments. Because your faxed message is received as it appears, you can send petitions with signatures. You can use a letterhead that will help to individualize your appeal and make it more effective.

The cost of sending a fax is the cost of an international phone call. A fax message can be a full length letter since it is so inexpensive to send (in contrast to a telegram or cable). You should consider including your fax number in your message and request a faxed reply from the official. If you do not have a fax machine at your home or office, many local print shops will allow you to use theirs for a fee. A variety of web-based companies will send your emailed appeal as an international fax. One such service provider is Faxaway at <http://www.faxaway.com> (phone: 1 800 906 4329). You should check with your own Internet Service Provider for others.

## Troubleshooting for Emails and Fax

Problems with fax numbers and email addresses often exist. When a government official's fax or email is listed on an Urgent Action which is distributed globally to activists in over 80 countries, you can imagine how many faxes and emails begin to come in to the official's office. This often results in the official's email or fax being turned off for a period of time. Officials may even permanently discontinue service for that address or number. For faxes, another problem may arise when inadequate phone lines in the country of destination sometimes block international calls. Of course, a persistent busy signal or bounced email message may mean that other activists are faxing or emailing in their appeals, which is a good thing! Have patience and keep trying. If you cannot get through on an email address or fax line for a long period of time, please airmail your letter so that at least the official hears your concerns in a timely manner.



## Can I telephone officials?

Some Urgent Actions deal with cases of extreme emergencies in which telephone calls to officials are requested. You may see a telephone number in the address section of the UA. If possible try to find a friend or colleague who speaks the language of the subject country to make the phone call; however, speaking slowly in English is usually acceptable. Be polite but firm in relaying the concerns set out in the UA. Most importantly, be certain that the name of the victim is spelled slowly and is clearly understood. Important information is sometimes gotten from a phone call. If you get any new information on the victim, please call the Urgent Action office as soon as possible at (303) 258 1170.

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An Amnesty writer, Nora, wrote a fax to Swaziland on an appeal case. Her phone rang on Tuesday night at 3:00 in the morning. There was no one there. It rang again at 6:00. Someone from a police station in Swaziland explained that he had received page one of her fax but not page two. He was wondering if she would kindly resend page two!



“A few days after AI Nepal launched the China Campaign, three of our members were suddenly arrested while collecting signatures... Our ordeal lasted three days, after which we were released unconditionally. Later, we found out that the Prime Minister's office had been flooded with letters, faxes, telegrams and e-mails from people around the world demanding our release.

“Before this happened, when I prepared and wrote Urgent Action appeals, I used to try to imagine the value of letters to victims of human rights abuses. But when we ended up behind bars ourselves, we directly experienced what a letter is worth.”

-- Anil Pant, Director and UA Coordinator for AI Nepal

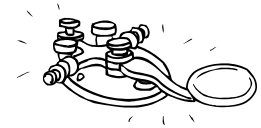
“We try and explain to the street children about the letters and the fact that people DO care about them. They look at me disbelievingly and ask, ‘Why would people so far away care about us when people here beat and kill us?’

I am still searching for an answer. I do not know WHY letters work – why uniformed murderers should care about the mechanic from Iowa who writes to them about a murdered street child in Guatemala City... But they do. So we must write – and keep on writing.”

-- Bruce Harris, director, Casa Alianza, Costa Rica

## Air Mail

Sending an airmail letter to a government official is sometimes the most feasible way of communicating your concern about a victim of human rights abuse. When fax numbers and email addresses do not work, or if you do not have access to a fax machine or the web, consider sending an airmail letter. Ideally, your letter should be one page and include your signature and return address so the official can respond to your concerns. Air mail postage rates often change. The current rate, as of May 2003, is 80 cents for one ounce (one page letter with envelope) to most countries; to Mexico and Canada: 60 cents. You can always check the international postage rate for specific countries and types of delivery at <http://ircalc.usps.gov/>. Postcards and aerogrammes are also effective. An aerogramme cost 70 cents to all countries and can be purchased at any post office; you simply buy one, handwrite your message on it, address it, fold, seal, and send it. Postcards also cost 70 cents to most countries, but 50 cents to Mexico and Canada. You can buy postcards at the post office. If you buy them elsewhere, be careful about the image on the front of the card; do not choose anything which might be deemed disrespectful or inappropriate to postal workers, government officials, or anyone else in the country where you are sending it.



## Telegram/Cable

A telegram is an expensive way to send your appeal. However, it can offer an effective method of getting the attention of an official. We suggest that you send your appeal as a telegram only at times when the situation is particularly urgent and as your group's or your own budget allows. The cost is calculated per word. Since abbreviations and punctuation such as commas and periods count as words, omit them and all unnecessary words and articles whenever possible. Use the telegram address listed in the Urgent Action or other action you are using. The text of the telegram should be short and to the point. The signature should include your name and mail or email address so that the official can respond to your appeal. Here is an example of the truncated language used in telegrams (also called cables).

EXTREMELY CONCERNED  
ABOUT NEWS REPORTS HERE  
THAT \_\_\_\_\_ HAS BEEN  
PLACED IN ISOLATION AND  
DENIED FAMILY AND LAWYER  
VISITS. PLEASE ALLOW MORE  
HUMANE TREATMENT OR  
UNCONDITIONALLY RELEASE  
HER NOW

There are several companies that can send a telegram for you. You may find a listing of them in the "Telegraph Services" section of your local Yellow Pages directory. You can call MCI Worldcom at 1 800 388 6244 to dictate a telegram (It costs \$10.00 plus a cost per word depending on the destination country).

# Beyond letters

## Variations of an Urgent Action appeal

Once you have the basics down for writing an effective letter, the possibilities are endless. Letter writing can and should be creative and fun. While the largest portion of AIUSA's Urgent Action Network is made up of individual letter writers, all Amnesty International community groups and student chapters receive Urgent Actions as well. Information from Urgent Actions and other Amnesty actions can be used in countless ways, including:

- Postcards to officials
- Letters to the editor in your local paper
- Telegrams/Faxes
- Emails
- Petitions
- Pre-written letters to circulate at a local farmer's market or festival, faith group meetings, retirement homes, coffee shops, and brew pubs
- Local radio station broadcasts



## Other ways to be involved with Amnesty International

There are many ways to be involved with Amnesty International. The basics of letter writing carry over into all programs and networks – letter writing is at the core of what AI does best. If you are looking for a way to get more involved, consider getting involved with:

- Local community or student Amnesty chapters
- AIUSA steering committees or working groups
- Human Rights Action Center (at [amnestyusa.org](http://amnestyusa.org))
- Campaigns
- Casework and Special Focus Cases
- Children's Human Rights Network
- Crisis Response
- Freedom Writers Network
- Government Action Network
- Human Rights Education Network
- Interfaith Network for Human Rights
- JustEarth! (AIUSA's program on human rights and the environment)
- Legal Support Network
- OUTfront (AIUSA's program on LGBT human rights)
- Women's Human Rights Network

For more information on any of these volunteer opportunities or programs, visit [www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org) or call the AIUSA Regional office nearest you at 1 - 866 - A REGION



The Urgent Action Network consists of individuals and groups from all walks of life. Many of these individuals and groups have varied and specialized interests. From journalists to attorneys, from freelance photographers to international businesspersons, from health professionals to students, your appeals can help a victim of human rights abuse.

While we encourage members to participate in all types of actions, we also provide categories of Urgent Actions to members who wish to write on a special or professional interest. Please contact the Urgent Action office if you are interested in receiving regular actions on :

- artists
- business people
- children (under 18 years)
- conscientious objection
- death penalty
- educators/students
- environmental activists
- health professionals
- human rights defenders
- indigenous people
- journalists/writers
- legal professionals
- physical scientists
- political leaders
- prisoners of conscience
- refugees
- religious leaders
- sexual orientation
- social scientists
- torture
- unionists
- women



# Children can be Human Rights Activists, Too!

For a victim of human rights abuse, hope may disappear as she feels “forgotten.” One of the most powerful voices in restoring hope in a victim and in appealing to authorities for justice is that of children. Encouraging children to participate in letter writing also benefits the children who write the letters: they gain skills in writing and composition, develop an understanding of the world, and realize they have the power to effect change.



Dear Excellency:

I want to tell you that there's a child in Turkey that is having all of his rights violated except one, his shelter. His name is Mehmet ali Gerdi. He got sent to jail because he's a Kurd and the police only want Turks in the country. He's only 9 years old; that's as old as me! I was wondering if you can help him get out of jail. I hope you can.

From,  
Arthur

Each month the Urgent Action program publishes and distributes a Children's Edition Urgent Action (CEUA). The CEUA program also provides letter writing opportunities from other Amnesty International materials throughout the year, such as the national Special Focus Cases, the annual Summer Postcard Action, a Holiday Card Action, and an Earth Day edition. CEUAs are online at Amnesty International USA's AIKids section.

Teachers, parents, after-school program leaders, and camp counselors are just some of the people who enjoy working with youngsters aged nine to fourteen on letters to officials, which often save young children and teens from government mistreatment and threats. If you know a young person, teacher, or a teen who would like to do a community service project working with children, contact the UA office for a CE starter packet. CEUAs are also available in Spanish, and a similar Literacy Edition program is available for those working with adult literacy groups or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

## Pledging Your Support, when Time is of the Essence

In 1975, AIUSA's Urgent Action program recognized the growing need for a speedy response to threats of torture and execution by launching its FIRST APPEAL Pledge Program (FAPP). What began as a telegram tree, run by half a dozen office volunteers in San Francisco, is now a cutting-edge pledge program that permits the UA office to write and send individualized messages by fax, telex, telegram, or international letter service under the signatures of members who have pledged to pay for these prompt communications. While email is becoming increasingly popular as a rapid form of global communication, FAPP still ensures that every UA case has rapid communications sent to every authority, even when the officials do not have email or fax. Messages are sent on each Urgent Action within hours of reception of the case in the UA office.

In addition to ensuring a prompt kick-off response to daily Urgent Action cases, FAPP messages are the only way to ensure a US response to the Worldwide Accelerated Response Network (WARN). WARN is an off-hours mechanism of 21 Amnesty International Urgent Action coordinators and individuals in 16 countries that commit to taking immediate action on case information from AI researchers on weekends, evenings, and holidays. WARNs are issued when there is no time to prepare and distribute a full Urgent Action case sheet, but immediate faxes, telegrams, or telexes are urgently required. To become a FIRST APPEAL pledge member or learn more about this program, contact the UA office.

25/FEBRUARY/2003

MONSIEUR AKILA ESSO BOKO  
MINISTRE DE L'INTERIEUR  
LOME (TOGO)

SEEKING ASSURANCES THAT MARC  
PALANGA IS NOT TORTURED WHILE  
HELD AT KARA GENDARMERIE IN  
NORTHERN TOGO. HE HAS BEEN  
DETAINED SINCE FEBRUARY 22.  
YOUR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE  
APPRECIATED.

STEPHANIE MOORE  
123 ACTIVIST AVENUE  
NEDERLAND CO 80466  
UNITED STATES

# International Documents for Human Rights Activists

Strengthen your appeals by citing from relevant United Nations documents. Below are some relevant articles from four UN documents. For a full list of UN human rights treaties, visit <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/intlnst.htm>

## STANDARD MINIMUM RULES FOR THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS

[www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/h\\_comp34.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/h_comp34.htm)

- Article 24: The medical officer shall see and examine every prisoner as soon as possible after his admission and thereafter as necessary, with a view particularly to the discovery of physical or mental illness and the taking of all necessary measures; the segregation of prisoners suspected of infectious or contagious conditions; the noting of physical or mental defects which might hamper rehabilitation and determination of the physical capacity of every prisoner for work.
- Article 37: Prisoners shall be allowed, under necessary supervision, to communicate with their family and reputable friends at regular intervals, both by correspondence and by receiving visits.



## DECLARATION ON THE PROTECTION OF ALL PERSONS FROM TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT (the Torture Declaration)

[www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/h\\_comp38.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/h_comp38.htm)

- Article 8: Any person who alleges that he has been subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment by, or at the instigation of, a public official shall have the right to complain to, and have his case impartially examined by, the competent authorities of the State concerned.
- Article 9: Wherever there is reasonable grounds to believe that an act of torture has been committed, the competent authorities of the State concerned shall promptly proceed to an impartial investigation even if there has been no formal complaint.

## INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

[http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a\\_ceschr.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ceschr.htm)

- Article 11: (1) The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions...
- Article 12: (1) The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health...

## UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

[www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm)



- Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.
- Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.
- Article 10: Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charges against him.
- Article 22: Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.
- Article 26: (1) Everyone has the right to education...