



URGENT ACTION NEWSLETTER

Urgent Action Office: 3-1992 Yonge Street, Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca

Write for Rights 2018: So close to 6 million!

Amnesty's signature event, centred on International Human Rights Day in December, was more successful than ever. During Write for Rights, we wrote messages to support nine women human rights defenders and one Indigenous community in Kenya.

Amnesty Canada contributed nearly 55,000 messages to the global total of over 5,900,000. That's an increase of about 400,000 over 2017.



Gulzar Duishenova defends the rights of people with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan
© Svetlana Zelenskaya/Amnesty International

The case that could have been the most challenging turned out to be the most successful so far. Our appeals to highlight Gulzar Duishenova's mobility challenges helped to impress on Kyrgyzstan's parliament the need to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. They did that on March 14! Talk about the power of the pen – and of the keyboard, of course.

The action for outspoken Ukrainian LGBTI activist Vitalina Koval was also successful. On March 8, she organized an International Women's Day event in her town. It was entirely peaceful, thanks to increased police presence that kept far-right groups at a distance for the first time.



Vitalina Koval opens messages of solidarity from around the world to support her work defending LGBTI rights in Ukraine.
©Amnesty International

To all who contributed even one letter during Write for Rights 2018, thank you. You used your voice to defend the rights of people you will likely never meet. You showed them that we're in this together.

Did you know?



Last year Amnesty International issued 206 new UAs and 226 Updates for a total of 432. How many did writers in Canada respond to? 100%! You are amazing. Threats to freedom of expression was the human rights concern that triggered the most UAs, followed closely by fear for the safety of human rights defenders. The region that produced the largest number of UAs was Asia-Pacific followed closely by the Americas. Good news arrived on 66 of the 206 actions.



Amnesty International takes great care to connect with every individual at risk of human rights violations before we begin campaigning on their behalf. We make sure they understand the impact of going public and the impact of the strategy that our researchers feel would be most effective. We also feed back to them how supporters around the world are engaged on their case. Respect for rights holders is a top priority.

Reasons to keep writing

We know that Urgent Actions can change lives. Here are some examples to inspire you!



Supporters greet Hassan al-Kontar on his arrival in Vancouver Photo via Twitter



Early last year, Syrian refugee **Hassan al-Kontar** was stranded in Malaysia. He was stuck at Kuala Lumpur International Airport for seven months on an expired tourist visa. On October 1, he wandered into a “forbidden area” of the airport. Officials arrested him. When authorities considered deporting him back to Syria, UA writers jumped into action. In Syria, he would have been at grave risk of torture, arbitrary detention or enforced disappearance. Weeks later, Hassan was granted asylum. His new home? Canada! UA 180/18

Hassan posted a video on his Twitter account on November 25, a day before he arrived in Canada. He said: *“The last 10 months, it was very hard and cold. I could not do it without the support and the prayers from all of you... Thank you all. I love you all... Let’s keep the prayer for those who need it the most, in refugee camps and detention camps all over the world. I hope they will be safe and legal as soon as possible, too.”*



Russian lawyer **Mikhail Benyash** is still in danger of receiving a five-year prison term for “using violence against a police officer”. But on December 12, another set of criminal charges was dropped. Mikhail penned this letter to thank everyone at Amnesty International who supported him while he was in custody between September 9 and October 23. *“Thank you, Amnesty! Thank you to all those who this organization unites and those who support it. Thank you to all those people who wrote letters in my support.... Don’t know how and when so many letters*

came to the Russian Bar Association. Most probably I won’t be able to thank personally everyone. [When I found out about the letters] I felt a part of something big and important, something really huge and spreading across the world: from Ontario in Canada to Australia! It is amazing that across the ocean, people like us are working [to defend rights]. They speak other languages but do the same work as us, exhausted Russian lawyers. This is so cool!” UA 167/18



Mikhail Benyash © Private



Once again, UA writers made a positive impact on legislation, this time in **Mexico**. When Amnesty International raised serious concerns about a proposal to introduce a National Guard, we mobilized UA writers to send messages of alarm. Our appeals in December 2018 helped persuade Congress to change most of the bill’s troublesome aspects. If the approved bill is implemented correctly, it could be a first step in the orderly withdrawal of military personnel from security tasks. UA 212/18



Khalida Jarrar is a Palestinian parliamentarian and outspoken critic of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. For decades, Israeli authorities have harassed her for her political and human rights engagement.



Khalida Jarrar via Wikipedia

Beginning in July 2017, they issued a series of six-month administrative detention orders against her. But they finally freed her on February 28.

Khalida Jarrar thanked Amnesty International and all those who took action on her behalf: *“I thank you all very much for standing up for my rights and of those of other Palestinian prisoners and detainees. While I*

Reasons to keep writing

was detained, I had no doubt that Amnesty's supporters would stand again to denounce the arbitrary administrative detention and to demand my immediate release."

She added: *"I'm free now, but I left at least 48 female Palestinian prisoners and detainees behind Israeli prison bars whose lives are extremely difficult and filled with misery. The mobilization should continue until the release of all Palestinian political prisoners and detainees. My final message to all Amnesty supporters is that the fight for human rights never ends and it is on us to continue these efforts."* UA 187/17

 Authorities in Somaliland chased down poet **Abdirahman Ibrahim Adan** the day after he recited a poem at Hargeisa's Mansoor Hotel. The verses highlighted human rights violations that people face including police brutality, arbitrary detention and the degrading treatment of prisoners. It also called on the government to reform its prisons and the criminal justice system. Authorities disapproved of the messages and detained Abdirahman on January 12.

Amnesty International issued UA 17/19 for the prisoner of conscience on February 6 and messages began flowing in to Somaliland. Happily, a regional court ordered Abdirahman's release 19 days later.

 There was good news from Azerbaijan too.



Mehman Huseynov in 2012 © Private

On March 2, authorities finally released prisoner of conscience **Mehman Huseynov**. The prominent blogger and anti-corruption activist had mounted the steps of a police station in March 2017 to denounce the abuse he had suffered inside. He was quickly charged with defaming the entire police station and jailed for two years. In December, authorities made up new criminal charges to keep him in custody. But intense domestic and international pressure persuaded them to drop those charges and free Mehman. UA 168/12

 The last happy story to relate is about Bahraini citizen and soccer player Hakeem **Ali al-Araibi**. In 2017, Australia recognized him as a refugee. All was well until he and his wife travelled to Thailand for their honeymoon on November 27 last year. Little did they know that an Interpol red notice requesting Hakeem's extradition to Bahrain was in effect. Thai authorities arrested him at Bangkok's international airport. Had he been sent back to Bahrain, he would have been at risk of torture and other ill-treatment in detention. UA writers joined the international outcry.

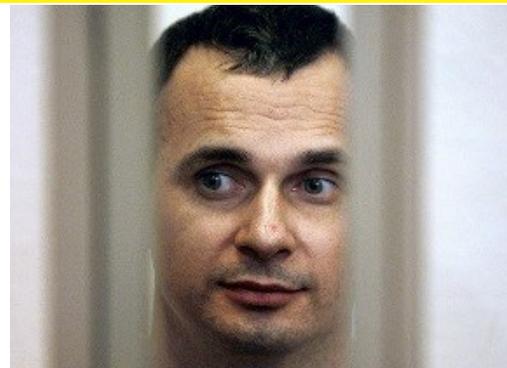


Hakeem al-Araibi shortly before his release
© Lillian Suwanrumpha/AFP/Getty Images

On February 11, Hakeem Ali al-Araibi was released from Bangkok's remand prison after the Bahraini authorities dropped their extradition request. Back in Australia, Hakeem told the press that he was "feeling jubilant." He thanked everyone in the human rights organizations who had acted on his behalf. UA 206/18

“...hear my words...call for resistance...”

UA writers use words. We use them to protect human rights. We use them to prevent human rights violations. We use them to remind others that they have rights and that fundamental rights, which belong to all humans, should command respect. These words are written by Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov. He is nearing his 1800th day of a 20-year prison term following an unfair trial on politically motivated charges. The prisoner of conscience is one of many Ukrainians detained by the Russian Federation. (UA 170/15)



Oleg Sentsov © Getty Images

“Dear ladies and gentlemen! I am not present in this room, but you can hear my words. Words are man’s primary tool. Sometimes it is the only tool, especially when everything else has been taken away. You can heal with words and you can cause harm with them. You can save a life, or take it, with words. You can give an order: ‘Fire!’ There are people whose words have potential to do a lot. There are people holding power, but they use the power of their words differently. You can call for accepting a defeat and surrender, but you can also do otherwise: call for resistance, even when there is no chance for survival...”

Please use *your* words to call for Sentsov’s immediate release.

President Vladimir Putin

Ul. Ilyinka, 23

103132 Moscow

Russian Federation

Fax: 011 7 495 910 2134

Twitter: @KremlinRussia

#FreeSentsov #SaveOlegSentsov

Did you know?



Amnesty International’s headquarters have been in London since the organization began in 1961. But in the last decade, we have made strenuous efforts to position offices around the world. One benefit is that staff in a regional office can respond quickly to human rights emergencies that happen in their time zone. It’s also easier for people in regional offices to collect information, verify it, connect with rights holders, and create the strategy best suited to respond to dangerous situations. Amnesty’s international offices are in Mexico City, Lima, Washington, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Dakar, Hong Kong, Colombo, Bangkok, Beirut, Tunis and Jerusalem.

Thank you

Keep sending in to the UA office any replies you receive to your appeals. They help the research teams at our international offices gauge the impact of our advocacy.

Worth repeating



A personal message can have the strongest impact.

Use short sentences and straightforward grammar to make your letters easy to read and translate when the authorities’ first language is not English.

Draw attention to the UA subject’s name or your most important sentence with **bolding**, underlining or **highlighting**.

Update on staffing in the UA office

Emma Jayne and her partner returned to Ireland in June and just welcomed baby Evan! The UN in New York has scooped up Stephanie Tran. She’ll be the intern this summer in the digital services team of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The office researches and applies new technologies to assist with their efforts. Marilyn McKim continues sending out UAs from the Toronto office of Amnesty Canada four days a week. Daniella Barreto is the power behind Amnesty SOS, online UAs and the UA Twitter account.