

## **SOME LETTER-WRITING SUGGESTIONS (adapted from 'Urgent Action Guide')**

1. Read the recommended action at least twice to familiarize yourself with the specific list of concerns.
2. Be brief - Usually one page is enough to convey your message and keep the attention of the reader.
3. Be factual - 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 your political opinions. Stay within AI's mandate.
4. Be polite - Using offensive language is not effective. Assume the official is not informed but is willing to seek a remedy to the human rights violation.
5. Show respect - You will most likely keep the reader's attention by showing respect for his/her country's constitution and judicial procedures. If there have been positive developments in the country, these can be briefly recognized and welcomed (e.g. releases, an announcement of an official investigation into allegations of torture, etc.).
5. Be unequivocal in the expression of your concern for the victim - You can strongly oppose the torture or other injustice done to an individual and still keep a respectful tone to the message. Remember that in assuming the official's ignorance of the victim's plight you are actually sharing your deep concern for the wrong committed with the official.
6. Write in English - It is most effective to write your messages in English unless they can be written in the language of the country concerned. If you do decide to have your message translated from English, do not allow it to slow the sending of the message.
7. Write clearly - The official must be able to easily read your letter so if you don't type it please make sure your writing is plain and legible.
8. Use shortcuts - Do whatever is necessary to make your letter-writing as easy and quick as possible. In this way you may not put it off, but instead write and send the letters sooner. By using a computer you can make a generic file for each UA concern. Paragraphs on disappearances, torture, death penalty, denial of medical care, etc., may be copied into your working file and amended as needed. You may find it useful to refer to the sample passages in this guide to get your letter started and shake "writer's block".

### **SENDING COPIES OF LETTERS:**

Most request for actions will have a "Copies to:" section. It is not expected that each participant send copies of letters to every addresses listed, but rather that you pick one or more. Sending copies to the media may spark their own investigations as well as beneficial publicity for the prisoners.

The correct procedure to follow in copying appeals is to simply type (or write) "cc:" at the end of your letter and list the names of the people and/or organizations to whom you will be sending copies. You can copy the original letter and send copies to those indicated.

### **MAKING REFERENCE TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

Amnesty International's name may be used unless there are specific instructions to the contrary. If you do refer to Amnesty International it may be useful to include a brief explanation of AI's aims and principles (impartiality and independence from any government, political faction, ideology, economic interest or religious belief); also indicate, where appropriate, that AI opposes torture and the imposition of the death penalty and seeks a fair and speedy trial in all cases and without reservation. Letters in a private or professional capacity may add effectiveness. Titles or professional letter-head may impress government authorities and suggest that the writer is influential.

### **SALUTATIONS AND CLOSINGS**

There is no standard international code for addressing authorities. These formalities vary according to different governmental structures in each country. However, you may safely use:

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

Close your letter in a formal style by using -

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

## **SAMPLE LETTER**

This is only one example. Refer to the *Amnesty International Handbook* or the *Casework Manual* for more sample letters.

Your Excellency,

I have learned of a situation that I am seriously concerned about and would like to bring to your attention. It is my understanding that \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ were abducted in early 1989 from \_\_\_ by uniformed soldiers and taken to an unknown destination. Despite government claims that an investigation had been carried out into the abduction and subsequent "disappearance" of the men, no news of their fate and whereabouts has emerged. They remain "disappeared."

I join Amnesty International, the independent human rights organization, in calling for a full and independent investigation into the "disappearance" of these men. I further call for you to bring to justice those who are responsible for these "disappearances."

Yours respectfully,

## **OUR REPRESENTATIVES**

When you write to your Congressional representative, make sure that you include your postal address so that they can identify you as one of their constituent.

<b>Senator, Barbara Boxer</b>	1700 Montgomery St. #240, San Francisco, CA 94111:415/403-0100, Fax: 415-956-6701, Email: Senator@Boxer.senate.gov
<b>Senator, Dianne Feinstein</b>	525 Market Street, Suite 3670, San Francisco, CA 94105:415/536-6868
<b>Rep. (SM County)</b>	Tom Lantos, 400 S. El Camino Real, #820, San Mateo 94402, 650/342-0300 fax:650/375-8270
<b>Rep. (NSC Co. S. SM Co.)</b>	Anna Eshoo, 698 Emerson St., Palo Alto, CA 94301, 650/323-2984; fax: 650/323-3498, Email: annagram@mail.house.gov
<b>Rep. (N. SC County)</b>	635 N. First Street, Suite B, San Jose, CA 95112, Phone: (408) 271-8700, Fax: (408) 271-8713, Email: zoe@lofgren.house.gov
<b>Rep. (S. SC County)</b>	Tom Campbell, 910 Campisi Way, Suite, Campbell, 95008, 408-371-7337; fax: 408-371-7925, Email: campbell@mail.house.gov