



Facts and figures about Amnesty International and its work for human rights

THE BEGINNING

Amnesty International was launched in 1961 by British lawyer Peter Benenson. His newspaper appeal, "The Forgotten Prisoners", was published worldwide on 28 May 1961 and brought in more than 1,000 offers of support for the idea of an international campaign to protect human rights. Within 12 months the new organization had sent delegations to four countries to make representations on behalf of prisoners, and had taken up 210 cases. Amnesty International members had organized national bodies in seven countries. The first year's expenditure was £6,040. The principles of strict impartiality and independence were established. The emphasis was on the international protection of human rights: Amnesty International members were to act on cases worldwide and not become involved in cases in their own countries.

TODAY

Amnesty International has more than 1,000,000 members, subscribers and regular donors in more than 100 countries and territories and over 4,300 local Amnesty International groups registered with the International Secretariat, in addition to the many thousands of school, university, professional and other groups which do not normally register internationally. There are nationally organized sections in 55 countries, 33 of them in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Middle East and Central Europe. The organization's nerve centre is the International Secretariat in London, with more than 300 permanent staff and 95 volunteers from more than 50 countries. The Secretary General is Pierre Sané. Amnesty International is governed by a nine-member International Executive Committee (IEC). It comprises eight volunteer members, elected every two years by an International Council comprising representatives of the worldwide movement, and an elected member of the International Secretariat.

HELPING THE VICTIMS

Amnesty International has a precise mandate, detailed in an international statute. The main focus of its campaigning is to:

free all prisoners of conscience. These are people detained anywhere for their beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth or other status -- who have not used or advocated violence; ensure fair and prompt

trials for political prisoners; abolish the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners; end extrajudicial executions and "disappearances".

Amnesty International also opposes abuses by opposition groups, including hostage taking, torture and killings of prisoners and other deliberate and arbitrary killings.

Each year, Amnesty International members around the world work on behalf of people threatened with imprisonment, unfair trials, torture or execution. This year's activities are an indication of the level of work done every year on behalf of these people.

Worldwide campaigns

Each year, Amnesty International members from around the world join forces to campaign for the better part of a year on human rights issues in one country or on a particular human rights issue. These major campaigns involve reporting on major human rights issues, lobbying governments and ambassadors globally for change, publicizing human rights abuses, and working closely with local human rights activists and other community organizations to achieve change.

At the start of 1997, Amnesty International launched a worldwide campaign on protection for refugees. The organization highlighted the human rights violations that lead refugees to flee their countries, and the perils or obstacles they faced in trying to seek asylum in another country.

In April 1997, 90 percent of the estimated 15 million refugees in the world lived in the south, many in the world's poorest countries. Africa shelters more than twice as many refugees as Europe, North America and Oceania combined. In addition, an estimated 25 to 30 million people are internally displaced.

At the end of the year, the organization's members launched a yearlong campaign to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- the bedrock of contemporary human rights protection. Throughout the campaign, Amnesty International members are highlighting the violations faced by human rights defenders and are asking both ordinary citizens and public figures to make a personal pledge to uphold human rights. In the first few months of the campaign Amnesty International has collected over four million signatures worldwide.

Working for individuals

Amnesty International members work for individuals or groups of people suffering the range of human rights violations in the organization's mandate -- from imprisonment as prisoners of conscience to "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution.

At the end of 1997, Amnesty International local groups throughout the world were working for change in 1,750 Action Files, the term that the organization uses to describe cases of one or more victims of human rights abuses taken up as long-term work by local Amnesty International groups. 1,800 local groups also participated in one of the 23 Regional Action Networks (RANS), committing themselves to long-term work on a particular region. At the end of 1997 Amnesty International groups with an Action File or an action on one of the RANS, were working on behalf of 3,985 individual victims where Amnesty International knows the names of those who suffered violations of their human rights. In many other instances Amnesty International does not have full information about all the victims' names, but the organization is doing all it can to take up these cases as well.

Wei Jingsheng, a long-term prisoner of conscience in China, was unexpectedly let out of prison in November 1997, the latest chapter in one of Amnesty International's oldest Action Files. He is 47 years old and has spent more than half his adult life behind bars. Wei Jingsheng has told how he first learnt about the support he was receiving and the effect it had:

"A guard who never usually spoke to me struck up a conversation. We chatted casually for a bit and then I asked him very nonchalantly, 'I guess fewer letters have been coming for me lately, right?' The guard then looked at me and exclaimed incredulously, 'Fewer? Old Wei, you get so many letters!' When he finished saying this he realized what he had told me and suddenly stopped speaking and hurried out of the room ... The mental inspiration this gave me greatly surpassed any small improvement in my living conditions."

Rapid Action

Rapid action for prisoners and others who are in immediate danger, such as torture or execution, is mobilized by the Urgent Action network of around 80,000 volunteers in some 85 countries. They are organized through electronic mail, fax, courier, express and airmail to send fast appeals on behalf of those at risk.

In 1997, 583 new actions on 99 countries were issued to the Urgent Action Network. Further appeals on existing actions were requested 351 times, making a total of 934 occasions on which the network was activated. Each

Urgent Action or a follow-up can generate hundreds of appeals to the authorities within days of being issued and several thousand within a few weeks.

The new actions covered a variety of concerns: prisoners whom it was feared might be tortured; those at risk of, or who had been the victim of, extrajudicial execution or "disappearance"; prisoners sentenced to death; and people who had been harassed or had received death threats from agents of the state or armed opposition groups. Actions included many other concerns, for example: arbitrary arrest, prolonged incommunicado detention, detention without charge or trial, death in custody and risk of refoulement.

Throughout the year, Amnesty International received letters from people who have been helped through the Urgent Action Network. One such letter arrived from the mother of Sergey Vysochansky, who had faced imminent execution in Ukraine. She had been sure her son would die as the authorities were rushing through his case. After three rounds of Urgent Action appeals on Sergey Vysochansky's behalf, his sentence was commuted to 20 years in prison. His mother wrote: "Thank you for saving my son's life."

Specialist Networks

Amnesty International has specialist networks -- groups of medical professionals, lawyers, and others -- who use their specialist expertise to campaign for victims of human rights violations.

Medical Network: The Amnesty International network of health professionals includes some 10,000 members, organized in medical groups and networks in around 35 countries. The network took action on 44 medical and urgent actions focussing on 24 countries. A paper on nurses and human rights was issued in mid-1997 and was used to reach out to nurses and nursing organizations. The organization made a submission in June 1997 to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings on the health sector.

International Legal Network: Lawyers, judges, magistrates, academics, law students and others in the international legal network who are familiar with the theory and practice of law have a vital role to play in Amnesty International's work. Lawyers groups contribute to Amnesty International's work in many ways: lawyers' groups act as technical advisers to the movement; as links between the movement and the wider legal profession; and as defenders of victims of human rights abuses, including other human rights defenders and promoters of legal reform.

In 1997 lawyers campaigning within Amnesty International continued to draw on their own professional networks and associations to amplify the human rights message. Amnesty International's lawyers' groups played a key role in all major theme campaigns during 1997, including Amnesty International's continuing campaign for a just, fair and effective international criminal court. They also contributed to numerous other Amnesty International campaigns, including support of the Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and to appeals on individual cases in a number of countries.

Establishing the development of lawyers' groups in under-represented regions has been a high priority and in September 1997 Amnesty International's international legal network was operating within 50 Amnesty International Sections worldwide.

International Network on Company Approaches: At least 30 Sections now have a contact person working on approaches to companies. Amnesty International business groups continued to develop their contacts with companies based in their countries through seminars, round-table discussions and smaller bilateral meetings, at which Amnesty International promoted the responsibility of companies to adhere to human rights principles throughout their practices. (See Human Rights Principles for Companies, AI Index: ACT 70/01/98)

Inter-sectional Women's Network: The Inter-sectional Women's Network (IWN) consists of members and staff from Amnesty International Sections, structures or groupings who are involved in work on women's human rights. The network has representatives in at least 30 Sections.

Youth and Student Groups: Amnesty International now has approximately 4,000 youth or student groups worldwide, with contact people in at least 45 Sections. These young members are often active campaigners, taking up the full range of Amnesty International concerns. At the International Council Meeting in December 1997 the movement agreed to develop and expand the number of youth and student groups.

International Working Groups for Children: There are coordinators of work on children's human rights in at least 30 sections. In the past year, the network was involved in the AI Week and Children's Day Action in October and November 1997 which focused on refugee children.

Amnesty International members for Lesbian and Gay concerns: At least 20 Sections have contact people for

this network, and in some countries these contacts represent a large number of active members campaigning against human rights violations perpetrated against individuals or groups because of their sexuality.

Military, Security and Police (MSP) contacts: At least 20 Sections have contact people working on MSP transfers where such transfers relate to human rights within Amnesty International's mandate. The purpose of the work on MSP transfers is to: 1. Prevent transfers that can reasonably be assumed to contribute to human rights violations; 2. identify international involvement which contributes to human rights abuses, and strengthen pressure for international action to prevent such abuses; 3. apply pressure directly on those military, security and police forces responsible for committing human rights abuses.

A meeting in September 1997 brought together MSP coordinators from 13 countries and experts from other NGOs to discuss strategies for Amnesty International's work on MSP transfers, compare national MSP control systems and discuss joint activities to promote regional/international control mechanisms for MSP transfers using the Nobel Peace Laureates' Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers and the EU Code of Conduct. At the International Council Meeting in December 1997 it was decided that the International Secretariat would create and allocate action proposals, especially Action Files, on MSP transfers to Amnesty International groups, as it does on other mandate issues. These Action Files should tackle specific transfers and/or issues such as the regulation of these transfers worldwide or at a regional level.

Other specialist networks: Amnesty International members have formed a number of other sectoral groups, including those working on human rights violations against trade unionists, religious people and writers and journalists.

Exposing the violations

In 1997, Amnesty International issued 105 major external documents on human rights violations on 62 countries including in Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Burundi, China, Colombia, DRC/Zaire, Egypt, Germany, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Lebanon, Mexico, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Turkey, Ukraine, UK and the USA;

Throughout the year, the organization sent 141 delegations to 62 countries. Delegates carried out a range of work which could include discussing Amnesty

International's concerns with government authorities, observing political trials and carrying out on-the-spot investigations into human rights abuses. Some of the countries visited were Cambodia, Colombia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Kenya, Mexico, Palestinian Authority, Philippines, Russian Federation, Rwanda, South Africa, Syria, Thailand and the USA.

Human rights developments and treaties worldwide

Today an ever-growing human rights constituency is gathering the facts on abuses by governments, taking action to stop them and strengthening the forces necessary to prevent future violations.

More than 1,000 domestic and regional organizations are working to protect basic human rights; An increasing body of international human rights agreements hold governments accountable for their actions; 140 governments are now party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and 137 governments are party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). These covenants require countries ratifying them to recognize or protect a wide range of human rights; 93 states are now party to the first Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Protocol establishes procedures allowing both individuals and states to present complaints of human rights violations; 32 states are now party 2nd Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty; 105 governments are now party to the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. 132 states are party to the Refugee Convention and 129 states are party to the Refugee Protocol

THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE

Every year, Amnesty International produces a global report which details human rights violations against men, women and children in all regions of the world. The 1998 annual report, which detailed abuses during 1997, is indicative of the kinds and levels of abuses against people every year.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS Confirmed or possible extrajudicial executions were carried out in 55 countries.

"DISAPPEARANCES" In 31 countries, people "disappeared" in 1997 or remained "disappeared" from previous years.

TORTURE OR ILL-TREATMENT People were reportedly tortured or ill-treated by security forces, police or other state authorities in 117 countries. In 41 countries, torture or ill-treatment, lack of medical care or cruel, inhuman or degrading prison conditions were confirmed or suspected of leading to deaths in custody.

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE Confirmed or possible prisoners of conscience were held in 87 countries.

UNFAIR TRIALS In 34 countries, political prisoners were behind bars after unfair trials in 1997.

DETENTION WITHOUT CHARGE OR TRIAL People were arbitrarily arrested and detained, or in detention without charge or trial in 53 countries.

DEATH PENALTY Executions were carried out in 40 countries. Prisoners were under sentence of death in at least 70 countries.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY ARMED OPPOSITION GROUPS Armed opposition groups committed serious human rights abuses, such as deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians, torture and hostage taking in 31 countries.

THE MONEY

Amnesty International's funding reflects the movement's independence and its reliance on broad public support. No money is sought or received from governments. The hundreds of thousands of donations that sustain the organization's work come from the pockets of its members and the public and organizations such as trusts, foundations and companies.

The international budget is spent on professional research by Amnesty International staff into human rights violations worldwide, on delegations that observe trials and make representations to governments, and on the movement's international public information, campaigning and development activities.

During the 12 months to 31 March 1998 the International Secretariat had expenditure of £16,312,000 in the following areas:

Research and action - £ 6,275,000 Campaigning - £ 1,306,000 Publications & Translation costs - £ 2,348,000 Human Rights Education & Promotion - £ 1,217,000 International Meetings - £ 288,000 Administration Costs of: Finance, Planning and Audit - £ 1,094,000 Human Resources - £ 947,000 Information Technology - £ 563,000 Facilities costs & general Administration - £ 2,274,000 In addition relief payments to victims of

human rights violations and their families totalled during
this period. - £ 224,000