

AMNESTY NEWS

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September 2009



Welcome to 2009-10

Campaigning for Human Rights is as essential now as it has ever been. A quick look at AI's 2009 Report (State of the World's Human Rights) confirms that there is still much work to be done. The Report highlights five "Global Themes":

Counter Terror with Justice:

In 2008, government practices in the context of counter terrorism – resulting in illegal detention, torture and other ill-treatment and impunity – continued to undermine the human rights framework.

Stop Violence Against Women:

Women and girls suffer disproportionately from violence - both in peace and in war, at the hands of the state, the community and the family. A life free from violence is a basic human right, yet violence is a daily reality for women in societies throughout the world.

Death Penalty:

During 2008, at least 2,390 people were known to have been executed and at least 8,864 people were sentenced to death around the world. As in previous years, a large number of death sentences were handed down in trials that failed to meet internationally recognised standards of fairness.

Human Rights Defenders:

Working with and on behalf of HRDs

Group Meeting

Monday 14th September 2009

“Wither the Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe”

Speaker:

**Wilf MBANGA,
Exiled Editor, “The Zimbabwean”**

**Avenue St Andrew's
United Reformed Church
The Avenue, Southampton
7.30 pm
ALL WELCOME**

has been at the heart of Amnesty International's work since the organization began.

Demand Dignity:

Poverty is not inevitable. The billions of people who live in poverty are shut out, ignored and denied security by the actions and failures of the powerful. This is a human rights crisis.

I am sure that like me you sometimes wonder if the “ordinary” people can make a difference. But the good news is we can. Every year, AI receives messages of thanks and solidarity that inspire AI members to keep working for human rights. Such messages show the positive effects of our work and that, together, we can make a difference.

See you on 14th September.

**AI'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 standards.

**AI'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.

**AI's
CORE VALUES**
remain those of :
international solidarity, effective action for the individual victim, global coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and mutual respect.

Stop disappearances:

In 2008 the UN reported over 1,200 cases of enforced disappearance, which is when a state detains a person without acknowledging their detention and conceals their whereabouts.

Many of these 'disappeared' face torture and death at the hands of their captors and their families are left with no idea what has happened to them.

The new UN Convention on Enforced Disappearance is the first legally enforceable treaty to deal with enforced disappearance and at last offers the chance to prevent and prosecute this terrible crime; It states clearly that there is no impunity and no excuse.

Though the UK has had the opportunity to sign this Convention since February 2007 they have not yet done so.

Background Information:

Enforced disappearance is a particularly cruel human rights violation, a violation of the person who has disappeared and a violation of those who love them and are fi-



nancially dependant on them.

Over the last 25 years the trend of disappearances has changed. Nowadays they tend to occur in nations suffering from internal conflict. There are now 5,500 outstanding cases of enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka, in Algeria the figure is almost 3000. Since 1999, it is estimated that more than 5000 people have gone missing in Chechnya. According to the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) over 30,000 people disappeared in Bosnia during the conflict; an estimated

13,500 remain unaccounted for. In Columbia 955 cases of disappearances remain unresolved.

Since 2001 increasing numbers of people are being detained under counter terror legislation and being held for lengthy periods of time without trial. In Pakistan, in 2006, human rights groups were lobbying on behalf of 563 disappeared persons. Unlike other enforced disappearances, these detainees are often not killed but they are at risk of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and are refused the right to a fair trial.

Call on the UK Government to sign the Convention on Enforced Disappearances.

Write to:

Rt Hon Jack Straw MP
Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ
United Kingdom

Letter writing guide

*Always be polite. This rule is essential and invariable. Your aim is to help, not to relieve your own feelings. Governments don't respond to abusive or condemnatory letters (however well **deserved!**)

*Always write your letters on the basis that the Government concerned is open to reason and discussion.

*It is important where possible to stress a country's reputation for moderation and justice, to show respect for its constitution and judicial procedures, and to demonstrate an understanding of current difficulties. This will give you more scope to point out ways in which the human rights situation can be improved.

*Follow strictly the instructions given by AI.

*Never use political jargon. Don't give the impression that you are writing because you are ideologically or politically opposed to the government in question. It is far more effective to stress that your concern for human rights is not politically based in any way, but in keeping with basic principles of international law.

*If appropriate, explain who you are and what you do. It shows your letter is genuine, and that people from varying walks of life are following events in the country concerned.

