

Letter-writing Tips

Letter writing works! Amnesty International sees improvements in more than a third of our appeal cases.

The most effective letters are short, clearly focused, based on fact, and respectful and personal in tone.

- ▶ **Use a reasoned and respectful tone.** Yes, many human rights abuses are outrageous. But your aim is to be listened to. Assume your reader is open to reason and write a polite, respectfully-worded appeal.
- ▶ **Follow the facts and instructions** given by Amnesty International for each appeal. The “facts” (who, what, when and where) help the government authority you are addressing to identify the case about which you are writing. The “Recommended Actions” say what we want to see happen so that the situation will improve.
- ▶ **Use your personal voice.** Our appeals gain strength when they are seen to be coming from many concerned individuals. Include a personal reference, for example: “As a mother of two children...” “As a student...” It is very important to express one or two of the key points of the “Recommended Actions” through your own feelings and words, as if writing to someone you know.
- ▶ **Base your appeals on international law, not political opinions.** Human rights are based on international laws, agreements and obligations. Effective letters are based on these obligations. Political judgments or jargon are not effective and can sometimes do harm.
- ▶ **Point to positive opportunities for change.** Where possible, point to a country's traditions or ideals that support human rights. Look for opportunities to encourage further support for human rights.
- ▶ **Express your personal interest in the country.** If relevant, include a brief reference to your personal experience with the country and its peoples, such as travel experience, studying the country's history or a newspaper article.
- ▶ **Be brief.** Letters should easily fit on one side of a single page. Often a simple, two- or three-sentence letter can be effective. Remember that you are part of an international network and don't have to cover every point, as someone else will. Your letter can be as short as two or three sentences. Try an “I am a student/mother of two/teacher/friend of your country, etc. writing to you from Montreal/Canada's west coast etc.” sentence. Follow it with a “What worries me ...” sentence, and then a “Please act (e.g. I call on you as Justice Minister to activate effective measures to protect ...)” sentence.
- ▶ **Use questions.** It can be very effective to end your letter with a question or two that ask for action (e.g. Have you initiated an inquiry to find those responsible for carrying out these attacks? Can you write back to me with news about the steps you have taken to address this troubling matter?).

Thank you for taking action!



Amnesty International Canada

A QUICK GUIDE FOR NEW LETTER WRITERS

1. Before you start writing, think what might persuade the authority to take action.
2. Be POLITE and be BRIEF -- write no more than one page.
3. WRITE IN YOUR OWN WORDS. Letters with a personal touch have the best chance of success.
4. Here's an optional guide for first-time letter writers.

- Dear _____ (use the salutation listed in the action)
- Sentence # 1 – describe yourself and where you are writing from:
I am _____ (a teacher/a student/a mother/an engineer/a friend of your country, etc.) writing to you from Toronto, Canada.
- Sentence #2 – describe the issue/person you are writing about:
I am _____ (very upset/worried/deeply troubled, etc.) by news that _____ (provide enough details that the authority will know what or who you are talking about).

Note: Put the names of the people IN CAPITALS, **bold typeface** or underline them so they stand out.

- Sentence #3 – make a specific call for action to address the problem:
I _____ (call on you/urge you/ask you, etc.) _____ (as President, as Minister of Justice, etc.) to _____ (choose one or two of the recommended actions and put them in your own words).
- Sentence #4 – ask for a reply: e.g. *Please send me a reply updating me about the steps you have taken to address this serious matter.*
- Sign your name and below, print your name and your address (if you are comfortable doing so). This gives your letter more credibility. It also enables the person to whom you have written to send you a reply.

MORE TIPS FOR CREATING UNIQUE APPEALS

- If you're using a computer, try using different fonts
- Vary spacing / tabs / width of page
- Highlight the subjects' names with **bold**, underlining, CAPITALS or CENTER THEM ON A SEPARATE LINE
- Mix up the order of the points you choose to raise from how they appeared in Recommended Actions on the case sheet
- Replace "...urge the authorities to..." with "I request that you use your authority to ..." or "I ask you to use your good offices to..."
- Refrain from judgmental words like "democratic" and "civilized"
- Turn a sentence in the Recommended Actions around. Example:
Please make the results public.
The public must have access to the results.
- And here's a challenge: Try not to use more than two consecutive words as they are written in the Recommended Actions.



A glossary of UA lingo

Our letters rely on words for their power. But some of the words used in Urgent Actions can be *obfuscating* (that is: *complicating* or *confusing*)! We hope this short glossary will help clear things up and also give you alternative wording to use in your appeals.

Arbitrary

In daily use, this adjective often means “determined by chance, whim, or impulse, and not by necessity, reason, or principle”. In UAs, it is likely used in the legal sense to mean: “not supported by fair or substantial cause or reason”. In other words, *arbitrary* means *unlawful* or *illegal*.

Allegedly

You’ll see this word a lot in UAs. *Allegedly* refers to something that is “accused but not proven” and often means “of questionable truth or genuineness”. It is important to assess who is *alleging* and whether they have a reputation for truthfulness! In a recent UA about Colombia, the army *allegedly* found explosives and detained leaders of a Peace Community, labelling them guerrilla collaborators. Yet they were later released without charge, casting doubt on the truth of the *so-called* evidence against them. Other synonyms you can use include: *supposed*, *dubious*, *questionable* or *reported*.

Commute or Commutation

For city-dwellers, commute is daily travel between home and work, often in a traffic jam! UAs use the legal meaning. To *commute a punishment* is to change it to one that is less severe. For example, the Governor “provided a *commutation* from a death sentence to life imprisonment.” Putting that into your own words in a letter, you might ask an authority to *convert* the death sentence to a humane penalty, or to *exchange* or *substitute* it for a punishment that respects the right to life.

Deterrent

The dictionary tells us this means “serving to *deter*” or in other words, to “discourage” or “prevent”. In death penalty cases, you may be asked to make the point that “there is no proof the death penalty *deters* crime more effectively than other penalties.” When making this argument in your letters, be careful to finish the thought. To say: “the death penalty has never been proven to be a deterrent” is obviously not true. What you want to say is that “the death penalty has never been proven to *deter crime* better than other, more humane, punishments.”

Extrajudicial

Definitions include “not forming a valid part of regular legal proceedings”, “in contravention of due process of law” and “without legal authority”. In plain speak, *extrajudicial* means *unlawful*.

Habeas corpus

You’ll see this Latin term most often when a lawyer is not permitted to see a disappeared or *incommunicado* client. *Habeas corpus* is a legal order stating that a person must appear before, and be judged by, a court of law or a judge before he or she can *lawfully* be made to stay in prison.

Immunity

You’ve likely seen *immunity* used in the context of health to refer to protection against disease. In UAs, *immunity* usually means *exemption from penalty*, especially for those who have committed violations of human rights, as in “they insisted that heads

of state must not be immune (i.e. must not be exempted or protected) from prosecution.”

Impunity

Impunity is linked to *immunity*. The dictionary definition is “exemption from unpleasant consequences” or “freedom from punishment”. In UAs, *impunity* refers to being protected from being held accountable, or judged and punished for abuses. In your letters, insist that “perpetrators do not enjoy *impunity* but are brought to justice, in accordance with your laws.”

Incommunicado

This term, originally from Spanish, literally means without communication. Prisoners who are *incommunicado* are not permitted to speak to or see anyone from outside their prison or place of detention. This puts detainees at high risk of physical abuse because prison authorities feel least responsible for what happens to their charges while they are hidden from view. Prisoners held *incommunicado* are *kept beyond the reach of outside observers, separated from legal counsel and close relatives, or held in isolation*.

Moratorium

In the context of the death penalty, this word means the stopping of executions for a set amount of time. If a recommended action asks you to call for a moratorium, you could say: “suspend the use of the death penalty for a set period” or “initiate a law to stop executions for a time”.

Ratification

A country may sign a treaty or a convention to signal its agreement in principle with it. However, it is not until it is formally approved by the government that it is then ratified and takes effect.

Recognizably criminal offence

You see this so often in Recommended Actions because to say the same thing in a few words is very difficult. We do not want justice systems making up charges as a convenient way to hold someone in custody. The charges should be credible and present in the criminal code of the country. When writing about this in your appeals, you could respectfully insist that the offence is legitimate and that the individual is prosecuted in a court of law with full legal rights. If it is not legitimate, then there is no legal basis for detaining the individual and that person must be set at liberty.

Refoulement

When refugees or asylum-seekers are safe in one country, we do not want them to be subjected to *refoulement*. That means we do not want them to be sent back or returned to the country where they would be *at risk, in danger or their lives would be in peril*. The most basic principle of refugee protection is *non-refoulement*.

HERE ARE SOME DIFFERENT WAYS TO BEGIN YOUR MESSAGE

I extend respectful greetings to you from [*insert place*], where I am [*insert occupation or other identifying information*].

As a supporter of human rights, my interest in getting in touch with you pertains to some troubling information that was made available to me by Amnesty International regarding the case of

I have the honour of writing to you from [*insert your home town*], CANADA. While there are many miles between our two countries, there is also much that links us together, including growing trade and investment. I trust that respect for human rights and the rule of law are other essential values that we share. For this reason, I am writing to ask for your intervention on behalf of [*insert name*].

As a Canadian medical professional, teacher, etc. [*insert your own personal descriptor*], I am addressing you today in dismay about ...

I appeal to your wisdom and quick intervention in the hope that you will

Greetings from Canada's east coast, where disturbing news has reached me about ...

I write to you as a Canadian who has travelled to [*insert country*], and come to admire your country's impressive history. For this reason, I want to ask for your help with a disturbing situation that I believe will be of mutual concern.

My name is [*insert name*] and I write to you from Canada as a friend of your great country.

We send this appeal to you from Canada's west coast to share with you our concern for the safety of [*insert name*].

I write to you in your capacity as [*insert the position of the person you are writing to; e.g. Attorney General of Colombia*] in the hope that you will use the authority of your position to ...

HERE ARE SOME DIFFERENT WAYS TO FINISH YOUR MESSAGE

I call on you to be an agent for human rights protection and not be complicit in human rights abuses.

May I encourage you to act swiftly? Your commitment to human rights will be judged by how you intervene on behalf of *[insert name]*.

Without your government's attention and vigilance, human rights violations of this nature can be expected to continue. I would therefore signal the importance of your leadership on these issues.

Please be assured of our support as you undertake to fulfill these important responsibilities.

I give you every encouragement to resist pressures to erode fundamental rights and freedoms.

Please accept the expression of my high esteem for the challenges you have in performing the responsibilities of your office.

Can you write back to me with news about the steps you have taken to address this troubling matter?

Can I have confidence that you and your government will take immediate action on this? Thank you.

I hope for your wisdom and understanding and will be looking forward to receiving good news about Thank you for your immediate action in this matter.

I trust that you will act promptly. Very respectfully yours,

With sincere appreciation for any measures you take to curb human rights violations.

Can you keep me informed regarding your progress with this very urgent matter?

Thank you in advance for granting this case its due consideration.

May I hear back from you as soon as possible?

Respectfully awaiting information from you about this troubling case,

SAMPLE WORDING FOR CASES INVOLVING FORCED DISAPPEARANCE

1. I am writing to you from [*insert town*], CANADA because I am very worried by the lack of information about [*insert name of disappeared person in CAPITALS or **bold** or underlined*]. I believe he was arrested by [*insert information from case sheet*] but no one is saying where he is.

I urge that you:

- < reveal his location,
- < give him immediate and unrestricted access to his relatives, lawyers and any medical help he may require, and
- < ensure that he will be spared from torture or any other forms of ill treatment.

2. Re: the disappearance of [*insert name*]

I am distressed by reports that [*insert name*] was taken away by [*insert who*] on [*insert date*] and has not been heard from since.

- Can you find out why [*insert name*] was taken away and where he is?
- Can you tell me who was responsible for disappearing this man and what steps you intend to take to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice?

3. In order to comply with your country's commitments under Article 9 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), I respectfully urge you to find [*insert name*] and release him/her unless he/she is charged with a criminal offence as laid out in [*insert name of country*] Criminal Code. If charges are laid, I ask you to ensure a trial happens as soon as possible in accordance with international standards of fairness.

International Law

You Could Refer to in your Letter

| Relevant articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights | How this article pertains to “disappearances” | Relevant articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights |
|--|--|---|
| Article 3: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” | A “disappeared” person’s right to liberty has been illegally withdrawn and his or her security is now uncertain. | Article 6(1): “Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” |
| Article 5: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” | “Disappearances” are cruel and inhuman treatment and people who have been “disappeared” are often tortured. | Article 7: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” |
| Article 8: “Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him or her by the constitution or by law.” | A “disappeared” person has been wronged by his or her unlawful capture. The right to a remedy is also violated since the victim has no possibility of recourse to compensation until he or she reappears safely. | Article 2(3): “Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes: (a) To ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity...” |
| Article 9: “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.” | A “disappearance” is arbitrary and unlawful as no official legal proceedings were followed | Article 9(1): “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law. 9(2): “Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him.” |
| 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 of any criminal charge against him.” | There is no hearing in the case of a “disappearance”. | Article 9(3): “Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release. ... 9(4): Anyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | | proceedings before a court, in order that that court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of his detention and order his release if the detention is not lawful.” |
| Article 18: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion...” | “Disappearance” is used against those who dissent. | Article 18(1): “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.” |
| Article 19: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” | “Disappearance” is used against those who attempt to share opinions, ideas, or information that are critical of the government and its policies. Moreover, being “disappeared” violates a person’s right to share his or her views with others. | Article 19(1): “Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.” |
| Article 20(1): “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association...” | Victims may be “disappeared” to prevent them from organizing or participating in a gathering. | Article 22: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others...” |
| Article 28: “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.” | The government may claim that those who orchestrated the “disappearance” were not agents of the state. However, one can still ask: “Is the government doing enough to protect its citizens from lawlessness?” | |

SAMPLE WORDING FOR CASES INVOLVING THE DEATH PENALTY

1. Tempting as it is to answer a horrendous crime with execution, that avenue does not respect the fundamental human rights to which every one of us is entitled, regardless of what we have done.

In the spirit of upholding the high standards of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we implore you to stop all plans to execute [*insert name*] and instead to commute the death sentence to a humane and just alternative.

2. I appeal to your wisdom and quick intervention in the hope that you will avert the execution of [*insert name*]. I understand that he was given the sentence of death for committing a terrible murder. I sympathize fully with the noble objective of crime deterrence and I accept the need to punish violent crime. However, the death penalty violates the most fundamental of human rights. It denies the right to life, and it assaults the mental and physical integrity of the prisoner. It cannot be carried out humanely. It has not been proved to deter crime any better than humane alternatives that respect life. May I trust in your leadership and in your willingness to respect human rights, and have full confidence that you will prevent [*insert name*]'s execution?

3. Your Excellency, when individuals commit horrible crimes, some of their rights must be denied for a time. The right to liberty is one example. Other rights, however, can never be denied in any circumstance. The right to life and the right to security of person are two examples.

I write today about the case of [*insert name*]. I am shocked at his cruel act of murder. But as a defender of human rights, I cannot tolerate the denial of his inalienable rights as laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I rejoice that your country has committed itself to respecting the rights in the UDHR and trust now that you will turn that commitment into reality with quick action to grant clemency to [*insert name*] and thus protect his rights to physical integrity and to life.

4. I am gravely concerned about [*insert name*], who was sentenced to death for [*insert details*]. The death penalty is an inhumane punishment and a measure that has never been shown to suppress serious criminality in the population. Many more humane punishments are available for persons who have committed even more serious crimes. I hope for your wisdom and understanding and look forward to receiving your reassurance that this death sentence has been [*commuted, replaced, lifted, etc.*].

5. We beg you to join the growing number of countries that consider that when the State kills, it only adds to the cycle of violence in the world. May we hear that you will exercise your authority and humanity to commute the above death sentence and lead your country towards a more humane form of punishment for the most serious crimes?

6. I urge you to issue a temporary cessation of executions, while your government examines what acceptable punishments can replace them. Clearly, this measure would conform to developments that are slowly eliminating the death penalty from justice systems around the world.

7. While we sympathize with the noble objective of crime deterrence, we know from numerous studies that the death penalty has nothing positive to contribute to this objective. We ask you to substitute the sentences of death with any penalty that respects their rights to freedom from cruel treatment and physical assault.

8. I am writing to express my concern about the severity of the sentences recently imposed on [insert names] for the crime of adultery. Stoning to death for the one and 100 lashes and one year in prison for the other seems to be quite out of keeping with international standards of punishment for such crimes.

Although I completely understand and respect the fact that every country has its different systems of law and justice, when it comes to the matter of punishment most nations have moved away from capital sentences and the infliction of pain as a remedy. Such punishments are increasingly seen as a severe infringement on the human rights of the victims and an indignity to the integrity of the national justice system.

I hope that the sentences can be commuted on appeal and I would humbly ask for your active assistance in ensuring that this is accomplished.

9. As of July 2006, 125 countries across the world have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice, with the Philippines the latest Asian country to do so in June. There have also been positive developments in neighbouring South Korea, where a bill to abolish the death penalty is currently being considered by parliament.

International Law You Could Refer to in Your Letter

I. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

| Article of the UDHR | Protection | Link with "Death Penalty" |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Article 3 | "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." | The death penalty is an obvious and unnecessary denial of the right to life. Alternate measures (for example, incarceration) are possible and equally protective of the public interest and safety. |
| Article 7 | "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination." | The death penalty is often applied in a discriminatory manner. |

II. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

| Part of the ICCPR | Protection | Link with "Death Penalty" |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Article 6 (1) | <p>"1. Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of life.</p> <p>2. In countries which have not abolished the death penalty, sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the crime and not contrary to the provisions of the present Covenant and to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This penalty can only be carried out pursuant to a final judgement rendered by a competent court.</p> <p>3. When deprivation of life constitutes the</p> | <p>All peoples have the right to life. All countries should be moving toward abolishment of the death penalty. This article can be particularly helpful if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the state had, at one point, abolished the death penalty and has now returned to it (Article 6(2)). -there is an underlying pattern or genocidal targeting which motivates this particular death |

| | | |
|------------|---|--|
| | <p>crime of genocide, it is understood that nothing in this article shall authorize any State Party to the present Covenant to derogate in any way from any obligation assumed under the provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.</p> <p>4. Anyone sentenced to death shall have the right to seek pardon or commutation of the sentence. Amnesty, pardon or commutation of the sentence of death may be granted in all cases.</p> <p>5. Sentence of death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age and shall not be carried out on pregnant women.</p> <p>6. Nothing in this article shall be invoked to delay or to prevent the abolition of capital punishment by any State Party to the present Covenant.”</p> | <p>sentence (Article 6(3)).</p> <p>-there has not been due process in the assignment of the death penalty (Article 6(4))</p> <p>-the death penalty was assigned in a case where the crime was committed by a child (like Nov) (Article 6(5))</p> <p>No State Parties should use this article to claim that it justifies the use of the death penalty (Article 6(6)).</p> |
| Article 26 | <p>“All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.”</p> | <p>The death penalty is often applied in a discriminatory manner.</p> |

Countries which have both Signed* and Ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:** Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Germany, Grenada, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Korea (Democratic People's Republic of), Korea , Republic of), Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Norway, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, San Marino, Senegal, Slovakia, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Ukraine, The United Kingdom of Great Britian and Northern Ireland (some reservations), Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe

***Sign:** a country signs a treaty or covenant when it agrees with it in principle

****Ratify:** a country ratifies a treaty or covenant when it is ready to apply it in and to domestic law

SAMPLE WORDING FOR CASES INVOLVING DEATH THREATS

1. In dispatching this urgent appeal to you, I urge you to use your authority as [*insert position of the person to whom you are writing; for example: Minister of the Interior*] to protect the human rights of [*insert name of person who has received threats in CAPITALS and/or BOLD FACE OR UNDERLINED*]

I am so worried about the surfacing of reports which indicate that his life and those of his companions [*insert names of others who may also be named as being in danger*] are at risk as I write. Is it true that [*add a brief description of what happened and who is suspected as being responsible, if this is available, or why the threats may have been delivered*]?

[*insert name of person(s)*]'s work for [*labour rights/human rights/Indigenous rights/protection of the environment, etc*] is enormously important. For this reason, I feel it is absolutely mandatory for you to place a high priority on protecting *him/her/them*. Efforts to engage *him/her/them* on the most appropriate means to arrange that protection would also be beneficial.

I insist in the strongest terms that the perpetrators of this violent assault be fully prosecuted. It is important that a climate of accountability is created and sustained in a just legal framework.

2. I am sending this important appeal to you in the hope that you will use your authority to promptly respond to an urgent situation.

Much to my dismay, I have received news through Amnesty International that human rights workers [*insert names*] who work with [*insert organization*] were subjected to threatening telephone calls on [*insert date*]. I encourage you to begin an exhaustive inquiry by a competent neutral party as soon as possible to determine the source of the calls and to lay charges against those responsible for unlawful actions. May I also call on you to contact the human rights activists to determine together how best to protect them from harm.

3. This situation is extremely distressing and cannot be allowed to continue. Those who made these threats, as well as those who gave the orders, must be found and brought to justice. Will you keep me informed about the progress of your investigation and its findings? Can you also tell me what protection measures you will initiate to ensure the safety of

4. What measures have you taken to protect [*insert name*]? What more can you do? Please consult her to determine what protective measures she wishes for her family and her colleagues. What steps are you taking to find and prosecute those responsible for these threats? Urgent action on your part is vital and will help to restore confidence in [*insert country*] as a country that both respects the rule of law and abhors violations of the fundamental rights of its citizens.

5. Please find the source of the threats and bring the authors to justice. A society which values the human rights of its citizens cannot stand by silently in such circumstances. Your vocal and authoritative public pronouncements against such unlawful and harmful threats will do much to satisfy both Colombians and the international community of your intentions to uphold respect for human rights.

6. What is being done to ensure the safety of human rights defender [*insert name*]?

7. As a Canadian who respects and admires the history of your great country, I respectfully ask for your intervention on behalf of [**insert names in BOLD CAPITALS**] Reports are being broadcast that they received a phone call on June 6, saying their lives were in danger. Later, a man in a police uniform aimed a submachine gun at them. This is very disturbing news. It is all the more disturbing since it appears these threats of violence are linked to their opposition to the construction of a tourist development in [*insert place*].

Many Canadians travel to this part of [*insert country*] each year. However, reports that tourist developments are being built at the expense of human rights are likely to cause tourists here to question whether this is a place we want to visit.

Can I ask you to make sure that protective measures are implemented to protect [*insert names in BOLD CAPITALS again*]? Can I also ask you to ensure that environmental organizations and their members are able to enjoy their human right to peacefully express their views? Please inform me about the steps you take so I can share this information with many others here in Canada who are very concerned about this situation.

8. As someone deeply interested in and friendly towards [*insert country*], I am very upset by reports I am seeing of the apparent danger to [*insert name of person*]. He works for the human rights organisation [*insert name*] in [*insert place*]. He received this most recent threat on [*insert date*]. It would appear to be connected with a case he has been working on in [*insert details*].

The threat was made to him by telephone, allegedly by a judge in that municipality. I urge you to provide him with such protection as he himself considers necessary.

SAMPLE WORDING FOR CASES INVOLVING INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION

1. I was alarmed to read news today that [*insert names*] were arrested by [*insert who detained them*] but no one will say where they have been taken. I am very worried about their safety when no one is accountable for what happens to them. I therefore urge you to reveal their location straight away and allow a lawyer of their choosing to counsel them. If these men will not be charged very soon according to the laws of [*insert country*], please instruct prison officials to set them free.
2. Amnesty International has alerted me to the disappearance in detention of [*insert name*]. She was apparently arrested by [*insert who*] near [*insert place*] and her family has not heard from her since. It is vital to her safety and the protection of her legal rights that her location is made public. Please find [*insert name*] immediately and ensure that she has access to a lawyer of her choice. Allow close family members to see her, and provide medical attention for any physical needs she may have.
3. The reason I am writing to you is because I am concerned for the safety of [*insert name*]. He was arrested on [*insert date*] in [*insert where*] by [*insert who*]. But no one knows where he was taken. I want you to make sure he is being treated well and if he has not committed a crime, please let him go. Could you please write back to me and tell me where he is and how he is doing.
4. I am writing this letter as a citizen of Canada to ask you to please intervene and ensure the safety of [*insert names*]. I understand they have been detained without communication with the outside world, and have been denied contact with any lawyer or family member. They may be guilty of a crime against your government. However, I believe that the rule of law should permit them full access to your legal system, including the right to be released unless they are charged with a criminal offence.
5. Experience shows that when prisoners are held incommunicado, they are at high risk of torture. I would appreciate assurances that [*insert names*] are not being hurt and can receive visits from lawyers and family members, as well as any medical help they may need. This is essential because restrictions on visitors can foster contempt for the prisoner=s right to wellbeing.
6. The circumstances of his/her imprisonment leave him/her particularly vulnerable to treatment that is injurious, demeaning and dehumanizing.
7. We feel a deep sense of worry about the vulnerable situation of [*insert names*]. We understand they were detained on [*insert date*]. To our knowledge, their whereabouts are unknown and there are no criminal charges against them. Are they being held unlawfully - only as a result of their activities in the sphere of human rights?

8. It is with sorrow that we write to you today after seeing reports that [*insert names*] were detained on [*date*] by masked members of the security forces. Neither has been seen or heard from since. It is imperative to establish what has happened to [*insert names*]. Will you locate them immediately, tell us where they were taken, and give this information to their families?

9. It is of the utmost importance that all individuals in detention are allowed regular opportunities to receive visits from their closest relatives and their lawyers. They must, as well, have adequate and ongoing attention from medical professionals if their state of health requires it.

International Law You Could Refer to in your Letter

| Instrument | Section | Excerpt | Relation to Incommunicado Detention |
|--|---------------|---|---|
| United Nations Declaration on Human Rights | Article 5 | “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” | This type of detention could be considered cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. |
| International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights | Article 7 | “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.” | |
| | Article 10(1) | “All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.” | There is an absence of dignity in this type of treatment. |
| UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners | Section 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. “ | This UN instrument has a direct link to <i>all</i> incommunicado cases. |

| | | | |
|--|---------------|--|--|
| | Section 38 | <p>“(1) Prisoners who are foreign nationals shall be allowed reasonable facilities to communicate with the diplomatic and consular representatives of the State to which they belong.</p> <p>(2) Prisoners who are nationals of States without diplomatic or consular representation in the country and refugees or stateless persons shall be allowed similar facilities to communicate with the diplomatic representative of the State which takes charge of their interests or any national or international authority whose task it is to protect such persons.”</p> | |
| | Section 39 | <p>“Prisoners shall be kept informed regularly of the more important items of news by the reading of newspapers, periodicals or special institutional publications, by hearing wireless transmissions, by lectures or by any similar means as authorized or controlled by the administration.”</p> | |

Countries which have both Signed* and Ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political**

Rights: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Germany, Grenada, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Korea (Democratic People's Republic of), Korea , Republic of), Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Norway, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, San Marino, Senegal, Slovakia, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Ukraine, The United Kingdom of Great Britian and Northern Ireland (some reservations), Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe

***Sign:** a country signs a treaty or covenant when it agrees with it in principle

****Ratify:** a country ratifies a treaty or covenant when it is ready to apply it in and to domestic law

SAMPLE WORDING FOR CASES ABOUT LEGAL CONCERNS

1. Please ascertain that the charges against him are not contrived and comply fully with the laws of your country.

2. We urge you to apply penal sanctions as provided by law and to disallow all punishments that do not conform to international standards. NOTE: Don't use this with the death penalty because some governments have execution in their law books.

3. May I outline measures to ensure that arrest and imprisonment are lawful:
 - Laws regarding arrest must clearly specify the grounds for detention and comply fully with both national and international standards.
 - Arresting officers must identify themselves to the person under arrest and make clear the reasons for the arrest.
 - Proper procedures must be followed, as described in Principle 12 of the body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons under any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1988. They include recording the reason for and time of the arrest, and the identity of the law enforcement officials concerned.
 - If arrests do not comply with the steps listed above, the relevant law enforcement official(s) must be disciplined and, if appropriate, prosecuted for violating the law.

4. It is essential that a prisoner understands the reasons for his/her arrest and has an effective opportunity to defend him/her self. Through instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, international law has developed a strong legal framework. The safeguards include:
 - the right to be represented by a lawyer of the prisoner's choice, even during interrogations
 - the right to have prompt, regular and confidential access to his/her lawyer
 - the right to be brought before a judge within a few days. The judicial officer will determine sufficient legal reasons exist to keep the individual in detention, and whether detention before trial is necessary
 - the right to have the charges examined in a court of law, and the trial to take place within a reasonable time
 - the right to have a trial in front of a tribunal that is properly established and whose independence and impartiality is recognized and protected. The public must be able to attend the proceedings

- the right to be presumed innocent
- the right to be tried in person
- the right to call witnesses and to examine them during the trial.

5. [insert name] has been deprived of liberty; are the grounds for that imprisonment established by law? Would you inform me, please, in which text they can be found?

6. Please initiate a transparent, authoritative and accountable process which is open to public scrutiny.

7. Please intervene on X 's behalf to ascertain that he is **either**

- given a fair trial with full respect for his legal rights **or**
- released in the absence of evidence of wrongdoing.

8. If they are dangerous, they should be charged in an open court where they would have a right to defend themselves. Otherwise they should be set free and allowed to go home.

9. We call for steps to ensure that he is tried before an independent and impartial tribunal under conditions which provide the strictest compliance with fair trial standards.

10. While we respect the legitimate right of your government to take the necessary measures as defined by your legal system, we remind you to do so with full guarantees that raid and detention procedures are based on sufficient evidence, and respect due process.

SAMPLE WORDING FOR CASES INVOLVING REFOULEMENT (OR FORCIBLE RETURN)

1. I am deeply alarmed by reports from Amnesty International that authorities in your country are ready to return [insert who is at risk] to [insert the country]. They could be in grave danger if you proceed with those plans.

The fundamental principle of *non-refoulement* is a basic component of customary international law. For this reason and in the name of common humanity I ask you to cancel the deportation order.

2. It is important to recognize that if [insert name] are sent back to [insert country], this action would violate the protocols established under non-refoulement. Essentially, this places an obligation on all states to protect people from being forced into a situation where they would risk the most severe treatment or put their lives in peril.

3. The only way to force [insert names] across your border and back to their homeland is to violate their right to safety from torture, as laid out in the Convention against Torture.

I urge you, very simply, not to commit that violation.

I urge you, instead, to extend your country's generous hospitality to people who desperately need your country's protection. I would be happy to hear from you directly about the efforts you are taking to protect them from harm.

4. It is with great dismay that I have heard that your government plans to deport [insert who].

My communication to you today respectfully urges you to reconsider this measure. I would venture to remind you of your country's responsibilities under international law to not return anyone to a country where they would risk facing torture or other serious ill-treatment. May I have confidence that you will uphold this commitment.

COPIES COPIES COPIES COPIES: SOME "HOW TO" TIPS

"I was wondering about the 'Copies to' section?" asked UA Network member Rebekah Shoop of Nanaimo. 'Do I simply print off a copy of one of the letters and enclose an explanatory message?'

- ❖ The easiest thing to do is to make an exact copy and pop it into an envelope.
- ❖ It's a good idea, if you're going to do that, to mention on the original that a copy is going to someone. For example, after your signature, you type flush left: "COPY: Ambassador for Yemen, Ottawa, Canada" or "CC: Ambassador Jimenez" (CC stands for carbon copy. Carbon paper is seldom used now but the letters seem to have "stuck".)
- ❖ Better still, print out an exact copy of your original and write by hand across the top "Copy for Ambassador Jimenez". You could also add something like:
 - "Ambassador, I trust you will follow up on the concerns I have outlined below and keep me apprised of progress in this case."
 - "May I ask that you pursue my concerns directly with your government?"
 - "I respectfully urge you to add your voice to the concerns expressed in my letter."

This takes more time but when effort and a personal touch is visible to the authorities receiving the mail, they take it more seriously and your extra minute translates into increased effectiveness.

Why are copies important?

Local and regional officials may be compelled to do something in response to your appeal if they know a copy is going to the President or Minister of Foreign Affairs. We know this to be likely in Russia, for example.

The same principle applies on your message to the President that is copied to a newspaper. In one Latin American country, the authorities ignored the appeals arriving from Amnesty International members all around the world until the copies that members had sent to the media were published. Copies to diplomatic representatives (Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Charge d' Affaires, etc.) serve to alert them about what people in Canada think about their countries. This opinion is often reported back to the home government and functions as an extra form of pressure.

The copies of appeals you send to human rights groups boost their morale immeasurably, especially if you add a hand written message like 'You are not alone'. Imagine opening the human rights office every day in the face of surveillance, tapped phone lines, death threats against your daughter or legal proceedings to discredit your work. To then receive copies of letters written on your behalf to the government by strangers in Peru, Italy, India and Canada is extraordinarily important.