

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 

**CIHAM ALI
ERITREA**

**TAKEN AT 15 AND
NEVER SEEN AGAIN**



WRITE FOR RIGHTS 20 YEARS OF WRITING LETTERS THAT CHANGE LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

Twenty years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. Over the following years, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to 4.5 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2020, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. Together, these individuals have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, freeing them from torture, harassment or unjust imprisonment.

This year's campaign channels this support towards people targeted for their peaceful activism, views or personal characteristics. This includes LGBTI activists, environmental defenders and peaceful protesters. These individuals have variously been beaten, jailed, shot at, harassed and intimidated. Through Write for Rights, they will receive individual messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. They and their families know that their situations are being brought to public attention and they are not forgotten.

Alongside the letter writing actions, Amnesty also speaks to those who have the power to change these people's situations, such as politicians in their



Amnesty International Taiwan letter writing event, December 2020.

countries. Write for Rights also gives visibility to these injustices through public events, and garners international attention on social media.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals, and other people and groups in a similar situation, by the country's authorities. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

■ Read about the people we're fighting for: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

■ Contact the Amnesty team in your country: www.amnesty.org/countries

■ Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R21

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity and any limitations. When participants want to take action on a case, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyze and question issues relating to the cases. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competences and skills

HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY to form their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.

■ If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/

■ Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn>

YOUR WORDS

ARE POWERFUL



ACTIVIST FREED IN SAUDI ARABIA

Nassima al-Sada, a campaigner for women's freedom, was arrested in 2018 for peacefully defending human rights. While in jail, guards beat her and banned everyone – even her lawyer – from visiting her. But thanks to supporters worldwide who wrote a massive 777,611 letters, tweets and more, Nassima walked free in June 2021, and is back with her family and friends.

FATHER OF THREE REUNITED WITH FAMILY

In April 2018, NGO worker and human rights defender Germain Rukuki was found guilty of a slew of sham charges and sentenced to 32 years in prison in Burundi. He was jailed before getting a chance to hold his youngest child, born just weeks after he was arrested. His family fled the country for fear of reprisals. On 30 June 2021, Germain was finally freed and reunited with his family, thanks in part to the more than 436,000 actions calling for his release.



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ONE STEP CLOSER TO JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Friends Popi Qwabe and Bongeka Phungula were murdered while heading for a night out in May 2017. Until recently, their families had been distressed by irregularities and delays in the police investigation. However, in March 2021, police revived the case after receiving 341,106 petition signatures from the families' supporters worldwide. The police have completed their investigation and handed over the case to the country's National Prosecuting Authority. "I feel optimistic," said Popi's sister Thembelihle. "I feel like finally, something is about to change."



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ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



Amnesty International Benin letter writing event, December 2020.



THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed that they are bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that they will abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up on the basis of its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



CIVIL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES

Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.

Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights

Article 2 Non-discrimination

Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person

Article 4 Freedom from slavery

Article 5 Freedom from torture



LEGAL RIGHTS

Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.

Article 6 All are protected by the law

Article 7 All are equal before the law

Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated

Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile

Article 10 Right to a fair trial

Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty

Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection



SOCIAL RIGHTS

Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.

Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life

Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders

Article 16 Right to marry and start a family

Article 24 Right to rest and leisure

Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education



ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.

Article 15 Right to a nationality

Article 17 Right to own property and possessions

Article 22 Right to social security

Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union

Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being



POLITICAL RIGHTS

Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion

Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)

Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information

Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way

Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country



CULTURAL RIGHTS, SOLIDARITY RIGHTS

Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life

Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized

Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others

Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!



ACTIVITY

ENFORCED
DISAPPEARANCE

KEY CONCEPTS

- Enforced disappearance
- Child prisoner

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants learn about human rights and enforced disappearance through the story of Ciham, a 15-year-old girl from Eritrea. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write a letter of support behalf of Ciham and show solidarity with her.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the concept of enforced disappearance;
- **identify** human rights violations caused by enforced disappearance;
- **feel** empathy with those whose rights have been violated;
- **know** that children have specific rights;
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign;
- **write** letters in support of Ciham Ali and showing solidarity with her.

AGE: 13+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes.

MATERIALS

- **UDHR Article Cards** and **Daily Action Cards** (pages 12-13)
- **Background Information: Enforced Disappearance** (page 10)
- **Ciham Ali's story** (page 14)
- **Handout: Children in the Justice System** (page 11)
- **Simplified UDHR** (page 5)

PREPARATION

- Print and cut up the **UDHR Article Cards** and **Daily Action Cards** (pages 12-13)
- Print the **Handout: Children in the Justice System** (page 11)
- Print **Ciham Ali's story** (page 14)
- Print **Simplified UDHR** (page 5)

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

This story talks about the difficult situations faced by a child in Eritrea. It may affect participants in different ways. Check in with participants to see how they are feeling.

FOLLOW COVID-19 MEASURES

Be sure to comply with public health advice in your area during the Covid-19 pandemic. Conduct your activity in a way that ensures the safety of all participants and respects any necessary physical distancing measures.

If you are doing the activity online:

- **Choose** a platform that provides participation and interaction while being secure
- **Adapt** the activity to allow for relevant reflections and debriefing (in small groups)
- **Provide** technical support for participants to allow for good participation.

1. MATCH RIGHTS WITH DAILY ACTIONS

Open the discussion by asking participants whether they have heard about human rights and which human rights they may know.

Introduce human rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) using the information on page 4.

Explain that they will be exploring how human rights are a part of our daily lives. Divide participants into small groups and distribute the **eight UDHR Article Cards** and **eight Daily Action Cards** on page 12-13 to each group.

Ask the groups to match the rights with the actions (that is, which Daily Action Card is relevant to which UDHR Article).

Regroup and ask participants to discuss their answers.

They could look like this: (There is more than one possible solution for some of the rights)



15 MINUTES

- Article 3:** I walk freely in my town without fearing for my life
Article 12: I do not have to disclose my personal life to my teacher
Article 13: I can go wherever I want in my country freely
Article 18: I speak freely and practice my religion and beliefs
Article 19: I use social media and say what I think on different topics
Article 24: I play with my friends
Article 25: I go to see a doctor if I am sick
Article 26: I can go to school and study

Ask the participants to pick one or two rights and discuss what would be different in their lives if this right was denied.

Explain that human rights are universal and interconnected. Removing one right can have an impact on other rights. Share the simplified version of the UDHR (page 5).

2. INTRODUCING CIHAM ALI

Briefly introduce Ciham to participants using **Ciham Ali's story** (page 14). Tell them that she is a real person who was arrested when she was only 15 years old. She has spent nine years in prison. Not even her family knows where she is being held. She hasn't been charged, nor has she been brought to trial. It's as if she has vanished.

Ask participants to work in pairs and hand out **Ciham Ali's story** and the **simplified version of the UDHR** (page 5). Give them about 10 minutes to read the information and answer the questions:

- What most surprises you about Ciham's story?
- How do you think she is feeling? How do you think her family feels? How do you feel?
- What human rights have been denied to Ciham and to her family?

Bring the group back together and collect responses from different pairs. Write a list of the human rights violations that Ciham and her family have experienced.

Use the **Background information: Enforced Disappearance** (page 10) to add any rights that the groups may not have identified.

Explain that Ciham's secret detention without charge or trial amounts to an enforced disappearance under international law. Explain all people have the right to not be arbitrarily detained and to have a fair trial. In addition, children who are suspected of having committed a crime should be treated differently to adult suspects. These rights and protections are guaranteed under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Conclude by reading a quote from Ciham's uncle, Saleh:

"There are people who are accused of committing crimes against humanity and they are treated better than this. You have just taken a child who has child-like dreams. You are basically saying I will punish you and detain you, and you'll spend half of your life in prison."



■ **Important:** This story talks about the difficult situations faced by a child in Eritrea. It may affect participants in different ways. Check in with participants to see how they are feeling.

■ **Optional:** If you have time, share and introduce the child-friendly version of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, available at: www.unicef.org/media/60981/file/convention-rights-child-text-child-friendly-version.pdf





3. EXPLORING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Form small groups. Give each group the **Handout: Children in the Justice System** (page 11). Explain that this is a list of specific rights and protections for children in the justice system.

Ask the groups to look at the list and to mark which of these rights and protection were not provided to Ciham.

Optional: Read out one by one the rights and protections on the list and ask participants to stand or raise their hands if they think that this was not provided or upheld for Ciham.

Ask participants to discuss the following questions:

- Were Ciham's specific rights and protections as a child violated when she was arrested?
- How has the violation of these rights affected her life?
- How would you feel if this happened to you? How would your family feel? How would your life be changed?

Bring the groups back together to share their responses.

It is important to highlight that, for the past nine years, no one – not even her family – knows where Ciham is being held. She hasn't been charged, nor has she been brought to trial. It's as if she's vanished.

Explain that an **enforced disappearance** is when a person is abducted or detained by, or with the knowledge of, state authorities, and the authorities then refuse to say where the person is or what has happened to them. Enforced disappearances sometimes last for years. In some cases, the person is never seen again. Victims of enforced disappearance are at the mercy of their captors, without safeguards to protect them from further violations of their rights.

Highlight that **enforced disappearance** and holding people in secret detention are absolutely banned under international law. There is no justification for it whatsoever. Several international conventions prohibit these practices, including the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

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Ciham Ali has been in detention in Eritrea since she was 15 years old.

4. TAKE ACTION



Explain about Amnesty's Write for Rights campaign. Give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be.

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards, or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

■ If you have time, you can share this five minute introductory video about Write for Rights: <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide>

WRITE A LETTER

Explain that Ciham is a US citizen which means the government of the USA has an obligation to protect her and do their utmost to secure her release. Amnesty International will be asking the US government to intervene on her behalf. The USA has the necessary political power to pressure the Eritrean government to release her.

Encourage participants to write to the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, using the contact information on the right.

Participants can use the template letter on page 15, or you can give them the following guidelines to write a more personal letter:

- Tell the US Secretary of State something about yourself.
- Tell him what shocks you about Ciham Ali's case.
- Ask him to **immediately intervene in Ciham Ali's case by calling for Ciham's immediate and unconditional release.**

**US Secretary of State,
2201 C Street NW,
Washington, DC,
20520,
USA.**

Salutation: Dear Secretary of State

Twitter/ Instagram: @SecBlinken

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Encourage participants to take a picture of themselves wearing anything purple (Ciham's favourite colour) and post it on social media to show solidarity with Ciham and her family. Use the hashtag **#Purple4Ciham** and tag **@SecBlinken**

Participants can also write letters of solidarity or make a drawing for Ciham. Take photos of your letters and drawings and post them on social media. Use the hashtag **#Purple4Ciham** and tag **@SecBlinken**

Optional: The nine-year anniversary of Ciham's unlawful arrest and enforced disappearance is on 8 December and could be a perfect opportunity to organize a solidarity action.

The main goal is to display "**#FreeCiham**" in as many spaces as possible to raise awareness for her case. Amnesty International is encouraging people to use the colour purple (Ciham's favourite colour) as much as possible, to tie in with the social media campaign **#Purple4Ciham**



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

An enforced disappearance is when a person is abducted or detained by, or with the knowledge of, state authorities, and the authorities then refuse to say where the person is or what has happened to them. Enforced disappearances sometimes last for years; in some cases, the person is never seen again. The disappeared person is therefore outside the protection of the law, putting all their human rights at risk, including:

- their rights to life, liberty and security;
- their right to recognition as a person before the law;
- their right not to be tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- their right to a fair trial;
- their right to a remedy, including compensation;
- their right to health;
- their right to education and employment;
- their right to a family life;
- their right to an adequate standard of living;
- various rights of their family members.

Enforced disappearances can also violate various economic, social and cultural rights for both the victim and their family, including:

- the right to protection and assistance;
- the right to an adequate standard of living;
- the right to health;
- the right to education.

International law says that a detained person can only be held in an recognized place of detention, such as an official prison. But in some countries, people are secretly held in private homes, ships, military camps or other locations. Every instance of secret detention amounts to a case of enforced disappearance.

Enforced disappearance and holding people in secret detention are absolutely banned under international law. There is no justification for it whatsoever. Enforced disappearance not only increases the risk of being tortured or otherwise ill-treated, but can itself be a form of torture or other ill-treatment for the disappeared person and their family. Several international conventions ban these practices, including the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.



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Ciham Ali before her arrest.

HANDOUT

CHILDREN IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

All people who are accused of or sentenced for committing a crime must still have their human rights respected. In addition, children who are suspected of having committed a crime should be treated differently to adult suspects. These additional rights and protections for children are guaranteed under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

ARREST, DETENTION AND TRIAL

Children who are accused of breaking the law have the right to:

- legal help and fair treatment;
- see a lawyer who is paid for by the state;
- see their parents or another responsible adult from the moment they are arrested;
- release pending trial unless it's absolutely necessary to detain them.

Under no circumstances should children be tortured, otherwise ill-treated or forced to confess to a crime. During their trial, children should have the support of their family and a lawyer.

The judge should take into account the age and needs of the child and ensure that they get a fair hearing.

PUNISHMENT

Children must never be sentenced to death or sent to prison for the rest of their life. Prison sentences should be only be used in exceptional cases as a last resort, and should be for the shortest possible time. Children should not be punished in a way that is harmful to them, physically or mentally. Wherever possible, children should take part in community-based and restorative justice programmes instead of facing formal judicial proceedings and prison sentences.

RIGHTS IN PRISON

Children who are sent to prison:

- should be able to stay in contact with their lawyer and family members;
- should not be detained alongside adults;
- must not suffer physical punishment;
- must not be denied basic things like food;
- must not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- should be able to spend time with other children in prison;
- should not be kept in solitary confinement;
- should be able to continue with their education; and
- must be offered medical care to stay healthy, if they need it.

Children are entitled to these and many other protections under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

You can read the full list of children's rights here: www.unicef.org/media/60981/file/convention-rights-child-text-child-friendly-version.pdf



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HANDOUT

UDHR ARTICLE CARDS

ARTICLE 19:**RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION****ARTICLE 3:****RIGHT TO LIFE AND TO LIVE IN FREEDOM
AND SAFETY****ARTICLE 12:****RIGHT TO PRIVACY****ARTICLE 13:****RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT****ARTICLE 25:****RIGHT TO A STANDARD OF LIVING
ADEQUATE FOR YOUR HEALTH AND
WELLBEING****ARTICLE 18:****RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF THOUGHT,
CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION****ARTICLE 24:****RIGHT TO REST AND LEISURE****ARTICLE 26:****RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

HANDOUT

DAILY ACTION CARDS

I USE SOCIAL MEDIA
TO SAY WHAT I THINK ON DIFFERENT
TOPICS

I WALK FREELY IN MY TOWN
WITHOUT FEARING FOR MY LIFE

I DO NOT HAVE TO
DISCLOSE MY PERSONAL
LIFE TO MY TEACHER

I CAN GO WHEREVER I
WANT IN MY COUNTRY FREELY

I GO TO SEE A DOCTOR
IF I AM SICK

I SPEAK FREELY
ABOUT MY BELIEFS

I PLAY WITH
MY FRIENDS

I CAN GO TO SCHOOL
AND STUDY

HANDOUT

CIHAM ALI'S STORY

Born in Los Angeles, USA, and raised in Eritrea, Ciham Ali had big dreams. A fan of Lady Gaga and the band Green Day, she was determined to become a fashion designer when she grew up. But at 15, her hopes were shattered.

On 8 December 2012, Ciham was arrested at the Sudanese border as she tried to flee Eritrea. Her father Ali Abdu, then foreign minister under President Isaias Afwerki, had gone into exile just as the military attempted a coup against the government. The rumour was that Ali Abdu had supported the coup and Ciham may have been arrested in retaliation.

Nine years on and no one – not even her family – knows where Ciham is being held. She hasn't been charged, nor has she been brought to trial. It's as if she's vanished. Eritrea is notorious for imprisoning people in underground containers where they suffer extreme cold and heat. There are reports of many people dying from torture, starvation, infection and other appalling treatment in these jails. While other children her age might have headed to college, Ciham has been suffering unknown horrors.

Although she's a US citizen, Ciham has been ignored by the US government. So far, the USA has remained silent on her plight, even though they have the power to influence Eritrea.

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HANDOUT

LETTER TEMPLATE

CIHAM ALI – ERITREA

US Secretary of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC
20520
USA

Dear Secretary of State,

Ciham Ali, a US citizen born in Los Angeles and raised in Eritrea, has been missing since 8 December 2012. The teenager who dreamt of becoming a fashion designer was arrested at the Eritrean border when she was 15. Her arrest appears to be in retaliation against her father's suspected involvement in a coup attempt on the Eritrean government. Nine years on and no one knows where Ciham is. Eritrea is notorious for imprisoning people in underground containers where they torture, starve or even kill them. The US government must act now. Please use your influence and speak out for Ciham: demand her immediate and unconditional release.

Yours sincerely



ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 10 million people who take injustice personally. We are campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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