



# GROUP EVENTS

PRIMED AND READY

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



# Convenor notes

## GROUP CASE STUDIES

Conduct a brainstorming session on the strengths of your group as a whole. Also ask each person what they individually bring to the group in terms of skills and knowledge.

Then brainstorm the strengths and weakness of your local area and the resources available to you.

Ask someone to write the answers on butcher's paper or a whiteboard.

Then give each group member a copy of handout one and go through the examples of successful group events. Ask the group if they are interested in and able to organise one of these events (in line with current campaigns) in your local area. Why or why not? How would these events need to be adapted to the strengths, knowledge and skills of your group? You can also look through previous regional e-bulletins for ideas and inspiration from other groups.

## EVENT PLANNING

As a group, choose a campaigning activity that the group will organise over the coming three months that is aligned with Amnesty International Australia's current campaign priorities. As a group, discuss the six action planning questions on handout two in relation to the event.

Be sure to complete any event approval forms that need to be sent to your community campaigner.

## DEVELOP GROUP CONFIDENCE

Your group members may feel nervous about speaking to the public about Amnesty International or human rights. Try using handout four with current and new members and role play some scenarios they might encounter – like answering tricky questions, or dealing with hostile people or timewasters.

## PURPOSE

To show examples of Amnesty International group events

To successfully plan new group events

To develop group members' confidence to talk to about human rights at public events

**Time:** Approximately two hours

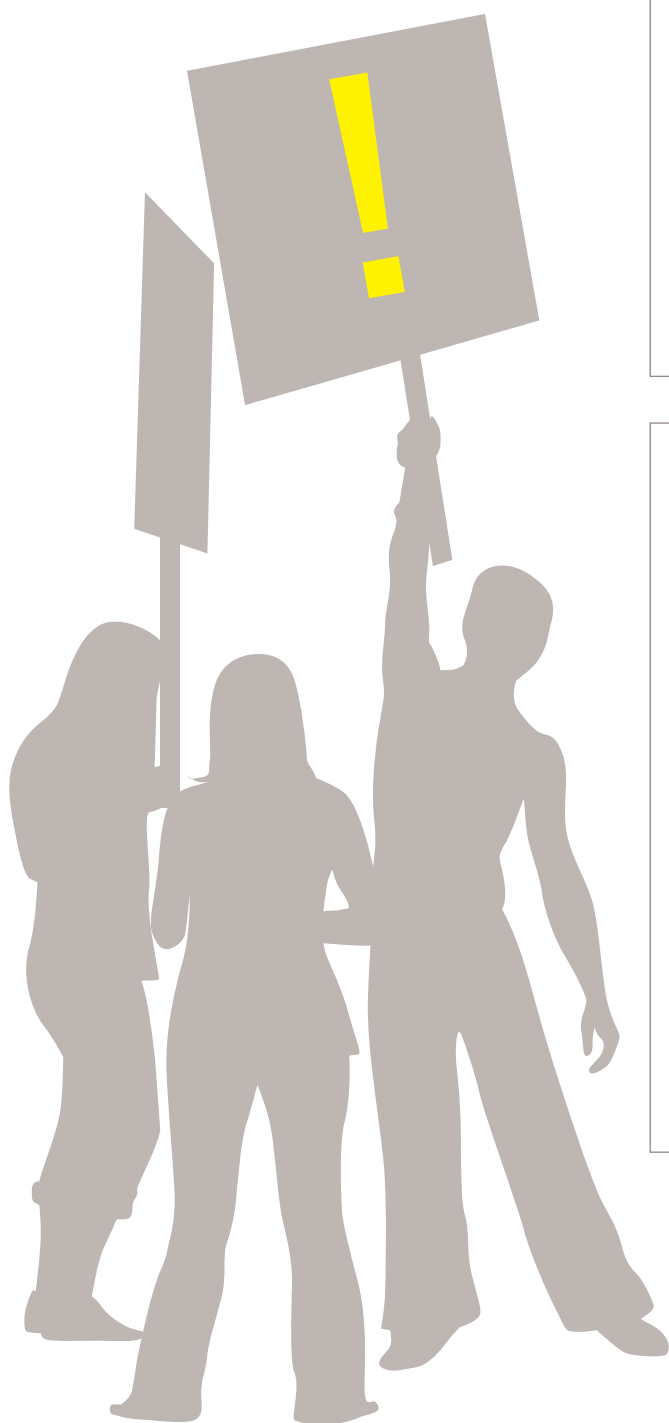
AI Switzerland activists hold an event at a Shell petrol station in Berne for the launch of the Demand Dignity report on corporate accountability in the Niger Delta. © Adrian Moser



Cover: Amnesty International's Sally Sami is interviewed during the Iran global day of action, July 2009. © AI

## HANDOUT 1

# Successful group events



## ADELAIDE CITY GROUP MONTHLY STALL

The Adelaide city group has been active for about 10 years. Its 15–20 members meet fortnightly and are a mixture of students and professionals.

For four years the group has held a stall on the last Saturday of each month at Adelaide's Central Markets. They have a roster for the stall and ensure that there are always at least two people on the stall. They choose a different campaign action every month and when they can, they align them with key dates, like International Women's Day and the World Day against the Death Penalty.

The group's convenor says the stall is a great tactic for achieving human rights impact. It keeps members engaged and is an easy action for new members to take. It is also a consistent presence in the community that attracts interest from a wide range of people.

## TIANANMEN SQUARE VIGIL

During our campaign on human rights in China, the Queensland/northern NSW region's China action group met weekly in the Brisbane action centre. They organised a series of events and actions in the lead-up to Olympic Games in 2008.

For the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown on 4 June 2008, the group wanted to conduct an action that would be simple, effective and easy to organise.

They decided on a candlelight vigil, to commemorate the people who were killed or who disappeared during the Tiananmen Square crackdown. The event would also show support for the Tiananmen mothers, who are still campaigning to find out what happened to their children. The team developed a plan for the event, and delegated responsibilities for organising each part and participating in activities on the night itself.

For an added visual element, they drew on the skills of an action centre volunteer who built a replica Chinese tank. They used this to stage the famous photo of a single person standing in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square.

The event attracted a great deal of attention with the candles, the tank and a display of white carnations (the symbol of the Tiananmen mothers). The team organised a photographer to record the event.



## HANDOUT 1

## Successful group events continued

**COMFORT WOMEN ART DISPLAY**

To promote the comfort women campaign, two NSW action centre volunteers created a photography exhibition and live art display outside Customs House in Sydney.

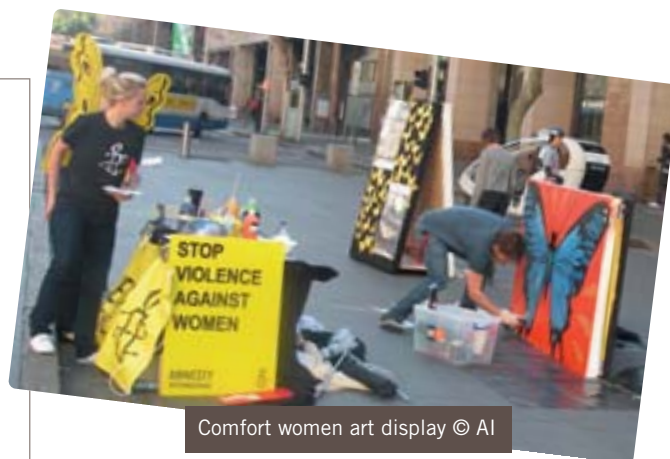
The idea was to attract people and inspire them to sign a butterfly action as part of the comfort women campaign. And they wanted to do something other than hold a stall.

Organising the event involved gaining council approval and putting together a wet weather plan in case it rained!

They sourced Amnesty International photos and had large prints made and mounted. They invited various artists to paint on the day – they were given information about comfort women beforehand so they understood the issue.

Eight other volunteers helped on the day. A few days prior to the event, training was organised with the volunteers to go over the key points of the campaign and discuss how to approach people on the street.

The event was very successful, collecting close to 500 signed butterflies.



Comfort women art display © AI

**HUMAN RIGHTS DAY EVENT**

To mark the closing of the 16 days of activism against gender violence in 2008, the WA women's rights action group held an evening event to honour the achievements of women human rights defenders.

The event was hosted in collaboration with the Women's Council of Domestic and Family Violence Services. It was held in the action centre and featured speakers, music and refreshments. Mingili Wanjurri provided a welcome to country and Dr Jazbi Arif spoke about women human rights defenders in Pakistan. Music was provided by Thalia Skopellos.

The women's rights group publicised event in the regional e-bulletin and via their own networks. The community campaigner also promoted the event on local radio.

The event was attended by 35 people, including several people who had not previously attended an Amnesty International event. Several attendees indicated an interest in becoming actively involved in the women's rights group, and the night increased everyone's awareness of human rights issues for Aboriginal women and women in Pakistan.



## HANDOUT 2

# Planning your event

## WHAT is the message of the action?

Keep the message simple, clear and relevant to your audience.

## WHY are you planning this action?

What is your aim?

What are you trying to achieve?

How does this action fit into Amnesty International's campaign objectives?

## WHO are you aiming the action at?

Who do you want to hear your message?  
Who is your target audience?

Some actions might be aimed at the staff of a corporation or government office.

Others might be aimed directly at members of the public or the media.

The way you phrase your message will vary depending on your chosen target.

Talk to your community campaigner for more tips.

Ask yourselves these six questions when you are planning an event. They help you ensure that the event you plan will deliver the intended result.

## HOW will you get the message out?

What form will the event take?

What tactics will you use?

Do you want to do a press stunt, organise a rally, conduct a vigil?

You might want to raise awareness in your community by having a street stall or distributing flyers in your local mall.

## WHEN will your message be best heard?

Is there an ideal time for your event that will maximise its impact?

Do you want your event to coincide with a meeting or conference, with the visit of a politician?

Should it coincide with a public announcement or press release?

You may want to choose a time when the media will be available or when the area will be full of workers or shoppers?

## WHERE will the action happen?

Is there a venue that will maximise your impact?

This might be somewhere symbolic or where you will get the most attention.

Investigate any council approval process that might be involved.

## HANDOUT 3

# Public campaigning suggestions

## MESSAGE

As a member of an Amnesty International group, there is a strong chance that at some point you will find yourself talking to people face to face about one of our human rights campaigns.

It might be an informal conversation at work, at home or at the pub. It could be during an event or some kind of campaign activity. There could be a time when you are called on to speak to the media.

## GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS

When speaking about Amnesty International campaigns, you are generally trying to engage someone's interest in your message, have them embrace it and then inspire them to act.

Amnesty International is unique:

- We expose the facts about injustice, with a sense of **outrage**.
- We act to liberate people from injustice, with a sense of **hope**.
- We provide an **action** people can do to create change.

Getting the message across is more than just knowing your stuff. How you speak and how you present yourself when you are talking are just as important. To communicate well, you need to match your words with persuasive tone and body language.

## WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE REMEMBERS

When you have had a conversation with someone, they will forget:

- 25 per cent of what you say within one day
- 50 per cent of what you say within two days
- 80 per cent of what you say within four days

To help the message stick, pick two or three key messages and repeat them. The best way to get your message across is to keep it clear and simple and reinforce it.

And even if the audience doesn't remember the details of your message – if you were confident, passionate and intelligent, they will remember your arguments as confident, passionate and intelligent!

## BODY LANGUAGE AND TONE OF VOICE

Tone of voice is vital. If you want people to talk to you, you need to make eye contact and smile. Just make sure you don't let it become a staring contest. As the person comes nearer to you can re-establish the eye contact and begin to speak.

To appear open to talking, you need to look open. Don't cross your arms, stand behind your stall, hide behind your friends. Turn to face people. Keep your hands in full view – having your palms facing the person you are talking to helps. Make sure you keep dramatic hand gestures out of their space and out of their face.

The more you relax the better. Don't rush. Rushing towards someone in your eagerness to hand them your flyer can startle and even frighten people. If you have already made eye contact, they know you want to talk to them, so you can approach them in a relaxed, friendly manner. On the other hand, if you are too slow, you may seem reluctant to talk to them because you lack confidence or do not have faith in your message.

Remember that everyone has personal space. If you want people to be receptive to your message, they need to feel that they have a choice. Avoid herding people towards your stall or someone with a clipboard. Watch for the obvious signals that someone doesn't want to engage with you. If you force someone to talk to you they will have already formed a negative mindset which makes unlikely they will respond well to your message.

## OPENING LINES

Come up with an opening line that works for you. Some tactics that have been successful include saying 'good morning' or 'good afternoon', because it invites a similar response, and you are in conversation. It is also polite and non-threatening.

If they don't seem rushed, ask an open question. Open question can't be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' answer. "What do you think of the arms industry" is more likely to stimulate conversation than "Do you think the arms industry should be regulated". In general, open questions start with what, who, where, when, why or how.

Ask a question unrelated to the campaign. Engage people in conversation, then shift the conversation towards the campaign issue. If you are not a natural at starting conversations, listen to someone near you who is. Observe how they approach people and ask for any tips they can pass on.

## HANDOUT 3

# Public campaigning suggestions continued

## WHAT DOES NOT WIN HEARTS AND MINDS

People can get defensive when they think you are criticising their opinion. When you are in a potentially confrontational situation, don't challenge the person directly.

Keep your mind open and positive. You won't change someone's mind if your attitude suggests that you think they are wrong, stupid or the enemy.

Find some common ground. Do they have a family? Start by talking about their kids and then take it through to families who lose kids because of the arms trade, for example.

## TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

When you talk to people, make sure it a two-way process. Don't bombard someone with information and deny them time to speak. Don't disregard something they say that veers from the topic. If they are talking to you, they are engaged. Remember to listen: one guide suggests spending 20 per cent of your time asking questions and 80 per cent listening to the answers.

The best result you can hope for is that you are happy you have delivered your message effectively, and the person you were talking to goes away happy that they were listened to. They may not have signed up to be a supporter then and there, but they have the time to absorb your ideas and accept them without feeling pressured.

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

As a member of an Amnesty International group that talks to people as part of their work to achieve human rights impact, at some point it is likely you will need to deal with some difficult situations. Some tactics for dealing with them are detailed here.

## ANSWERING TRICKY QUESTIONS

### Do

Decide whether the question is relevant and worthwhile. If not, you might need to sidestep it (see Dealing with time wasters). But don't avoid a perfectly reasonable question just because the answer is tricky!

Acknowledge the question – “that's a good question” or “thanks for bringing that up” – it shows the questioner that you respect them and are open to dialogue.

Respond with questions of your own, to the questioner or others around you. Don't assume that you personally have to have an answer for everything.

If you can't answer the question, say so. Offer to find out the answer and get back to them.

Let them know about other sources of information, like our website and the action centre, which could answer their question for them. Be specific about what information is available for them, so you don't seem dismissive.

### Don't

Start to waffle or pretend you know the answer when you don't – you could discredit the entire campaign in the eyes of the person you are talking to.

Feel you have to answer every question as it is asked – you are allowed to have time to think.

Refuse to answer, ignore or block relevant questions.

Present yourself as an expert (unless of course you are).

### Dealing with time wasters

Don't waste time with time wasters – target your efforts to where you can actually make change.

Don't get distracted by an interesting debate. Stay focused, and ask yourself if the conversation is a tactical use of your time.

Don't get caught up in a heated discussion. It not only stops you from talking to anyone else, but it can also look unprofessional, and raise the level of tension in people around you.

The best way to avoid these conversations is simply to agree to disagree. Thank the person for expressing their opinion and assure them that you respect their right to hold it. Be polite and firm and move on.

If you get stuck with someone supportive but long-winded, explain that while it has been lovely talking to them, there are lots of other people you need to talk to as well. Suggest that you can continue your conversation another time, when you have more time (if you will follow through).

### Dealing with hostility

You might meet a number of negative responses from people you talk to about human rights, including aggression and ignorance. The important thing to remember is that these are not personal attacks, they are merely disagreeing with your opinion on one issue. They may be responding to stereotypes; try not to do the same.

Think before you respond to a negative comment to avoid escalating the situation. Stay calm and be assertive. Use non-threatening body language: instead of crossing your arms, pointing fingers or leaning forward, keep your palms open your shoulder back and try to keep a smile on your face.

It might help to remind yourself why you are there and reaffirm the importance of the campaign work you are doing.

Work in pairs, so that when a situation arises, there is someone with you for moral support or to intervene if tensions rise.

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