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human rights

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2017

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Good news: the last 6 months of progress

Short read: "I refuse to surrender my hope on Manus"

Analysis: the state of the world's human rights

2016 was a year marked globally by hateful rhetoric and fear-driven politics. While world leaders should have been working together to protect people caught up in conflict and responding proactively to the global refugee crisis, they turned their backs instead.

We've seen many governments and politicians shamelessly blaming the world's most vulnerable people – including refugees, minorities and migrants – for economic hardships, and in doing so encouraging a rise in discrimination and hate crimes, particularly in Europe and the US.

But we know from the past that when the obstacles start to seem insurmountable, the human rights movement responds stronger than ever. Globally and in Australia, ordinary heroes are countering this fearmongering, showing true courage in protecting values we all hold dear – fairness, freedom, equality and justice.

Be it abuse survivors and whistleblowers in Australia, Manus Island and Nauru; civil rights activists in the US; or the 'clown of Aleppo', a young man who chose to remain in the Syrian city to bring comfort and joy to children – these individuals have taken a stand against oppression.

Amnesty supporters continue to play a vital role in promoting human rights, all across the world. As part of the Amnesty movement, you are countering the rise of fear-mongering politics, shining a light on human rights abuses wherever they occur, and calling on all Australian politicians to demonstrate true commitment to human rights.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty movement.

Claire Mallinson

Claire Mallinson
National Director, Amnesty International Australia



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Cover: Amnesty supporters protest after US President Donald Trump announced new hardline immigration policies, February 2017. © Amnesty International US

Chelsea Manning in February 2015. © Private
Dolma Tso after her release in December. © Private

YOU ARE CHANGING LIVES

Millions of Amnesty supporters like you have pushed decision-makers to make change happen worldwide. You've helped release journalists and activists, change discriminatory laws, compensate victims of corporate crime, pardon survivors of torture and so much more – thank you for all your support!



GOOD NEWS

US: Chelsea Manning to be released

In the final days of his term President Obama commuted the sentence of WikiLeaks source Chelsea Manning. Manning had been serving a 35-year sentence in a maximum security prison after releasing documents which revealed potential human rights violations by the US military. Manning, who has been in jail for nearly seven years, will be freed on 17 May this year. Amnesty has campaigned for her release for several years.

China: Tibetan woman freed

Dolma Tso, a Tibetan woman imprisoned for helping a neighbour, was freed from prison in December 2016.

In 2013 Dolma was arrested and sentenced to three years in a women's prison in China after she moved the body of her neighbour, who had set himself on fire. In 2015 she was at risk of undergoing a forced medical procedure that would put her health at risk, and her family's request to see her condition for themselves were denied.

Thanks to pressure from Amnesty supporters, the operation didn't go ahead and Dolma Tso left prison unharmed.

Thank you for taking action on behalf of my sister Dolma Tso. Because of the actions taken by supporters, the Chinese government could not proceed with a medical surgery that they intended against my sister's wishes.

Dolma's brother

Read more successes at
www.amnesty.org.au/goodnews

Australia: government to ratify OPCAT

The Australian Government announced in February that it will ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). Ratifying this human rights treaty means that independent monitors will be able to access all Australian detention facilities. This is an important safeguard against torture and other forms of mistreatment. The Australian Government plans to officially ratify in December. Supporters have campaigned for many years to get OPCAT ratified in Australia – thank you!

Cuba: graffiti artist released

On 21 January Danilo Maldonado Machado (also known as 'El Sexto') was released from a maximum-security prison on the outskirts of Havana, after being detained without charge for nearly two months.

Danilo Maldonado was arrested at his home on 26 November, hours after the announcement of Fidel Castro's death. That same day, a Cuba-based newspaper reported that he'd allegedly graffitied "He's gone" on a wall in Havana. Amnesty International considered him a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.



I want to thank you and everything Amnesty International has done for Danilo's freedom. Without your help, who knows where he would be right now. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Alexandra Martínez, Danilo's fiancée

Kenya: refugee camp to remain

A historic court ruling in February blocked the Kenyan government's decision to shut the world's largest refugee camp. The Dadaab refugee camp's closure would have left more than 260,000 Somali refugees with nowhere else to go.

In his ruling, Justice JM Mativo said the government's orders to shut down Dadaab

were excessive, arbitrary and disproportionate. The High Court ruling came in response to a petition by two Kenyan human rights organisations: Kenya National Commission on Human Rights and Kituo Cha Sheria, supported by Amnesty International.

Queensland: commitment for a Human Rights Act

Following a Queensland Human Rights Act inquiry launched in 2015, late last year the Queensland Government announced plans to introduce a state-based Human Rights Act.

Australia is the only Western country not to have a national Human Rights Act. So far it's been up to states and territories to protect our rights, but only ACT and Victoria have Human Rights Acts in place.



Northern Territory: boost to diversionary funding

In February the Northern Territory Government announced 18.2 million dollars in funding for diversionary programs and other initiatives that help keep kids out of the justice system. The funding boost comes in the wake of the Don Dale Detention Centre abuse scandal.

Also in February Dylan Voller, a boy tortured at Don Dale Detention Centre, was released on bail from prison eight months early to participate in a youth rehabilitation program. 19-year-old Dylan will take part in the BushMob program in Alice Springs, which helps young people get their lives back on track.

US: mother released from immigration detention

Sara Beltran Hernandez, a mother who fled violence in El Salvador only to be detained in the United States for 15 months, has been released from detention to be with her family.

Sara is now permitted to live with her family in New York while her asylum claim is processed and where she can seek medical treatment for a brain tumor.

While we welcome the release of Sara, Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of people seeking asylum in the face of President Trump's aggressive new immigration orders.

Malaysia: death sentence of mentally ill man commuted

In February we received word that Malaysia had commuted the death sentence of Nigerian national Osariakhi Obayangbon to life in prison. Obayangbon had been initially sentenced to death in 2000. Obayangbon was diagnosed with schizophrenia before his appeal in 2007 and despite international law prohibiting the imposition of mandatory death sentences on those with mental disabilities, his sentence had remained.

You did not only save Osariakhi's life, you restored hope to the family whose lives would have been shattered and meaningless had the execution been carried out...on behalf of Osariakhi, we wish to thank you once again for restoring hope to the hopeless.

A letter from Osariakhi's brother Curtis

Indigenous rights campaigner Roxanne Moore puts MPs on notice to ratify OPCAT, Canberra, December 2016.
© Private

Former Cuban prisoner of conscience, Danilo Maldonado Machado ('El Sexto') visited AIUSA's Washington DC office in February 2017 to thank Amnesty. © AI

Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. © Film Aid

Dylan Voller © Private

Osariakhi Obayangbon © Private

OUR CAMPAIGNERS DISCUSS THE LATEST IN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDING AT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA.



COMMUNITY IS EVERYTHING

It's been a busy six months as we continue to demand our government do more to keep Indigenous kids out of our broken justice system. Amnesty made a submission to the NT Royal Commission into the protection and detention of children, and we also met with the new Northern Territory government. Our local groups built relationships with key decision-makers in the NT, and we supported local Aboriginal organisations to secure further positive changes.

We've seen some progress, with the Northern Territory banning restraint chairs in children's prisons and announcing new funding for diversionary programs. We also celebrated when Queensland announced that it will move all 17-year-olds out of adult prisons in line with international human rights law.

But there's more to do. We need more support for Indigenous-led solutions across all states and territories. We'll continue pushing for the Prime Minister to take leadership. August, when the Royal Commission hands down its report, will be a key moment for this.

Julian Cleary, Indigenous Rights Campaigner

Amnesty supporters in Western Australia made sure to check out 'One Day in Freo', a festival held on 28 January as an alternative to Australia Day in sensitivity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. © Private



REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER RIGHTS

At this moment, there are more people seeking asylum than at any point since World War II. People just like us, but with no choice but to run for their lives.

Amnesty supporters have been calling on our government to offer safety to more people by increasing our annual refugee intake to a minimum of 30,000 people. Currently, 10 countries take in 56 per cent of the world's refugees (approx 11.76 million). While it's promising that Australia offers safety to 13,750 people each year, we have the ability to open our arms to more.

We've also been demanding the Australian Government end its abusive offshore detention regime ever since its inception, and will continue to do so. We hope one day we won't need to campaign for refugee rights, that the world's governments will do their fair share to protect and assist people who are simply seeking somewhere safe to live. Until then Amnesty will tirelessly defend the rights of these vulnerable people.

Ming Yu Hah, Refugee Rights Campaigner

Save the Children and Amnesty teamed up for this snap action on behalf of the children suffering under Australia's refugee policies. Canberra, September 2016. © Save the Children



MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Choosing to marry the person you love is a human right, and an important way many people choose to show their commitment. But in Australia, LGBTIQ couples still don't have this right, despite two-thirds of Australians believing marriage should be equal.

In January and February Amnesty supporters made their voices heard in support of marriage equality, especially Amnesty uni groups who wrote letters of encouragement to their members of parliament asking them to support a 'yes' vote in parliament.

At the time of writing, a free vote on marriage equality in parliament has yet to happen... but it's on the horizon. Amnesty will continue to stand alongside activists and other organisations in campaigning for this to happen without delay.

Steph Cousins, Advocacy and External Affairs Manager

Amnesty volunteers chat to ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr and Deputy Leader of the Opposition Tanya Plibersek at University of Canberra's O Week, February 2017. © AI
University of Melbourne's O Week stall, February 2017. © AI



CRISIS RESPONSE

Our crisis response work is agile and ever-changing – we can never know for sure when a human rights crisis will occur, but when it does, Amnesty is going to be there. At the time of writing, we are working alongside our US and global counterparts to stop the ban on Muslim people entering the United States. We'll be mobilising activists in Australia to amplify the voices of those affected – it's times like these that global solidarity is so important.

Right now we've also got our eyes on the situation in the Philippines, where the government is pushing to bring back the death penalty, and where President Duterte allows a wave of extrajudicial killings to continue in 'a war on drugs'.

Diana Sayed, Crisis Tactical Response Campaigner

Victorian supporters took part in a rally against the rise of racism and Islamophobia in the US, March 2017. © Matt Walsh

Write for Rights

Every year Write for Rights – Amnesty's global letter-writing event – gets bigger and better. We are still counting all your actions for 2016, but the global tally has already passed over 4 million. Here in Australia we gathered a phenomenal 130,000 actions!

Over 50 Write for Rights community events were held across Australia. Groups hosted literary evenings, held stalls at festivals and markets, and partnered with other organisations to run events, such as with the Country Women's Association to make a quilt for Annie Alfred. These events also generated over 20 local media stories.

A massive thanks to everyone who held events, wrote letters, and took action online – your participation makes a real difference in the lives of the people we write for.

Rose Kulak, Individuals at Risk Campaigner

Write for Rights events around the world, clockwise from top left: Sydney © Al; Belgium © Bastien Ranschaert; Poland © Grzegorz Zukowski.





MAXIMA'S STORY

Máxima Acuña, a peasant farmer in northern Peru, is one of the people that Amnesty supporters wrote for as part of Write for Rights 2016, and in Australia we are continuing to work for her. Máxima has braved violent attacks from local police for refusing to leave the land where she lives with her family.

Máxima is in a legal battle with Yanacocha, one of the world's biggest gold and copper mines, over the ownership of the land. She believes the harassment is an attempt to drive her away from her home. But she's not going anywhere.

Police have attacked her family, including beating her and her children, damaging her

house and demolishing an extension she was building. On several occasions, Yanacocha's own armed security guards even destroyed her crops.

It's a campaign of intimidation designed to make her life impossible – so she gives up her fight and leaves. But still Máxima will not give in.

Her bravery has won her the 2016 Goldman Prize, the world's most respected environmental award. Community members look to her as a leader and have banded together to protect her.

Together, we must make sure her family can live on the land in peace until the courts make a final decision.

ACT NOW

Stand with Máxima – tell Peru to protect her and her family from violence and intimidation.

Write to Peru's Minister of Interior. Please start your letter with 'Dear Minister' and include these calls in your letter:

- guarantee Máxima Acuña and her family are not forcibly evicted.
- demand that all violence against them, including harassment and intimidation, stop immediately.
- order an investigation into the attacks and harassment.

You can also send a small card for Máxima and her family, which we can pass on for you.

Suggested message: I support your struggle to protect your family and defend human rights.

POST DETAILS

Drop your letters off at an Amnesty action centre or post it to:
Wire letters, Locked Bag 23
Broadway NSW 2007.

Máxima Acuña, and receiving letters of support
© Raúl García Pereira/Carlos Eduardo García Lazo



The state of the world: a global pushback against human rights

War crimes were committed in at least
23 countries

36 countries illegally sent refugees back to a country where their rights were at risk

22 countries saw people killed for peacefully standing up for human rights

Amnesty International's 'State of the World's Human Rights' annual report analyses global human rights trends over the past year, covering 159 countries, including Australia.

Seismic political shifts in 2016 exposed the potential of hateful rhetoric to unleash the dark side of human nature. Whether it is Trump (US), Orban (Hungary), Modi (India), Erdogan (Turkey) or Duterte (Philippines), more and more politicians call themselves anti-establishment and wield politics of demonisation that hound, scapegoat and dehumanise entire groups of people to win the support of voters.

This rhetoric will have an increasingly dangerous impact on actual policy. In 2016, governments turned a blind eye to war crimes, pushed through deals that undermine the right to claim asylum, passed laws that violate free expression,

incited murder of people simply because they use drugs, legitimised mass surveillance, and extended draconian police powers.

The more countries backtrack on fundamental human rights commitments at home, the less leadership we see on the world stage. This could have disastrous consequences given the already pitiful global response to mass atrocities in 2016, with the world standing by as events in Aleppo, Darfur and Yemen unfolded.

Meanwhile, several other countries carried out massive crackdowns, including Bahrain, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Philippines and Turkey.

Other countries implemented intrusive security measures, such as prolonged emergency powers in France and unprecedented surveillance laws in the UK. Another feature of “strongman” politics was a rise in anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQI rhetoric, such as efforts to roll back women's rights in Poland that were met with massive protests.

Newly displaced people wait to receive food supplies at a processing center for displaced people in Qayyara, south of Mosul, Iraq, October 2016.
© REUTERS/Zohra Bensemra



"I didn't want to leave Syria, but our house was destroyed".
Salwa Al Aji, a teacher from Damascus, now lives in Softex camp, Greece. July 2016 © Richard Burton/AI
Amnesty International activists protest against President Donald Trump's immigration policies, February 2017.
© Amnesty International USA

Read Amnesty's full Annual Report detailing 159 countries at www.amnesty.org.au/2016-report

Refugee crisis: In 2016, 36 countries violated international law by illegally sending refugees back to a country where they would face torture, violence, the death penalty or where their rights were at risk. While Australia inflicts terrible suffering on asylum seekers in nearby islands Nauru and Manus, the European Union made an illegal and reckless deal with Turkey to send refugees back there, even though the country cannot protect their human rights.

Syria: Conflict continued throughout the year with ongoing international participation. Syrian government and allied forces carried out large-scale attacks, killing, injuring and displacing thousands of civilians, while tens of thousands of civilians remained disappeared or detained and at risk of torture. In December the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution establishing a mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of serious crimes committed in Syria.

Philippines: The Philippines government launched a campaign to crackdown on drugs in which more than 6,000 people were killed. These killings followed the election of President Duterte, who repeatedly and publicly endorsed the arrest and killing of those suspected of using or selling drugs.

US: The global trend of aggressive and more divisive politics was exemplified by Donald Trump's poisonous campaign rhetoric, but leaders in various parts of the world also brokered their future power on narratives of fear, blame and division.

Myanmar: The persecuted Rohingya minority in Myanmar faced increased violence and discrimination. Religious intolerance and anti-Muslim sentiment intensified. Fighting between the army and ethnic armed groups escalated in northern Myanmar. The government increased restrictions on access for UN and other humanitarian agencies to displaced communities.

Iraq: Government forces, paramilitary militias and the armed group Islamic State (IS) committed war crimes and gross human rights abuses in the conflict in Iraq. IS fighters killed, raped and tortured captives, used civilians as human shields and made use of child soldiers. Militias executed, forcibly disappeared and tortured civilians fleeing areas held by the IS. In response, thousands remained detained without trial on suspicion of links to IS and torture in detention remained rife.

STAND UP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

It is time to stand together and put a stop to the politics of demonisation that are creating a divided and dangerous world.

Amnesty International calls on people around the world to not let the rhetoric of fear, blame and hate erode the vision for an open society based on equality. If each individual takes a stand and acts to protect our human rights, together we can turn the tide.

I refuse to surrender my hope on Manus

I'm a passionate young writer incarcerated by the Australian Government for over three years on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. This indefinite offshore processing centre has ensured the loss of the rights of refugees in a world of power, greed and cruelty. Compassion, love and equality have died, along with human rights. I search my mind for the crimes that I committed; I come up with nothing.

I question what has happened to this world where refugees – among the most vulnerable people in the world – are treated like animals.

For the Rohingya ethnic group, creating a sense of identity is a difficult task. My ancestors have lived in Rakhine, Myanmar for generations. However, our country won't acknowledge our existence. We're known as illegal migrants in our own land, stateless people. Many people in this world take for granted that they can get a passport, but we are denied this right.

We are not even given a birth certificate or any other documentation to prove our citizenship. Rohingya people are denied freedom of movement, access to social services and more importantly, education. Tragically we are victims of unprovoked violence, spread by fear, ignorance and hate. When a government doesn't allow media or international visitors, the world should question this. They would be horrified; women and girls are raped, brothers buried alive and young boys killed.

Everything was snatched from me

Everything was snatched from me one dark night. I was threatened with death and fled my country. I lost everything precious to me; I couldn't hug my mother for the last time.

I embarked on a journey in search of a place to rest my head in peace. There was no other way to leave Myanmar except by boat in the middle of the night. I crossed the ocean for 15 days from Bangladesh to Malaysia. I left

Malaysia after experiencing so much cruelty in a few months. I arrived in Indonesia in 2012 and devastatingly, I was imprisoned for two years.

I was recognised as a genuine refugee by UNHCR. I waited for so long but I was stuck in limbo with no hope of a visa, no way to support myself. I was sure I would die if I stayed. In October 2013, I boarded a boat to Australia. I was detained on Christmas Island until, against my will, I was moved to Manus Island Detention Centre which was clearly built for intentional torture.

I've lived in great fear

The Australian Government never had a plan to resettle refugees in Papua New Guinea and the PNG Supreme Court found this camp illegal under its constitution. Again I was given refugee status by PNG, yet I am still imprisoned behind high fences. My friends who came with me on the same boat are free in Australia. We are not welcome in this country.

I've lived in great fear since I arrived and as proof we are unsafe, I was beaten inside the detention centre during the 2014 riot.

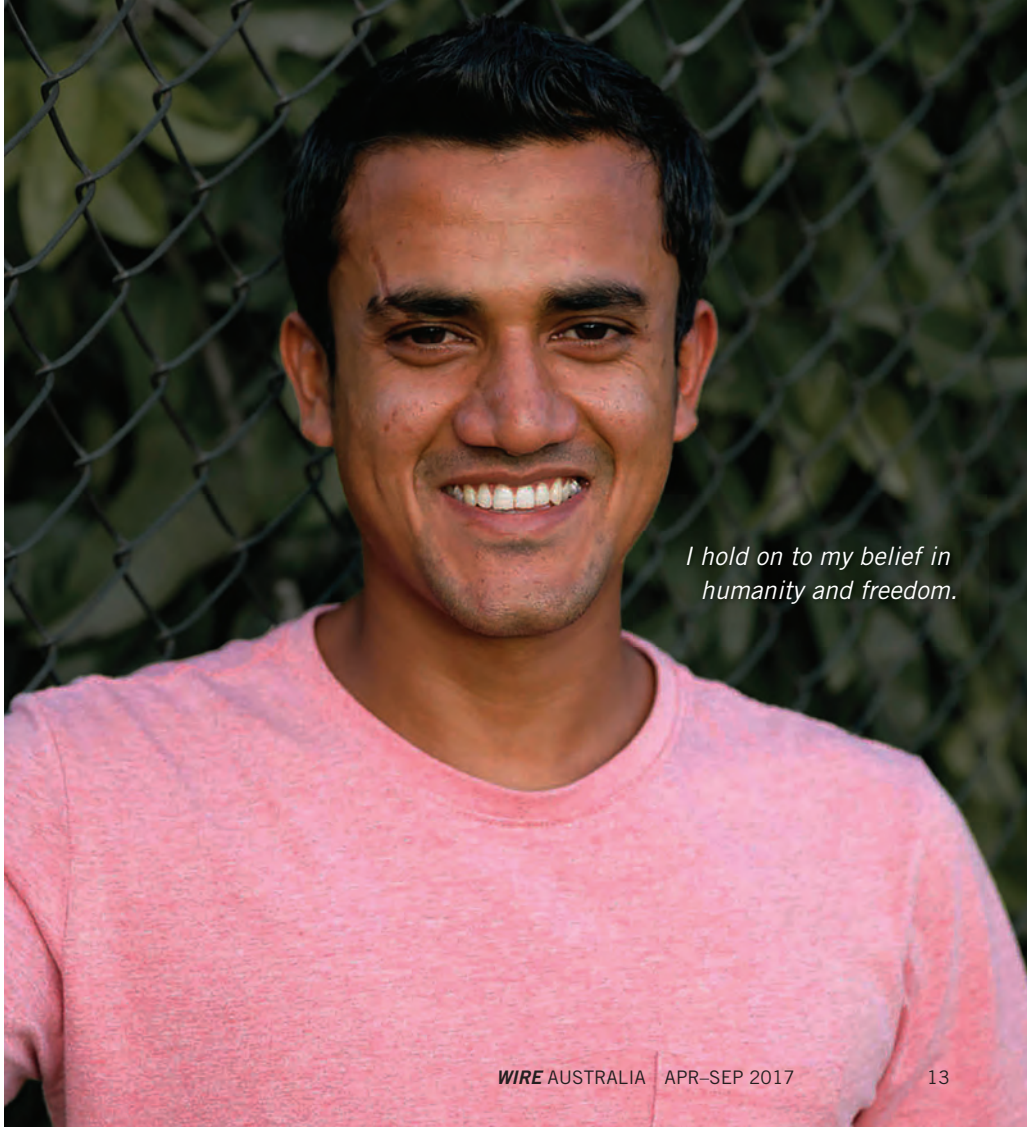
There is no end date and my future remains unclear. All I receive from the Australian Government is constant, endless torture.

I'm a refugee who refuses to surrender my hope. I hold on to my belief in humanity and freedom. I never got the chance to attend school or university; these words in English are my own – painstakingly studied with limited resources.

I have the power to give a voice for those who are voiceless. I survived the worst of life on the gift of love, the key to human survival. All I need is a chance to raise my voice on behalf of the millions of refugees to advocate for their right to live the life they deserve.

By Imran Mohammad

Read Imran's next blog where he discusses the lives of Rohingya people in Myanmar:
www.amnesty.org.au/rohingya



*I hold on to my belief in
humanity and freedom.*

Shop for human rights



**New t-shirts have arrived
in the Amnesty online shop!**
Our ethically-sourced shirts are
great conversation-starters and
every purchase goes towards
defending human rights.
Grab them for you, your family
or friends: bit.ly/amnesty-tees



Hike the homelands with Team Amnesty

LARAPINTA TRAIL, NORTHERN TERRITORY 24–30 JULY 2017

Join Team Amnesty for the 2017 hike the homelands challenge! As part of this incredible – yet challenging – adventure, you will stand on ancient escarpments and gaze out upon the ochre-coloured landscapes of Central Australia. Best of all, you'll be helping Amnesty raise vital funds to defend human rights all over the world.

For an information pack or to sign up: 1300 905 188
bit.ly/hikethehomelands



Team Amnesty on the Larapinta Trail, July 2015 © AI

*LGBTQI rights are human rights.
Having Amnesty support LGBTQI
human rights sends a powerful message
to LGBTQI people who are fighting
for equality: a message that we are born
free and equal, in dignity and rights.*

Lizzi Price
Amnesty volunteer

Lizzi has been part of the Amnesty LGBTQI Network for about a decade. Recently she helped coordinate the Amnesty float in this year's Mardi Gras parade. "Our float message: 'Equality, Safety, Respect: Every Child, Every School' came in response to the alarming levels of bullying towards LGBTQI children and young people in school ... The float got a fantastic response but it was the young people in the crowd that will stay in my memory, who were literally jumping and screaming with excitement and joy to see Amnesty supporting their right to safe education."

Find your local Amnesty group: www.amnesty.org.au/groups

Lizzi Price © Private

