

**WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



**IMOLEAYO MICHAEL  
NIGERIA**

**LOCKED IN AN UNDERGROUND  
CELL FOR PROTESTING  
POLICE VIOLENCE**



# 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](http://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

■ Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [www.amnesty.org/countries](http://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/](http://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

TORTURE AND OTHER  
ILL-TREATMENT

## KEY CONCEPTS

- Law enforcement/policing
- Arbitrary arrest and detention
- Torture and other ill-treatment
- Excessive use of force in policing

## ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about arbitrary detention and torture and other ill-treatment in Nigeria. They will find out what the police are allowed to do under international human rights law. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write a letter in support of Imoleayo and show solidarity with him.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the role of the police in protecting human rights and relate it to their own lives;
- be able to **identify** examples of torture and other ill-treatment and how they relate to specific human rights;

- **feel empathy** with those whose rights have been violated by the police;
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign;
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Imoleayo Michael.

**AGE:** 13+

## TIME NEEDED

60 minutes.

## MATERIALS

- **Background information: Write for Rights** (page 2)
- **Background information: Use of Force and Human Rights** (page 9)
- **Background information: The Right to Liberty** (page 10)
- **Background information: Torture and Other Ill-treatment** (page 9)
- **Imoleayo Michael's story** (page 11)

## PREPARATION

- Print **handouts** and **Imoleayo Michael's story**.

## 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. INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF THE POLICE

Ask the participants to think about the role that the police should play in society.

- Why do we have police?
- What do you think they should do?
- How do you think they should act?

Discuss their responses. If not mentioned by participants, remind them that in most countries the police have the following key roles:

- making sure people obey the law (enforcing the law);
- protecting people and property and keeping public order;
- investigating crimes and making arrests.

It is important to highlight that police officers are allowed to do things that other people cannot – for example, use force to arrest someone, detain someone in a prison cell, or carry weapons. The police are given these additional powers so that they can carry out their responsibility to protect citizens and keep public order.

However, with power comes responsibility. The police are permitted to use force against others, but they must always do so in accordance with international human rights law, which will be explored more in the next activities.



## 2. WHEN POLICE ABUSE THEIR POWER: IMOLEAYO MICHAEL'S STORY

 25 MINUTES

Explain that participants will now hear the story of what happened to a young person who was protesting against police violence in Nigeria.

Read **Imoleayo Michael's story** (page 11)

Ask participants:

- What issues do young people protest about in your country?
- Does anything surprise you about Imoleayo's story? Does this happen in your country?
- How do you feel about the way the police acted towards Imoleayo?

Explain that, to prevent the abuse of power by the police there are a number of international human rights standards that police and law enforcement officers should follow. However, in some countries, not all law enforcement agencies respect these human rights and this has consequences for the lives of people like Imoleayo.

Divide the participants into three groups. Each group will discuss specific rights that exist to protect people from the type of abuse that Imoleayo has faced.

Give each group the handout **Imoleayo Michael's story** (page 11) and one of the following background information handouts:

- **Group 1:** Use of Force and Human Rights (page 9)
- **Group 2:** The Right to Liberty (page 10)
- **Group 3:** Torture and Other Ill-treatment (page 9)

Explain that each group should read the story and the background information and discuss the following questions:

- How were Imoleayo's rights violated?
- What consequences has this had for Imoleayo's life?
- Why are these human rights standards important?

Ask each group to prepare a creative way to share the result of their discussion.

## 3. EXPLORING HUMAN RIGHTS

 15 MINUTES

Bring the groups back together to share the results of their discussion. It is important to highlight how Imoleayo's rights were violated by people who were responsible for protecting him.

Conclude by reflecting on the following questions:

- Why are international human right standards and guidelines important when it comes to policing and law enforcement?
- What should the Nigerian authorities do to guarantee Imoleayo's rights and ensure that the police do not continue to abuse their power?



## 4. TAKE ACTION



Explain about Amnesty's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty is encouraging people to demand that all charges against Imoleayo Michael be dropped. 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>

■ Show participants the video of Imoleayo which can be found here: [www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos](http://www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos) (available in English).

### WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice in Nigeria using the contact information in the box on the right.

Participants can use the template letters at [www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/](http://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/) or you can give them the following guidelines to write a more personal letter:

- Tell the Attorney General something about yourself.
- Tell him what shocks you about the case of Imoleayo Michael.
- Tell him to **immediately drop all charges against Imoleayo Michael.**

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### SHOW SOLIDARITY

Encourage participants to show solidarity with Imoleayo Michael by expressing their encouragement, admiration or anything else they feel towards him. Ask them to think about what he might want to hear at this difficult time.

Show Imoleayo that he's not alone. Write him a message of friendship and support. You can also take a photo of your letter and post it on your social media channels, tagging him and using the hashtag **#FreeImoleAyo**

Solidarity messages, cards and letters should be sent to Imoleayo via:

**Amnesty International Nigeria,  
34 Colorado Close,  
ABUJA Federal Capital Territory,  
Maitama District,  
Nigeria**

#### IMOLEAYO'S SOCIAL MEDIA:

Twitter: [@imoleayomichael](https://twitter.com/imoleayomichael) (tag [@AmnestyNigeria](https://twitter.com/AmnestyNigeria))

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/adeyeun](http://www.facebook.com/adeyeun) (tag [@ainigeria](https://www.facebook.com/ainigeria))



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

# USE OF FORCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Police officers are allowed to do things that other people cannot – for example, use force to arrest someone, detain someone in a prison cell or carry weapons. The police are given these additional powers so that they can carry out their responsibility to protect people and keep public order.

However, with power comes responsibility: the police are permitted to use force, but they must always do so in accordance with international human rights law.

## STANDARDS ON USE OF FORCE

- The use of force must be strictly necessary. Force should be only be used in exceptional circumstances and must comply with the country's international human rights obligations, particularly the rights to life, physical integrity and security of the person.
- The use of force must be proportionate to the risk or the danger (for example, you cannot shoot someone for littering).
- Where use of force has resulted in injury or death, a prompt, thorough, independent, impartial and transparent investigation must be carried out.
- Police officers must be held accountable if they misuse their powers, in line with international standards of fairness.
- Law enforcement agencies must create clear instructions for what to do in situations that police officers may face during their work, including decisions about whether the use of force is necessary.

## PROHIBITION OF TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

There can never be any justification to subject a person to torture or other ill-treatment. This prohibition applies to all countries at all times. Article 5 of the UDHR prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The UN Convention against Torture is an international human rights treaty dedicated to the prohibition of torture.

### WHAT IS TORTURE?

- Torture results in physical and/or mental pain or suffering serious enough to be considered severe.
- Torture is inflicted intentionally.
- Torture is inflicted for a purpose, or on the basis of discrimination.
- State officials are involved, either directly or indirectly, in inflicting torture.

In many instances, it is not necessary to make a distinction between torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment – all of these acts are absolutely prohibited under international law.

Examples of the types of conduct that can amount to torture or other ill-treatment include:

- corporal punishment;
- inhumane prison conditions;
- rape, or other forms of sexual abuse, by state agents;
- making it illegal to have an abortion;
- threats of violence, which can inflict psychological suffering;
- the death penalty.

The prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment also means that states are obliged not to send any person forcibly to another country or territory where she or he would be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****THE RIGHT TO LIBERTY**

The right to liberty does not mean that people can never be detained or imprisoned, but it does say that there must be a very good reason for locking someone up, and that certain safeguards must be met.

Some of these safeguards include:

- An arrest or detention must be carried out according to the law.
- It must not be arbitrary. For example, an arrest or detention without a basis in law is arbitrary, or where the law is vague, over-broad or incompatible with other human rights such as the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly or belief.
- The person arrested must be told why they are being held, and which crime they are accused of committing.
- They must be brought to trial within a reasonable time, or they should be released. It must be the exception, rather than the rule, to deny someone bail (temporary release while awaiting trial), and instead to hold them in jail before their trial.

If any of these safeguards are not observed, there has been a violation of the right to liberty.

**FREEDOM FROM ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION**

Everyone has the right to liberty. The arrest and detention of anyone without legal basis or due process of law, or because they are peacefully expressing their opinion, is arbitrary.

There are specific rights designed to protect people in detention from abuses. Everyone has the right:

- to be informed immediately of the reasons for their arrest and detention;
- to a lawyer from the moment of arrest;
- to inform their family of their situation;
- to know which authority is holding them and to have their detention registered immediately;
- to challenge the lawfulness of their detention in court.

**PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE**

Under international human rights law, the accused person should be presumed innocent until proven guilty. Therefore, a suspect should only be detained before their trial where it is considered reasonable and strictly necessary. Consideration should be given to the nature and seriousness of the alleged crime, as well as the circumstances of the individual, including their age and health.



© Imoleayo Olayinka

Imoleayo Michael

## HANDOUT

## IMOLEAYO MICHAEL'S STORY

When young people demonstrated in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, in October 2020, Imoleayo Michael joined them. They were marching against violence, extortion and killings by the police's Special Anti-Robbery Squad, popularly known as SARS. Imoleayo, a young computer programmer, promoted the marches on Twitter and Facebook, using the viral hashtag #EndSARS.

Two weeks later, in the early hours of 13 November, 20 armed men raided Imoleayo's home. They shattered his bedroom window and pointed a gun at him, forcing him to open his front door. Once inside, they seized his mobile phones and computer, then locked his wife, elderly mother and seven-month-old son in a room. They even disconnected the power supply to the streetlights around his house.

The armed men took Imoleayo to the headquarters of the state security service, where they held him in an underground cell for 41 days without access to a lawyer or his family. While there, he was cuffed, blindfolded and chained to a steel cabinet. He was also forced to sleep on a bare floor. All he had to eat was some porridge mixed with stones. Security officers interrogated him a total of five times.

Imoleayo suffered pneumonia and was eventually released on bail in December 2020. He's facing trumped-up charges of "conspiracy with others to disturb public peace" and "disturbing public peace".

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*Imoleayo Michael is currently facing charges of conspiracy with others to disturb public peace.*



# 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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