



## Guide to being a College Rep

Cambridge University Amnesty International

As an Amnesty college rep you are part of a Cambridge wide network of Amnesty reps who hold Amnesty events, normally centred around letter writing, in their colleges.

There is also a central Amnesty exec committee who run university wide campaigns and events. On this committee there is a **College Group Support Officer** whose job is to help you. The contact email for the exec is: [exec@cuamnesty.org.uk](mailto:exec@cuamnesty.org.uk) . For more information about being a college group support officer and CUAJ you can also go to the Facebook groups called ‘Cambridge University Amnesty International’ and ‘Amnesty College Reps’.



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### Letter writing works!

Amnesty International is the world’s largest human rights organisation and letter writing is our best opportunity to stop specific human rights abuses. Amnesty estimates that letter writing efforts have led to positive results in approximately one third of cases. Amnesty letters have helped influence government leaders, free prisoners of conscience, launch investigations, prevent torture and stop executions. Below are just a few examples of people helped by Amnesty letters.

*Dr Mohamed Jalal Ahmed Hashim, a prominent opponent of the construction of the Kajbar Dam in Sudan, was arrested on June 16th. He was released from detention on*



*August 25th. He expressed his sincere thanks to Amnesty International, explaining that so many faxes arrived that the security services holding him suspected that he was a very important person with many contacts worldwide. Since several of the faxes mentioned his diabetes, prison medical staff started to check his diabetes every day.*

*When Urgent Action letter-writers sent messages of support to a family of a man killed by military police in Brazil, it obliged the authorities to acknowledge the existence of their community. They said: "When the Urgent Action letters began to arrive, it was the first time the postal services entered our favela."*

*Urgent Action appeals helped to protect Colombian human rights defenders Astrid Manrique and Yolima Quintero after they received death threats. Yolima Quintero said "I have boxes and boxes of appeals sent on our behalf by Urgent Action letter-writers... I have no doubt those letters saved our lives...Urgent Actions are a powerful way to hold our government accountable... **Your support is the oxygen that keeps us going.**"*

## **Advertising your group**

Make sure you go to your college Freshers' fair with some sign up sheets- we can give you materials to have a stall and this is a great way to get names on your mailing list and to meet interested people.

Advertise your events in college, with posters (we have sample posters we can send you) and bulletins on your college mailing list.

Consider setting up a Facebook group for your college group.

## **Using your mailing list**

Your college has an Amnesty mailing list which can be managed at the address: **amnesty-<college>@srcf.ucam.org** . Instructions for using the list can be found in Appendix 2.

When someone is added to this list they get emails from the central university Amnesty group as well as the college specific emails you send. When people sign up onto the central Amnesty mailing list (for instance at the CUSU societies' fair) they will be put on their college list, so **it's really important that you use this list** to send emails.

## **Financing your group**

Your main expenditure should be on postage, although you may well incur some other costs, such as buying food and stationary for your letter writing meetings (food is great at letter writing, but make sure you don't spend too much on it). To keep postage costs down **make sure you use air letters** to write your letters on (just ask for these at the Post Office).



Any college group that can receive college/JCR funding should do so. Many colleges and JCRs give out substantial funding to college societies, although at some colleges your group may have to have its own bank account for holding these funds. Talk to your JCR treasurer about how your college Amnesty society can get funding. If you do have a college bank account **make absolutely sure you hand over the account when you leave Cambridge**. Try and avoid having a bank account if you can as failure to hand over college bank accounts properly has lost CUIAI hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds. HSBC (in market square) is experienced with society bank accounts- they might be a good place to go.

CUIAI will also provide some funding for college groups. Details are below:

1. CUIAI will reimburse all postage (stamps and airletters) and stationary that facilities letter writing (pens, papers and envelopes) should the funding of your college fails to cover it completely.
2. We understand that not every college JCR allows their funding to be used on ents items. CUIAI will be able to reimburse up to £12 per term per college for ents items (e.g. food, drinks)
3. If you are organising an event in your college and you have informed the CUIAI exec that this can be advertised as a uni-wide event, then CUIAI would be able to reimburse all ents items outside the £12 quota. Please inform us beforehand!
4. Please keep all your receipts for reimbursement and sent them to the CUIAI Treasurer at the end of *\*each\** term, with your name, college, email and the name that the reimbursement cheque should be made payable to.

## Writing Amnesty Letters

As a college rep your main job is to get letters written in your college. Every week you will be sent some Amnesty Urgent Actions by the College Group Support officer which your group can write letters about. If you ever need extra actions or want actions during the holidays then just email the college group support officer and they'll be provided.

The most cost effective way to write Amnesty letters is **to buy air letters from the post office**. A letter writing guide can be found in Appendix 1. Different groups write letters in different ways. Some meet every week or every fortnight, and others hold a couple of big letter writing events a term. Consider teaming up with other college reps for a bigger event.

Try and keep an accurate record of how many letters your group writes so we can keep track of how many we send in Cambridge.

## Available Resources

CUIAI has loads of resources available for the use of your group, and we can order more through Amnesty International UK. Please contact us if you want to use



anything and we can get it to you whenever you need it. The list below is just a sample of the materials we have available- let us know if there's anything else you need.

- Posters
- Stickers
- Balloons
- Badges
- Collecting tins
- Action cards for signatures
- Information packs on campaigns

## **Ideas for events in your college**

Lots of different colleges hold different kinds of events to write letters and get people involved. Below is just a sample of events that have been held- feel free to be inventive! When **publicising your event** ask the exec to advertise it on the main Amnesty mailing list and Facebook group which reach **thousands of people!** Let the exec committee know about it in good time and we'll make sure it gets promoted. Do take advantage of this!

You can always team up with other college groups or the central university group to make your event even bigger.

### **Weekend of the Letter**

CUAI holds university wide 'Weekend of the Letter' events where we try to get as many Amnesty letters written over a weekend as possible. Reps are very much encouraged to try and do something on this weekend- between them reps have managed to get thousands of letters written over the course of a weekend.

### **Film night**

Host a film night with letter writing. We have a list of human rights related films if you're struggling to think of anything. You could do this in conjunction with your college film society if you have one.

### **Superformal**

Get your college to host a superformal, get donations on the door and put action cards or letters on the tables. You could have a letter writing session before or afterwards.

### **Greeting cards party**

Amnesty UK runs an annual greeting cards campaign between November and January. Cards with a friendly greeting or message of solidarity are sent to someone who is in danger or unjustly imprisoned. It offers hope and encouragement to the people who receive our cards. It can also help bring about change - the impression their international mail makes on police, prison staff or political authorities can help keep them safe. You could have an end of term party in college where you make and send cards. We can provide you with a set of case sheets.

### **Club night or party**



Host an event for Amnesty in your college bar with drinks and music. Alternatively have late night (or even overnight) letter writing with films and refreshments.

### **Raffle**

Have a letter writing raffle- write letters to get tickets. Lots of local shops are happy to donate prizes.

### **Talk or debate**

Perhaps team up with your college politics or debating society to have an Amnesty related talk or debate. Get people who attend to write letters or sign action cards.

## **Team up with other groups**

Some reps from different colleges have clubbed together to hold bigger (or even university wide) letter writing sessions- this is really fun, can get loads of letters written, and is a great way to meet other Amnesty supporters! If you want to get in contact with other college reps ask the College Group Support Officer for their details. You can also go to the 'Amnesty College Reps' Facebook group at <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=10836582202> for other reps' details.

This has been really successful in the past, especially when several colleges with small groups have worked together.

## **Get more involved!**

The central CUAJ committee runs campaigns and events throughout the year (such as the cage on King's lawn every term, or our major Lent term campaign based on a specific Amnesty issue such as 'Control arms' or 'Terrorism, Security and Human Rights'). We're always looking for people to get involved, volunteer at an event, help with campaigning, and join the central committee.

For details of what's going on and how to volunteer email: [exec@cuamnesty.org.uk](mailto:exec@cuamnesty.org.uk)

## **Appendix 1: Guide to letter writing**

### **Some General tips:**

- Speed is vital if you are taking an Urgent Action - a brief letter, covering all the recommended action points listed in the appeal is all that is necessary.
- Letters should be brief, factual and polite. Take special care not to sound aggressive or offensive. Write in a natural style.
- Keep letters factual and to the point. Details to include will be outlined in the action.
- Don't discuss ideology or politics - Amnesty International opposes human rights violations, not governments or political systems.
- Be positive - make a clear request and write as if the reader is open to reasoned argument.



- If you are writing on behalf of an individual case, give the full name of the prisoner or the individual/s at risk
- Say a little about yourself if you want to - for example something about your occupation or background to show that all kinds of people everywhere are concerned about human rights.
- Write in English unless you can get an accurate translation.
- You can mention that you are an Amnesty member or you can write as a concerned individual.
- Letters can be hand-written or typed.
- Use a conclusion that encourages a reply.

### **Sample Letter**

*I am writing about the case of (name) who was arrested on (date) and (place). I understand he is in poor health, and has been held without charge for several months. Please use your influence to ensure that he receives medical treatment and that he is charged with an internationally recognisable criminal offence and promptly brought to court or released.*

*Please could you let me know what medical treatment (name) has received and when, and tell me when he will be charged?*

*I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.*

*Your respectfully*

*(Your name)*

### **What to do with answers to your letters**

Once in a while you may get a reply! But your letter may get no response at all. Do not despair. Someone has read your letter, and if it is one of hundreds or thousands of others it will have an impact.

*If you do get a reply:*

Send a copy of the reply to AI, identifying the case, explaining where you saw it. It will be referred to the relevant expert who will judge what further action, if any, should be taken. If the reply is positive, send a positive letter back to the writer.

### **Frequently asked questions**

*Who should I write to?*

The appeals always give full details. You could also send a copy to the relevant embassy in London. You may be asked to send letters to heads of state or leaders of opposition groups, or to officials directly responsible for the victim's welfare, such as prison governors or local police chiefs.

*How do I identify myself?*

Always give your name and address - this shows that the letter is genuine and personal. It also shows the open nature of Amnesty's activities.

*Should I use Amnesty International's name?*



You can decide whether to write as an individual or as part of an international organisation.

*Should I type or use handwriting?*

Typing and clear handwriting are equally good - the main thing is to get the letter written and sent.

*Is it worth writing appeals in a foreign language?*

Write in your own language unless you are very confident of writing an accurate appeal in a foreign one.

*Can I write directly to victims of human rights abuses?*

Most letters are written to officials and not to prisoners. Prisoners may only be allowed to receive a limited number of letters, and their families should have priority. However, you can write directly to prisoners or victims as part of the annual Greetings Card Campaign, which runs from November to January.

*Is it risky for me to sign my letters? Will that country refuse to let me visit it in the future?*

We have no record of this happening. Thousands of Amnesty members sign their letters without experiencing any problems. However if you have business or other close links with a country and have any concerns, then you may prefer to choose another appeal case.

## **Appendix 2: Using your college mailing list**

### **How to access and update the college group mailing lists**

College groups are strongly encouraged to use the Amnesty college group mailing lists. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. Anybody added to the college group mailing list will also receive e-mails to the university-wide mailing list, containing information on CUIAI meetings, current campaigns and news.
2. People who want to be removed from the mailing list can do so independently of the rep by clicking on a link; this eases the administrative burden of e-mail list management.
3. The e-mail list software will automatically remove those individuals who have left the university, again making it easier for the rep.
4. Handover to the new rep is easier as the e-mail addresses of list members are online, rather than on the rep's computer.

### **Sending e-mails to your mailing list**

To send an email to everyone on your college list, just send your email to:

**[amnesty-kings@srcf.ucam.org](mailto:amnesty-kings@srcf.ucam.org)**

This guide uses King's as an example, but you will need to replace kings with your college name as it is written in this list:



caius, catz, christs, churchill, clare, clarehall, corpus, darwin, downing, emmanuel, fitz, girton, homerton, hugheshall, jesus, kings, lucycav, magdalene, newhall, newnham, pembroke, peterhouse, queens, robinson, steds, stjohms, selwyn, sidney, trinity, tithall, wolfson.

*Some things to note:*

- Try not to CC people: It is better to add them to the list properly, as described below. The system will not send out emails that are CC'd to more than ten other addresses.
- Avoid attachments: It is best not to send attachments to mailing lists as these tend to annoy some people, especially Computer Scientists.

### **Adding people to your mailing list**

The ONLY thing you should need to do to your mailing list is add or remove people as described in this document. Please do not change any of the other settings: your college list is a part of the University-wide list doing things other than adding or removing people could stop the main list working.

1) Go to: <http://www.srcf.ucam.org/mailman/admin/amnesty-kings>

This guide uses King's as an example, but you will need to replace kings with your college name as it is written in this list:

caius, catz, christs, churchill, clare, clarehall, corpus, darwin, downing, emmanuel, fitz, girton, homerton, hugheshall, jesus, kings, lucycav, magdalene, newhall, newnham, pembroke, peterhouse, queens, robinson, steds, stjohms, selwyn, sidney, trinity, tithall, wolfson

2) You will be asked to enter the password, which you should have:

If you don't know the password, just email the College Group Support Officer.

3) Click 'Membership Management'

4) Click on 'Mass subscription':

5) Type the email addresses you want to add in the box:':

You will need to scroll down to see the box. Make sure you put the full email address (you need to put @cam.ac.uk).

6) Scroll down again and click 'Submit your changes':

7) When you have clicked submit, the next page will have one message for each email address you added:

If it says 'Error subscribing -- Already a member' that is not a problem: the person will definitely get emails on your list. Most addresses will be in the 'Successfully subscribed' list.

### **Removing people from your mailing list**



1) *At the end of the year/when people have left Cambridge:* The software that runs the list will detect if people's addresses are no longer active and automatically remove them. You don't have to do anything.

2) *If people ask to be removed:* People can remove themselves from the mailing list, and shouldn't ask you to do it for them. Each message contains a footer which says something like:

Cambridge Uni Amnesty International  
<http://www.cuamnesty.org.uk>

Unsubscribe:  
<http://www.srcf.ucam.org/mailman/listinfo/amnesty-kings>

If people want to be removed from the list, just tell them to go to the address at the bottom of their email and follow the instructions there. However, if you want to, you can remove people by following exactly the same process as outlined above for adding people, but choose 'Mass removal' rather than 'Mass subscription'.