

## GUIDE: How to lobby your MP

**AMNESTY**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
Aotearoa New Zealand



### What is 'lobbying'?

Lobbying is using your right to meet your Member of Parliament (MP) as one of his or her constituents. You can do this either in your constituency or by visiting Parliament.

An MP should regard you as a constituent, whether you voted for them or not. MPs are meant to “represent” each constituent’s interests. This does not mean that they have to agree with you. But it means they should listen and be prepared to pass on your views to the Government.

You should therefore use a meeting with your MP to try to:

- Influence their views
- Persuade them that many other constituents share your concerns
- Ask them to pass on your concerns to the Government, and
- Ask them to take appropriate action
- Establish a relationship so you can engage in future

In order to get the most out of your meeting with your MP, it is important to prepare effectively.

### Contacting your MP

#### **Finding their contact details**

There is a downloadable list of contact details available on the [www.parliament.nz](http://www.parliament.nz) website.

(<http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/MPP/MPs/Contact/4/c/0/00H00OCMPMPsContact1-Contact-list.htm> )

#### **For telephone calls**

- Expect a staff member to answer your call.
- Be respectful, courteous, and to the point. Ask: “Are you the person I should speak to in order to convey a message to and/or request a meeting with [Name]?”
- Remember to introduce yourself and say where you are from.
- Say you are calling as a member of their constituency and to discuss his/her stand on your concerns regarding xxxx and to request a meeting as soon as possible.

## For letters and/or emails

- Address your letter or fax correctly (i.e. Dear Mr Smith)
- Be respectful and polite in what you write
- Let your candidate know why you are writing (include a subject line)
- Why this human rights concern is an important issue, and why they should be aware of it in their role as an MP. (e.g. New Zealand has a proud human rights legacy that Parliamentarians must honour, etc.)
- Conclude by requesting a response or a meeting, and thanking them for their attention.
- Under your signature, print your name and home address.
- Keep it short! MPs are busy, so remember that it is better to get straight to the point, request a meeting and elaborate on the issues face-to-face.

**Note:** If you are having trouble getting hold of your MP call into their electorate office and speak with someone there. Then follow up with an email and/or phone call.

## Before the meeting

### Know your MP's history

- If you are going to see your MP on a specific issue, it makes sense to research what they think about it in advance, so you can prepare for the argument they are likely to make.
- The first thing you need to do is check if there is party policy on your issue. Have a look on:
  - <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/> where you can find media releases for each MP
  - The political parties' website
  - Some MP's have their own individual websites
  - Amnesty International's Pre-Election Questionnaire Responses (from 2008) available at <http://www.amnesty.org.nz/election2008>
- Have a look at their record as an individual MP – you can see whether they take a particular interest in this area, and whether they have rebelled or stayed loyal to party policy.
- It is also handy to know if your MP has any particular portfolio or responsibility for their Party or Parliament. Portfolios can be searched at <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/portfolios>

### Know your subject

- Even if you're visiting your MP to discuss a national issue, it's always important to have a *local* angle. The MP wants to know how this issue affects his or her constituents. Talk about how this issue is affecting others in the constituency (e.g. *this issue is of concern to xx number of Amnesty members*). Case studies and anecdotes are always good.

- It's worth dropping in that many people you have spoken to share the same concerns, or for example how many people there are in the constituency it is affecting, so the MP is aware of how many voters you're talking about here!
- Be specific about what you want the MP to do for you. Do you want them to write to the relevant minister? Submit a parliamentary question? Approach your local councillors? Express concern to their counterparts overseas?  
*If you're not sure what they could do, ask the MP what they can do to help. They're the experts on what MPs do!*

### During the meeting

- Be punctual: MPs are busy people and if you are late you may not get to see them at all.
- When you arrive at the meeting remember to
  - Ask how much time is available (and adapt your meeting plan accordingly)
  - Begin by thanking them for the making the time to meet
  - Reiterate that you are a member of Amnesty International
  - Outline what you would like to discuss in the meeting (this is important if you have more than 1 issue to discuss)
- If you are meeting with your MP with other members of the constituency have a role for each visitor and tell the MP who is coming. Ideally, one should facilitate/lead the meeting and one should be responsible for making notes so you can follow up later.
- Offer the MP something in writing, outlining the points you have made. If the information is not to hand send it promptly after the meeting. Ensure you have a copy of Amnesty's report or media release if available for the MP.
- If something comes up that you weren't prepared for, don't be afraid to tell them that you'll get back to them with the answer. Don't try to blag it! Just make sure that you do follow through as promised.
- Always be polite and tolerant of differing views. The MP may not be willing to work with you on this, but don't close off the chance to work together on future issues.

### After the meeting

- Always write to thank your MP(s) after the meeting, and make sure you follow up on any promises that they have made to you, for example, asking questions in Parliament or writing to the Secretary of State on your behalf. They should send you copies of any correspondence.  
**Remember** to follow-up and encourage them to join our AI parliamentary network (send them more information if appropriate)
- Feedback to Amnesty what happened at the meeting – an email to [advocacy.intern1@amnesty.org.nz](mailto:advocacy.intern1@amnesty.org.nz) outlining what was discussed and the outcome. This strengthens our relationship and enables our work to be more

effective as if we engage with the government on the same issue we are aware of their position and what has been said etc

- Now that you've established a working relationship with your MP, keep in touch with them, informing him/her of any new information relating to the issue previously discussed – or any other information you think may be useful to them (such as media releases, new reports from Amnesty etc). Remember to always keep it relevant and to the point.

## **General Amnesty International Concerns/Questions to ask the MP**

- What is your political parties' human rights priorities/agenda?
- Have they heard of Amnesty International Parliamentary Network?
- Have they received and read the Parliamentarians Newsletter? (we send these out monthly to all MPs) It is good to print out a copy of the newsletter (downloadable on our website) to take along so you're up to date with our advocacy work at AIANZ and also to give them a copy)
- Would you like to receive more information on AIANZ's work with the NZ Government and other governments e.g. in the Pacific? If so, what is most useful (e.g. press releases, reports, the AIPN newsletter in hardcopy, by email etc)
- What is your parties' or personal position on New Zealand having not adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?
- What is the government's position on violence against women?
- Would the government like further research and information on the issue of violence against women?

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### **Remember, it is your right to lobby your MP**

*Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.*

*The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed...*

Article 21, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

