



RAPID RESPONSE NETWORK FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Even though Kiwis are a small part of Amnesty International's global Rapid Response Network, how does our activism make an impact?

New Zealanders make a big impact through Rapid Response appeals for the following reasons:

New Zealanders are amongst the first to respond to appeals due to our timeline.

Appeals are regularly released overnight New Zealand time by Amnesty International's Research Headquarters the International Secretariat (IS) in London. New Zealanders usually receive appeals at the start of the day.

Action taken within the first 24-hours is key to contributing to the up-to 20% success rate in achieving an improvement for an individual or community at risk. These improvements include getting access to a lawyer or family; speeding up judicial proceedings; or being transferred to a safer location with better conditions of detention.

By taking action rapidly, even if it's only by a few people, Amnesty International members highlight to governments and decision makers around the world, that we know what is going on. Practically, it means that human rights abuses such as torture are less likely to occur.

2. How are Rapid Responses researched and distributed?

The International Secretariat receives information about possible cases from a variety of sources including the families, colleagues, friends and lawyers of those at risk, local human rights groups, prisoners released from detention and even newspaper reports. Once the researchers have verified the facts of a case, they decide whether Amnesty International has the mandate and the resources to take action. If so - and if the situation is pressing enough to require an action - an appeal is drafted and forwarded to relevant staff where it is edited and issued as an Action. This can happen within a few hours.

It is then circulated to Co-ordinators around the world. New Zealand's Rapid Response Team is located at Amnesty International's office in Auckland. You can contact us on rapidresponse@amnesty.org.nz.

PARTICIPATING IN THE RAPID RESPONSE NETWORK

3. Can I ask others to take action on the Rapid Response I receive?

Yes, we'd be delighted if you could encourage friends and family, school or work colleagues, social group members to take action too. Members of our Rapid Response Network already circulate

the appeals they receive amongst fellow students and hold regular letter-writing meetings within their communities (school, faith, book group) to give more people the information and opportunity to take action too.

We welcome all members of the Rapid Response Network publicising their activism and getting multiple signatures from concerned New Zealanders on letters they have drafted. We are regularly looking at ways of adding value to the activism our members already undertake and would love to hear from you if you have great ideas to share with the Network.

Useful outreach in the past has included:

- members working in a legal firm getting signatures from all staff, and letters from some on company letterhead on behalf of a lawyer at risk
- members with links to the media getting both media coverage and letters written by journalists on behalf of a journalist who had received death threats in Latin America.
- a priest at risk of human rights abuses was spoken about from the pulpit during Sunday Mass, with the Catholic congregation encouraged to sign a letter after the service.
- an English teacher using an appeal to teach students to write a letter – a popular exercise because writing letters to save a life added a real sense of urgency to the lesson.

So please do consider “exporting” your activism to others.

4. I would like a wider variety of countries represented in the appeals I receive. Can you do this?

We try to give each participant a political and geographic variety of appeals throughout the year but are not always able to do so due to the following reasons:

- We prioritise sending out appeals from the Asia Pacific region – as the region New Zealand is most likely to be able to influence.
- Human rights abuses requiring immediate action occur more frequently in some countries than others. The lack of appeals on a particular country does not necessarily mean that Amnesty International is not taking any action against potential abuses. Rather, Amnesty International might be seeking more information on cases of interest or engaging on the cases through advocacy or other campaigning.
- The usefulness of an appeal depends to a large extent on the quick receipt of reliable information. In some countries, channels of communication are well-established, while in other countries information on individual cases reaches Amnesty International too slowly for us to immediately react and issue a Rapid Response.
- We prioritise appeals in alignment with our priority campaigns.

5. Can I receive more or less appeals each month, and how do I go about doing this?

Yes. You can receive daily through to monthly appeals (please let us know what your preferences are, should they change). To change the frequency of your appeal emails, email rapidresponse@amnesty.org.nz with the following information:

The frequency at which you currently receive UAs (e.g. daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly)and;
The frequency you would like to change to.

6. Is it possible to take a holiday from receiving appeals?

Yes. Just email rapidresponse@amnesty.org.nz with your stop/start dates.

7. Why are there time limits on appeals?

We state a final date for action at the end of each appeal to help us co-ordinate our campaigns. If we receive important news before this end date, we will immediately relay the news to you. If we receive news after the action period expires, we know that you will no longer be working on the case, and we can include the new information in the follow-up appeal. The time limit also serves to remind us that appeals are, by definition, urgent and require an immediate response.

8. How do I know that my letters have an impact?

Since Amnesty International's inception in 1961, the grassroots efforts of our members have contributed to the release of tens of thousands of prisoners worldwide. The Rapid Response Network has been a key tool in mobilising public pressure to end grave human rights abuses and to demand justice for those at risk. Our campaigning remains firmly rooted in the power of individuals working in support of others who need protection. Where we get updates or good news we alert these to Network members who have been sent those appeals.

9. Wouldn't it just be easier to sign a petition?

Amnesty International does have on-going petitions connected to specific local and global campaigns. However, our impact comes from the fact that governments receive letters, emails, and faxes, social media messages and phone calls from individuals around the world, voicing their concerns – in their own words - about human rights abuses within hours, days, and weeks, of an appeal being sent. **The more diverse and personal responses are, the more effective we will be.** This is why we encourage members to write their own messages when taking action.

10. Why are we increasingly asked to take action via social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

Amnesty International is always assessing the best way to contact the decision maker/s we seek to influence. Decision-makers are increasingly active and more accessible on social media. And in some cases there are dedicated attempts to block letters from Amnesty International, such as Iran. Activism on social media platforms offers us a speedier more public way to raise concerns.

11. Can you provide more background information on the cases?

We always provide relevant information. However, appeals contain less detail than other AI materials like our reports and policy papers. Sometimes this is because we just do not have the time or opportunity to get more information. Other times, it is because of our own space limitations. However, if we do have additional information we provide links to where to find that.

We design each appeal to be the equivalent of no more than two pages so that it can be quickly and economically distributed. Just as Amnesty International staff rely on its members to write appeals, members rely on careful and concise documentation from the Amnesty International research staff. Amnesty International has an online library of past reports and press releases indexed by country here <https://www.amnesty.org/en/>. These resources can be useful for learning more about patterns of human rights abuses in specific countries.

LETTER WRITING QUESTIONS

12. What sort of letter is most effective?

Remember that you are writing on behalf of a specific individual(s) or community(ies) who can potentially be harmed as well as helped by our efforts. Because of this, it is important that we consider the tenor and content of our appeals.

An effective letter is both firm and courteous. It gives an indication of who you are and why you are concerned for the person. It is written on the assumption that the government is open to reason and that the recipient of your appeal may not know the specifics which pertain to the individual victim for whom you are writing. The letter could emphasise personal concern for the country's international reputation.

Always ask that the official not only improve the human rights situation of the individual(s) or community(ies) at risk for whom you are writing, but also keep you informed as to any developments in the case. Stress the fact that your concern for human rights is not politically motivated, but in line with basic principles of international law.

You may want to avoid references to 'democracy' and 'democratic principles', as they may be viewed by appeal recipients as an attempt to impose a Western ideal.

Finally, to be effective, it is important to keep your letter brief and to the point - no more than a page in length.

When writing to non-English speaking recipients, use:

- Simple language and grammar; and
- Avoid colloquial (slang) expressions.
- Please only write in a foreign language if you are fluent in it

You'll find a downloadable letter writing guide via our website here <https://www.amnesty.org.nz/join-rapid-response-network>.

13. Can I write on my company letterhead?

Unless you are authorised to make such a decision, ask your supervisor before using company letterhead. Some companies may object to the use of their letterhead for human rights advocacy; others may encourage you to do so. If you own the company – go for it!

14. Can I hand write my letters?

Yes. We encourage people to express themselves in a variety of ways, as long as the message is polite, non-political and legible. Handwriting your letter also adds diversity and a personal touch to the appeal responses. If you prefer to draw a picture or send a poem etc feel free to do so.

15. Is it more effective to send letters representing myself as a member of Amnesty International or simply as an interested individual?

We encourage letter writers to use their professional or academic affiliations in their correspondence with government officials. You can refer to Amnesty International as your information source, but it may be more effective to simply state that you have learned about this person's plight and are therefore concerned.

Where Amnesty International should not be mentioned we'll let you know

16. Why include a sample letter with the appeal?

We believe that much of our effectiveness comes from the diversity of letters, postcards, faxes and emails which we, as a network, produce. From school students adding drawings to their handwritten letters and envelopes to the professional writing on letterhead, we express ourselves in different ways which, cumulated, results in a rich mix of expressions of concern that makes for more effective campaigning. However, you'll find sample letters included in each appeal for guidance or to use if you prefer.

17. Why do we ask you to document your action taking in every appeal?

When you take action on line your activism is automatically documented. That does not occur with your rapid response activism or any other off-line activism you take. We are keen to document all our members and supporters action taking.

Here's what we do with that information:

- We update your membership record with your action-taking;
- We draw on this data to assess what issues or countries are of most interest to our members;
- We feed that data to our research HQ the International Secretariat when they ask us for updates and to allow them to better assess the human rights impact we have together. This information is also fed back to the people and communities we take action on behalf of, as further evidence that they are not alone.

Updating your action taking will take about 3 minutes to complete via our on-line form <https://bit.ly/2XNqxIs>.

If you are updating your action taking via our form and have still not requested your membership number from us, please do email info@amnesty.org.nz with this request. It will speed up filling in our Take action form.

We will ask you for your name, the subject of the appeal you have written and the appeal number, which can be found at the bottom of the appeal and looks like this: UA: 158/10 Index: AMR 51/062/2010 USA Date: 12 July 20xx..

WHAT DO I DO IF....?

19. What should I do if I my email bounces back and does not reach the intended recipient?

When an email address is available for an official, it is included in the address section of the appeal. The email addresses listed represent the most up-to-date information we had available at the time of the appeal's release. If your email bounces back to you or you receive an "undeliverable" notice, please forward the email response to rapidresponse@amnesty.org.nz, and we will explore other email addresses. In some instances, a full inbox is the cause for the delivery failure, and can be due to the amount of emails we have generated, and therefore may only be temporary. For this reason, try resending the email two or three times.

20. What should I do when I receive a reply to my letters from a government official?

Please send us the original or copy of any **substantive reply** you receive. There is no need to forward replies which simply confirm receipt of your letter. However, if the reply is in a language you can't read and you are unable to assess its content please do forward to us.

When sending us the responses to your letters please include the reference number of the case. This can be found at the bottom of the appeal and looks like: UA: 158/10 Index: AMR51/062/2010 USA Date: 12 July 20xx. This helps us keep track of the responses for each case.

We regularly ask you to send copies of letters you write to diplomatic representatives of the target country in New Zealand. Replies from such sources often provide useful insights that the first addressee does not provide.

Replies provide important information to Amnesty International researchers who monitor the reaction of officials to our actions.

OTHER ACTIVISM OPTIONS

21. Are there other on-line activism options for me to engage in?

Yes. Our Rapid Response Network is only one part of our online activism.

Regularly or as a crisis arises we send out e-actions to our members and supporters within our Urgent Action Network. More information here [Take Action | Amnesty International NZ](#)

22. Can I join with other Amnesty members to take action?

Yes, if you have an interest in joining a local group or regional team in your area and attending regular meetings with like-minded souls taking action for human rights please visit <http://www.amnesty.org.nz/get-involved> and register as either an Advocate (over 25) or Youth Advocate (25 and under) here <https://www.amnesty.org.nz/amnesty-community/join>

Many of our groups host letter writing events also. And every year we participate in the global Write for Rights (W4R) letter writing marathon from mid November to mid December. If you would like to participate or host your own W4Rs event please visit <https://write.amnesty.org.nz/>