

ACTION FILES



A Guide For Action

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I. IMPORTANT ACTION FILE INFORMATION

Action File (AF) assigned to group#: _____

AF sent to: _____ Date sent: _____

AF Coordinator: _____

Action File Reference#: _____

AF Country: _____

AF Concern: _____

AF Prisoner (subject) name(s):

Who is my Country Specialist ? (See pg. 4 for explanation of Country "Co-Group" Coordinators)

Your Country Specialist is: _____

Country he/she covers: _____

Here is their contact information: _____

You should not hesitate to contact your Country Specialist (also known as a "Country Coordinator") They can and should be a vital resource in your Action File work. Please contact them within one month of receiving your Action File and update them regularly on your casework.

Casework Program contact:

Andréa Solomon, Casework Assistant, Amnesty International, 730 Peachtree Street NE,
Suite 1060, Atlanta, GA 30308 / **phone#:** (404) 876-5661 x19 / **email:** asolomon@aiusa.org

II. What is an Action File?

An Action File is a long-term human rights case that focuses on one individual, several individuals or a specific issue. Action Files can focus on any area of Amnesty International's mandate, including "disappearances," torture, prisoners of conscience, extrajudicial executions and the death penalty.

Action Files are created when an Amnesty research team decides that the long-term efforts of a small number of Amnesty activists would be the best way to approach a particular case. The research team compiles information about the case and target country into an Action File, which is then sent to the National Casework Office in Atlanta. Casework Program staff assign the Action File to an interested Amnesty group. Action File casework awards great responsibility and autonomy to volunteer groups and allows for extremely flexible and focused activism.

III. Contacts For Your Casework

Your Regional Office:

<i>Mid-Atlantic Region:</i>	Washington, D.C.	(202) 544-0200	aiusama@aiusa.org
<i>Midwest Region:</i>	Chicago, IL	(312) 427-2060	aiusamw@aiusa.org
<i>Northeast Region:</i>	Boston, MA	(617) 623-0202	aiusane@aiusa.org
<i>Southern Region:</i>	Atlanta, GA	(404) 876-5661	aiusaso@aiusa.org
<i>Western Region:</i>	Los Angeles, CA	(310) 815-0450	aiusala@aiusa.org

When to contact your regional office:

- If your Group Coordinator's contact information changes or if you have a new Grp.Coordinator
- If you need additional resources, such as videos or country reports
- If your group wants a speaker

The National Casework Program: Located in AIUSA's Southern Regional Office in Atlanta, the National Casework Program facilitates all of AIUSA's work on Action Files, Regional Action Networks and Special Focus Cases. The program also coordinates the Freedom Writers Network.

When to contact the Casework Program:

- If your AF coordinator's contact information changes or if you have a new AF coordinator
- If you can't reach your Country Specialist
- If you have a question or request that your Country Specialist is unable to help you with
- If you need an additional copy of the AF report form (see page 11 for AF reporting)
- If your group has discontinued work on your Action File
- If your group wants an additional Action File
- If your group would like a casework-oriented training

Country Coordination Groups: *Country Coordination Groups* (also known as "**co-groups**") are composed of **Country Specialists** - volunteers with expertise in both the Amnesty International movement and the particular country or region on which they work. *Co-Groups* work closely with group members in developing and implementing action strategies for casework. *Co-Groups* members monitor the political situation in a country, assist researchers at the International Secretariat, and serve as AIUSA's primary country specialists. **Please note: the term "Co-Group" does not refer to other groups sharing your case. Any AI groups sharing your case are referred to as "share groups."**
(Contact information for your Country Specialist is provided on page 2.)

When to contact your Country Specialist:

- When you first get your Action File, you should introduce yourself to the co-group coordinator as soon as possible
- When you decide on an action plan, it's a good idea to review it with your co-group coordinator
- When you have country or case-specific questions not covered in the AF materials
- When your group wants new ideas for dynamic approaches to your casework
- When your group wants guidance on doing actions that may be new to your group - such as outreach or home government work

What your group can expect from your Country Specialist:

- Practical, constructive advice on mandate and policy questions
- Background on the country and AI's strategies in the region
- Information about which actions are most effective and appropriate for your case/country
- Prompt replies to group inquiries
- Updated information about the country, government authority addresses, and changes in strategy
- Suggestions about how to strengthen group activities on the Action File
- Help with language translations
- Encouragement, constructive criticism and moral support

What your Country Specialist can expect from your group:

- Ongoing, effective work on the Action File by group members
- Timely notification of change of address or phone number
- Ongoing and prompt inquiries whenever questions, problems or concerns arise
- Copies of any and all correspondence received from the target country
- Consistent updates on group's action and future plans
- Encouragement, constructive criticism and moral support

It's a good idea for your group to have contact with your co-group coordinator at least quarterly. A strong, on-going relationship with a co-group member can greatly benefit your casework.

IV. A Casework Overview: Steps to Follow

STEP ONE: Choose a Case Coordinator

Decide who in your group will be responsible for coordinating work on the Action File. Although all group members should participate in AF work, it is very helpful if you set up an **Action File Team** within your group, consisting of several group members who have agreed to organize actions for the Action File. Within the AF team, identify one person to be the point person, or **AF coordinator**, for the AF. Send back the postcards enclosed with your case materials with the name, address, phone numbers and email address (if available) of your group's AF coordinator. Please be sure to let the Casework Office know if your Action File coordinator changes. [*Note: case updates from the London research team typically will be sent to your Group coordinator, who should then forward the information to the AF coordinator. For this reason, it is important to let your regional office know immediately if your Group Coordinator changes as well.*]

STEP TWO: Review the Materials

Review all materials included in the Action File and familiarize yourself with their contents. We recommend that you copy everything and keep it in a secure place. All case materials should be kept safe and handled only by members of your group. It's important to stay organized so that if the case is given to another group member to coordinate, he/she can easily access all needed materials. You'll notice that some of the documents included with your AF are marked as "INTERNAL" or "FOR AI MEMBERS ONLY." For security reasons, such materials should be circulated *only* among AI members.

STEP THREE: Contact your Co-group Coordinator

The co-group coordinator will be your primary resource person for your AF casework. Introduce yourself to her/him as soon as possible. (See page 4 for a more complete explanation of co-group coordinators.)

STEP FOUR: Gather Information

Gather as much information on the target country as you can handle. Learn about the culture, politics, people, alliances, economy and history of the country. Become educated on the issues involved in your case. The more informed you become about your case and the country's situation, the more effective your casework will be. (See page 12 for more info. on where to find country information.)

STEP FIVE: Plan a Strategy

Plan a Strategy. Short of executing the plan, coming up with an effective strategy for your case is the single most important element in good casework. Because of its importance, we devote all of section **VII, Developing an Action Plan**, to this step in your casework. (Page 9.)

STEP SIX: Contact Others

A few months after you receive your new Action File, London will send your group a list of the other Amnesty groups outside of the US who have adopted your case. Try to establish contact with at least two of these groups. Find out what kinds of action they are taking on your case and whether there are any projects you can work on together. Sometimes only one Amnesty AF group among five will receive a response letter from the target government or make contact with a prisoner's family. It's great if groups can share new case information and encourage each other's efforts.

STEP SEVEN: Get to Work

Get to Work! Put your plan into action and focus on achieving your short-term, and eventually your long-term, goals.

V. Action Options

Take ownership of your case. There are many interesting and effective actions a group of motivated activists can take on their case. Brainstorm ideas within your group about the many action options available to you in your casework and incorporate them into your strategy plan. Action can be classified into the following four categories. (Don't limit yourselves to one category; many successful actions incorporate all four.) Consider using the following techniques:

1. Direct Appeals



Direct Appeals are any efforts made to contact the target government, the prisoner or victim, or the victim's family. They include letters, phone calls, faxes, telegrams, embassy or consulate meetings and other methods of communication and correspondence. The research you do on the target country and its government will help you to decide who to pressure most intensely, and by what means. Remember, these are the people who have the power to give you what you want; the more pressure you can apply on these individuals, the more likely the goals of your case will be accomplished. Please send copies of any replies received by your group to the National Casework Office.

For groups with limited resources: The minimum level of activity in this category would be to ensure that government authorities in the target country receive at least 5 letters per month from your group. If you can correspond with the prisoner or other subject of the case, try to ensure that you send one letter per month to them on behalf of the group.

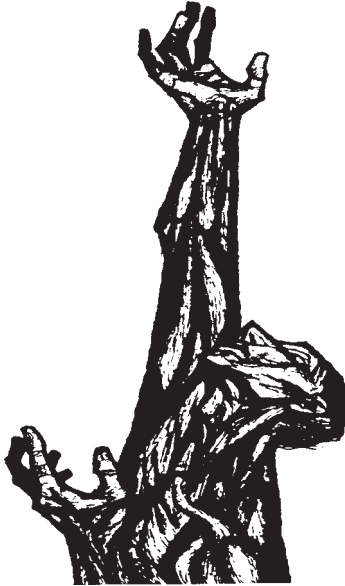
2. Publicity



Publicity Actions focus media attention on your casework or increase public awareness of your case and the situation in the target country. You and other group members are Amnesty's representatives to local media. Newspapers, public and commercial television and radio, cable, weekly publications and ethnic/foreign language media all have different audiences and contents. Send news releases, write letters to the editor, give interviews, stage rallies and demonstrations and create newsworthy events. **Remember to make your events visually oriented.** Editors will be most interested in stories with local angles, ties to larger news issues, and elements of human interest. See AI's "Media Guide for Groups" for more information on working effectively with the media.

Few government leaders want their nation to receive bad press in the United States. Publicity can be an effective tool in applying additional pressure on the target country. If your group is able to get media coverage, be sure to send a copy of the newspaper clipping to the target country's officials.

For groups with limited resources: The minimum level of activity in this category would be to get a letter-to-the-editor or an article about the prisoner or about your group's work into your local newspaper.



3. Targeted Outreach

Targeted Outreach includes soliciting organizations or people with a special influence on the target government to take action on behalf of the case. These include corporations doing business in the country, influential or well-known public figures, and people in your community with ethnic, religious, racial, political or other ties to the prisoner or issue. These organizations or individuals may have more influence with the target government than would the average citizen. For example, after doing some research, one AI group solicited letters from NBA team owners to influence a head of state who was a fan of professional basketball. Once your group has identified these key organizations or individuals, you can contact them and ask them to write a letter on behalf of your prisoner and exert whatever other means of pressure they have available.

Ethnic newspapers, churches, trade unions, college clubs and any other interested party can be good sources of support for your work. Such groups can be enlisted to help with letter-writing, mailings, petitions, publicity work and other aspects of your casework.

For groups with limited resources: The minimum level of activity in this category would be to contact at least one of the individuals or organizations listed under "Outreach" in the Action File case materials.

4. Home Government (U.S. Officials)



U.S. Government officials can have a great deal of influence over a target country's leaders. Your target country probably cares about its relations with the U.S.; it cares about the opinions and actions of U.S. politicians and other key U.S. government officials.

Officials and politicians can be asked to write letters, send telegrams, place a statement in government publications (such as the *Congressional Record*), speak at a public event, write a letter to the editor or op-ed column concerning your case, hold a press conference, enlist the support of his/her colleagues and provide you with information about others to contact as well as upcoming relevant legislation. Letters from your Member of Congress are more effective if they are sent directly to the target government or embassy, rather than to the U.S. State Dept.

When contacting U.S. Government officials, minimize the amount of work his or her staff must do to assist you by providing a draft letter for the staff to adapt. Work at building a constructive relationship with the selected official. Keep in mind that politicians answer to their constituents.

For groups with limited resources: The minimum level of activity in this category would be to contact your Member of Congress in the House of Representatives and ask them to write a letter on behalf of the subject(s) of your Action File.

VI. How to Work With Members of Congress

Congressional staffers are not necessarily human rights experts. They don't know your prisoner. If they take action on your case, they're doing it on faith. And if they don't know you or Amnesty, that's hard. You may need to work to convince them that acting on your case is the right thing to do.

Here's how:

1 Tell them about Amnesty. AI is a Nobel Peace Prize winner with more than 40 years' experience documenting human rights cases and is extremely rigorous about the facts.

2 If your case is a Prisoner of Conscience (POC), make sure you state the definition of a POC. Make sure to mention that POCs have not used or advocated violence.

3 If your case is not a POC, be clear about what you want the Member of Congress to do. Should they ask the target government to investigate allegations of torture, account for the whereabouts of a "disappeared" person, bring to justice the perpetrators of a political killing? These are things that a responsive Member of Congress should be willing to do.

4 Give them written information about the case, and ask if they would like a draft letter as an example. If you have arranged a meeting with your representative or his/her staffer, prepare the draft letter in advance and offer a copy of it along with background materials describing your case. Amnesty International country reports, press releases or a copy of the most recent Annual Report entry for your target country are good materials to pass out. You can check the Amnesty International website for recent reports on your target country. (<http://web.amnesty.org/library/engindex>)

(Note: Do not offer a copy of the Action File itself since it is an internal document.)

Additional Tips:

5 Ask for Something Specific - It doesn't do you much good to simply tell your officials that you care about an issue and leave it at that. You have to tell them specifically what you want them to do. Otherwise you will get little more than well-meaning sympathetic replies - no concrete action.

6 Be Persistent - You need to be persistent to get meetings with your representatives or their aides. You have to be persistent to get action. Follow-up. Call to see if they've taken the action you requested. Make it clear that you feel so strongly about the issue that you won't simply drift away.

7 Remember Your ABC's - Be Appreciative, Accurate, Brief and Courteous.

- **Be Courteous** - Always, always be courteous. Being abrasive is almost always counter-productive. And it gives them a good reason to ignore your request.

- **Be Brief** - Members of Congress and their staff are incredibly busy - and so are you. They appreciate it when you get to the point and respect their time. Also, your meeting or call might be interrupted. Get to your request in the first minutes.

- **Be Accurate** - Members of Congress and their staff need to see you as a credible source of information. Your credibility is vital in building a working relationship and getting action. Never bluff. No one expects you to know everything. If you don't know something, just say so.

- **Be Appreciative** - Thank your representatives and their staff for their time and for their hard work. Just as the fear of negative publicity is a deterrent to action, public praise is a powerful incentive to future action. Write a letter-to-the-editor of your local newspaper thanking your Representative for taking action on your case. (*Guidelines for writing a letter-to-the-editor are available from the Casework Office.*)

- (*For more resources for effective home government work, see Page 11*)

VII. Developing an Action Plan

Once your group has become familiar with your case and its circumstances, it's time to develop an action plan. You should have a strategy set within a month of receiving your case. We recommend that your entire group, or at least everyone interested in AF work, attend the strategizing session. A well-attended session will produce a greater number of ideas, as well as an accurate inventory of the resources available within your group.

- ◆ **What's the long-term goal of the case?** Is it the release of the prisoner, a fair and prompt trial, or the investigation of a human rights violation? Keep this goal in mind as you plan your actions.
- ◆ **Take an inventory of your group's resources and organizational considerations.** This list should include the number of people available to work on the case, budgetary concerns, as well as constraints and competing demands for your group's energy. Also include any relevant skills or contacts your group members possess.
- ◆ Next, **list the targets of your case.** Primary targets are those people who have the power to directly affect your overall goal. They are usually government officials from the target country. Secondary targets are individuals or organizations who influence or have power over the primary targets. They include U.S. political leaders, media and many others. Also list any allies or constituents your group could recruit to support the case. These could include any individual or group with ethnic, cultural, religious, political or other ties to the AF's victim or issue.
- ◆ Develop tactics aimed at each of the targets, as well as plans to incorporate the efforts of your allies and secondary targets. Take an integrated approach and **include tactics from each of the four types of action** (direct appeals, publicity, targeted outreach and home government). This will greatly increase the likelihood of meeting your goals.
- ◆ From these tactics, **make a list of goals.** Be realistic. Keep your overall goal in mind, but set "SMART" goals (SMART = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). *For example:* 99 letters written to 5 relevant government authorities on behalf of [prisoner] by [date]; *or* a benefit concert on behalf of [prisoner] at [local venue] on [date] at which you will get 200 signatures on petition for prisoner's release and an article in a local newspaper about the prisoner.
- ◆ After selecting a course of action, **match up group members and resources with tasks. Assign a time frame and deadlines to your work and goals.** Deliberate, timed escalation can be very effective, beginning with letters and community level work and expanding in size and level of influence over time. Keep this concept in mind when trying to enlist others in your work. For example, your state governor may be more inclined to help if he sees the involvement of local leaders and officials. Local leaders might be more receptive after seeing an article in a local newspaper. The local newspaper will be more willing to feature an article about your casework if there is a local angle with good visuals, like an event staged by your group.
- ◆ Be sure to **celebrate** your accomplishments and successes, large or small, as you achieve them.

VIII. Annual Action File Planning Sheet

Year: _____

AF Country: _____ Subject(s) of AF: _____

Ultimate goal of the case: prisoner release ____ fair and prompt trial ____ investigation ____

Perpretrators of specific human rights violations brought to justice ____

Other _____

Members of the group AF team:

Short-term SMART goals (*Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound*) **for this year:**

Direct Appeals:

Publicity:

Targeted Outreach:

Home Government work:

Other

IX. Updates

Updates containing any new information on your case, strategy suggestions, country information, etc. will be sent out by the research team in London when there are new developments in your case. (To ensure you receive these mailings, please make sure that the Casework Office has correct contact information for your **AF Coordinator**, and your regional office has correct contact information for your **Group Coordinator**.) Rest assured that even when there are no obvious changes in your AF's status, your persistence on the case may have a positive effect on your prisoner. On-going letter-writing and other forms of action on a prisoner's behalf can improve prison conditions for prisoners and may help protect them from being tortured.

X. Action File Reporting

Every October, you will be asked to report briefly on the activities your group undertook in the previous year on your Action File. This information will allow Amnesty International's researchers to better evaluate the impact of actions on the target country, and will help Amnesty USA to gauge the effectiveness of the AF. **Please assign someone in your group the job of case record keeper** who will keep track of what you do on the case, approximately how many letters are written, which Members of Congress you've approached, and what they have agreed to do for your case, etc. A sample AF report has been included with your AF.

XI. Resources

Additional casework resources available from the Casework Office:

The Casework Manual - a comprehensive guide to casework techniques, the 449-page Casework Manual contains numerous examples of AI groups' successful casework strategies and actions.

The Casework Video - a step-by-step guide to successful casework, featuring inspiring interviews with former prisoners and with Amnesty group members. (30 min.)

Enduring the Darkness: A Story of Conscience, Hope and Triumph - This is a moving account of the efforts of AIUSA Group 202 in Normal, Illinois, on behalf of a South Korean prisoner of conscience. The book presents actions the group took and includes many letters from the prisoner.

Working with the Media: A Guide for Groups - a booklet that describes how to get your group's actions and event covered by local media.

From AI's Legislative Office in Washington, D.C.:

The **Raise the Roof!** Video -- Listen to veteran Members of Congress and AI activists tell you how simple it is to enlist Members of Congress to become powerful advocates for human rights.

Sources of Country Information on the World Wide Web:

Amnesty International

For “Amnesty International Report 2004,” with entries on human rights concerns during 2003 in more than 155 countries, and for various country-specific reports or thematically-oriented reports, see:

www.amnestyusa.org (*Amnesty International USA*)

www.amnesty.org (*Amnesty International research headquarters - London*)

[The following are not Amnesty International sources of information. Their listing here should not be seen as an endorsement of views expressed on their website.]

The Library of Congress Country Studies

This source contains a series of studies on nations that include facts-at-a-glance and comprehensive sections on history, society, and culture. It provides more of a cultural perspective on nations than the aforementioned sites. This is possibly the most comprehensive source of country information available on the internet. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>

Infonation-

This is a tool published by the United Nations which compares the most up-to-date statistical information available on its member-states.

http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/infonation/e_infonation.htm

BBC NEWS Country Profiles-

This source provides a brief profile of each country's history, politics and economic background, as well as relevant audio and video clips from the BBC archives.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

World Factbook-

This source provides detailed, up-to-date statistical analyses of every country in the world. It includes sociological, economic, governmental, and military information.

<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook>

United States Department of State Country Reports (countries sorted by region)

This site contains the U.S. State Department's reports on U.S. relations with the country in question, often mentioning the human rights situation in that country. It's a useful source for assessing potential links between the U.S. and the target country.

<http://www.state.gov/www/regions.html>

Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection at University of Texas-Austin Library on-line

The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection is a general collection of more than 250,000 maps covering all areas of the world. More than 5,000 map images from the collection are also available online http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/map_collection_guide.html

***Thank you for
adopting an Action File.
Good Luck with your Casework!***

