



NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Amnesty International

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Introduction

The goal of Amnesty International is to campaign on behalf of the disenfranchised of the world, “so that every person may enjoy all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” To accomplish this lofty goal, Amnesty uses the dual forces of research and direct action; as the face of this organization, it is your job to perform both tasks to the best of your ability. As you engage with each of the following committees, remember that your work is instrumental in promoting human rights in this world.

Senate I

Human Trafficking

Amnesty International believes that the trafficking of persons is a global human rights problem. Their “Stop Violence Against Women” campaign highlights the issue of human trafficking in all of its forms. Amnesty believes that the US government should prosecute all traffickers and expand the **statute of limitations** for prosecuting traffickers to ten years. More broadly, Amnesty also believes that there should be a focus on improving training, accountability, and transparency with regard to US Customs and Border Protection officials and practices.

Statute of limitations—the maximum amount of time after an event takes place in which someone can take legal action.

Senate II

US-Iran Relations

Amnesty International is highly critical of human rights abuses perpetrated by Iran’s government, ranging from arbitrary arrests and suppression of free speech to the abuse of women and minorities. To address these human rights concerns, Amnesty International has publicized Iranian abuses in widely circulated press reports, engaged in letter campaigns with the Iranian government, and pushed for United Nations resolutions. One such resolution, introduced in October 2007, called for a global suspension on executions, with a particular emphasis on Iran.

Group of Eight

Energy and Trade Policy

Amnesty International is not opposed to trade nor lifting tariffs. However, there are human rights implications associated with potential trade liberalization policies. Amnesty opposes allowing free trade with regimes that it finds to be chronic abusers of human rights, which would include many oil-exporting nations. On the other hand, trade can lead to human rights promotion in a society because as a country opens its borders to trade, it also becomes exposed to a freer exchange of ideas. The ideas and wealth that trade can bring often help bring about positive change with regard to human rights. However, Amnesty believes that in many repressive regimes, free trade means little for the populace when the government is in charge of the actual trade, meaning that the loosening of trade restrictions only benefits the government and not its people. Amnesty believes that lucrative trade agreements are also an excellent bargaining chip in efforts to liberalize repressive regimes.

Foreign Aid to the Developing World

Amnesty is not aid-focused in most of its core initiatives. However, there is an unsettling **correlation** between poverty and corruption; the poorest nations are often those with the most corrupt and repressive regimes. When aid is given to such nations, Amnesty typically opposes those actions. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, China, Vietnam and South Korea are examples of recipients of foreign aid that Amnesty has argued strongly against. Amnesty is not opposed to foreign aid, but does believe that it should be given on condition of good behavior.

Correlation—a relationship.

World Health Organization

Neglected Diseases

Issues of health and health care are not traditionally targeted by Amnesty International; however, it has defined health and sanitation as a basic human right. Amnesty International has also noted that denial of access to health, water, and sanitation is increasingly used in the developing world to undermine democracy and exercise control over underprivileged populations. By developing increased access to health care and sanitation, the organization is well aware that denial of those services will be more difficult to use as a political tool by dictators and cruel regimes. Thus, Amnesty would support measures to increase access to clean water and health care, though it typically focuses its attention elsewhere.

World Bank

Gender Inequality and Poverty

Amnesty International has become an active and vocal supporter of women's rights around the world. Under the broad slogan that "women's rights are human rights," Amnesty has worked with other NGOs and national governments to establish many important programs and statutes in support of gender equality. Violence against women has been a strong focus of Amnesty's efforts. The "Stop Violence Against Women" campaign was launched in 2004 to help vocalize the scandal of violence against women and create an environment of basic rights for women. This campaign urges governments and armed groups to end immunity for violence against women during times of conflict and their aftermath, demands that governments abolish discriminatory laws that lead to violence against women privately and publicly, and asks for new laws and policies to protect females from violence.

Recently, along with Women Thrive Worldwide and Family Violence Prevention Fund, Amnesty International has led the fight for the International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA), a piece of US legislation that addresses violence against women globally in an unprecedented way. It would direct the United States government to create a five year strategy that will reduce violence in 10-20 countries that are known to have the highest levels of violence against women. Sponsored by Senators Joe Biden and Richard Lugar, the bill is currently being debated in the US Congress.

Amnesty International has many other programs directed at calling attention to and directed towards women's rights. For example, the "Maze of Injustice" is part of Amnesty International USA's attempts to **rectify** the disproportionately high levels of rape and sexual violence directed at Native American women in the United States. Through their research, Amnesty International is calling on the US government to take the first steps to end sexual violence against **indigenous** women. Similarly, Amnesty International Ghana is working on promoting gender equality in schools by organizing competitions among all-girls schools with the theme of stopping violence against women.

Rectify—to set right, to correct by removing errors.

Indigenous—native to a particular region or nation.

World Trade Organization

Intellectual Property Rights

As a human rights organization concerned with individual liberties, Amnesty International's perspective on TRIPS is primarily relevant when an individual's intellectual property rights are infringed. In recent history, Amnesty has not dealt with any cases that address intellectual property rights or any component of the TRIPS doctrine. This is not to

say that Amnesty has not taken a position on the Doha Development Round negotiations or any other component of WTO policy; in fact, Amnesty has been continuously vocal when it comes to the development or alteration of existing trade agreements. Most notably, Amnesty has advocated that the WTO phrase trade policy in terms that respect human rights obligations established in international doctrine such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. As previously mentioned, Amnesty does not support free trade agreements that benefit repressive regimes.

United Nations Security Council

Crisis in Darfur

Addressing the conflict in Darfur is one of Amnesty International's top priorities. The organization has decried the actions taken by the militants in Darfur and has reported almost every war crime imaginable, including murder, rape, and displacement.

The organization calls for more international efforts in dealing with the crisis. While Amnesty supports the decision of the UNSC to send 26,000 troops into the region, it criticizes the lack of progress that has been made at getting the troops on the ground. Though UNSC Resolution 1769 called for an increase in UN troops in Darfur to 26,000, there are currently only 11,000 on the ground. Amnesty points out that every moment wasted in getting peacekeepers into Darfur allows for more crimes against humanity to be committed in the region. The organization calls for member countries of the UN to follow through on troop and equipment commitments as quickly as possible.

Amnesty has also stressed the importance of following through on the warrants put out by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war criminals in Sudan. The organization believes that accountability for crimes against humanity will work to prevent future atrocities from occurring. The ICC has no police force to make arrests for the warrants they put out, so Amnesty wants the United Nations Mission in Sudan to enforce the ICC warrants.

Modern Maritime Piracy

Though Amnesty International's **purview** does not include piracy itself, the organization has committed itself to fighting the death penalty and human rights abuses. Moreover, many nations list piracy as one of the offenses that can warrant capital punishment. Here, Amnesty's primary concern would be for the protection of pirates against the death penalty.

Purview—range of operation, authority, or concern.

Amnesty International in the News

Guantánamo Bay

The US-operated detention center in Cuba has long been the subject of fierce criticism from several human rights advocacy organizations, and Amnesty International has certainly been a vocal objector to the allegedly illegal practices of the US military in detaining enemy combatants suspected of terrorist activities. The recent election of President Barack Obama marked a new chapter in the future of Guantánamo Bay, however. In one of his first acts in office, on January 22, 2009, President Obama signed **executive orders** directing the Central Intelligence Agency to shut what remains of its network of secret prisons and ordering the closing of the Guantánamo detention facility within one year. Amnesty International regarded this dramatic departure from the detention policies of his predecessor, President Bush, as a momentous victory in the campaign for human rights.

Amnesty International's Secretary-General Irene Khan has also praised the symbolism of this decision of the Obama administration, noting, "By prioritizing the closure of Guantánamo in his first 48 hours in office, President Obama is sending an important message to the rest of the world that the USA is now closing a dark chapter in its history." The organization, however, continues to advocate for a speedy realization of this promise. Amnesty International is particularly concerned with a certain clause in the executive order that calls for Guantánamo to be closed "as soon as practicable, and no later than one year from the date of this order." Arguing that the trials or releases of over 240 **detainees** are already years overdue, Amnesty International has said that this reference to a timetable should be applied with urgency. Kahn has urged, "The USA dedicated substantial resources to this ill-judged exercise right from the start and throughout its seven-year operation. It should now dedicate the necessary resources and effort to bring it to a speedy and lawful closure."

The issue, of course, is not as simple as having the will to shut the detention center down; the difficult question of what to do with these prisoners, who are virtually all suspected of terrorism, with respect to legal proceedings and possible destinations remains unanswered. There are serious national security concerns, and a primary reason Guantánamo was utilized in the first place was because no other country wants to allow the detainees within their borders. Amnesty International, however, has made every indication that although it is pleased with the symbolism of this gesture, it realizes that there are potential complications and will continue to fight for the swift fulfillment of President Obama's order.

Executive Order—A directive issued by the President of the United States.

Detainee—a person held in custody, especially for a political offense or for questioning.

Myanmar

The country of Myanmar, a Southeast Asian country formerly known as Burma, has been plagued with internal conflict for the last 20 years. Its current government has gained a reputation in the global arena as a particularly notorious violator of human rights, and Amnesty International has been at the forefront of reporting on the details of crimes the **military junta** currently controlling the government has committed. Specifically, Amnesty International has reported on the increase in unlawful arrests the Myanmar government has made against citizens, in particular pro-democratic demonstrators. These demonstrations grew in size and intensity from August to late September 2008, at which point the military put a violent end to them. The government has promised the international community to cease the practice of unlawful, politically-motivated arrests, but Amnesty International reported in January that the government has, in fact, accelerated these arrests despite assurances to the contrary. Amnesty was also able to report that around 1,850 political prisoners were being held—700 of which were most likely arrests made during and after the late summer protests—and that more than 80 people were unaccounted for and were probably victims of **enforced disappearance**.

In the months leading up the Amnesty International report, political and economic pressure on the Myanmar government concerning their human rights violations had diminished; relations with the UN were visibly improving and talk of sanctions had faded. When the report broke, however, and revealed the extent to which the government had been fooling the international community, major news sources around the world used this news to take a closer look at the situation and report their own subsequent findings. This was a prime example of one of the methods through which Amnesty is able to effect change—by raising media awareness. Though the NGO itself does not have the power or resources to coerce the Myanmar government into certain actions, by bringing the plight of illegally arrested pro-democratic dissenters in the region to the forefront of international media attention, it can serve as the catalyst for change.

Military junta—a group of military officers who rule a country after seizing power.

Enforced disappearance—an instance in which force is used by agents of a state to cause a person to vanish from public view. This is then followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty, thereby placing the victim outside the protection of the law.

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