

# LOCAL GROUPS TOOLKIT





# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL LOCAL GROUPS

**“Be close to your locality, be close to Human Rights”**

Amnesty International local groups play an essential role raising awareness locally and getting people involved in campaigning to make a huge difference in our campaigns.

So if you have decided to set up an Amnesty Local Group. Congratulations!

## HOW DO YOU SET UP A LOCAL GROUP?

### **1st: CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ACTIVISM OFFICER**

Pina Attanasio is going to be your support in Dublin (pattanasio@amnesty.ie, phone: 018638351). The Activism officer will be the contact between you and the OFFICE of Amnesty (Sean MacBride House, 48 Fleet Street, Dublin 2, Ireland.) So you won't be alone, do not hesitate to contact the activism officer for any enquiry.

### **2nd: FIND A FEW OTHER KEEN SUPPORTERS TO HELP YOU GET THINGS STARTED**

It will be really helpful if you get a core group of 3 to 5 members. It helps with sharing tasks, organising meetings and gathering knowledge.

### **3rd: LEARN ABOUT AMNESTY**

Read Amnesty International resources to get familiar with Amnesty's history, along with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international human rights treaties and covenants on which Amnesty's work is based.

- Amnesty International: <http://www.amnesty.org/>
- Amnesty International Ireland: <http://www.amnesty.ie/>
- Human Rights Declaration and other treaties and covenants: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/pages/introduction.aspx>

### **4th: INITIAL RESOURCES**

You should establish good relationships with other organisations which could support you as a partner. You could ask to local businesses if they would like to make you a donation to set up a local group.

### **5th: PLAN YOUR FIRST MEETING**

WWChoose a venue, time and date. In your first meeting you could invite people and speakers, probably that will attract more interest in the local community. If you need some ideas contact your activism officer.

# WHAT I HAVE TO DO IN THE FIRST MEETING OF MY LOCAL GROUP?

## 1st: PUBLICISE YOUR MEETING

Use posters, flyers, and social media such as Facebook. Make sure to use the Amnesty International Logo on all publicity materials and to include contact information and a meeting date and location for potential members.

## 2nd: EVERYTHING ORGANISED

Materials, sign-up sheet and an agenda drawn up. Maybe you could have some refreshments to make the meeting more welcoming and sociable.

## 3rd: AT THE START OF THE MEETING

Introduce yourself and why you want to start a group, and then get everyone to introduce themselves.

## 4th: DURING THE MEETING

To settle up the group you have to make some decisions:

1. Where are the regular meetings going to take place?
2. Who is going to manage the group?

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world indeed, it is the only thing that ever has"*

Maragret Mead, Antropologist

## ROLES

It is important that if you have a role in your local group, you have to compromise yourself to achieve the purposes of your group that is your responsibility.

- **COORDINATOR:** In the local group is completely needed to designate a coordinator. This person facilitates and guides the meetings, ensures everyone is everyone heard, and is the MAIN CONTACT WITH THE ACTIVISM OFFICERS and new group members.

## OPTIONAL ROLES

- **SECRETARY:** This person records the minutes of meetings, and ensures that everyone knows when and where meetings are on.
- **TREASURER:** This person leads the group's fundraising activities and in charge of payments when expenses occur.
- **CAMPAIGN OFFICER:** This person researches Amnesty international campaigns and informs the group. They also coordinate campaigning activities.
- **PUBLICITY OFFICER:** This person is responsible for advertising meetings and campaigns.
- **MEMBERSHIP OFFICER:** This person is always trying to get more people involved in campaigns for the group.

# HOW TO KEEP GOING?

## TEN KEYS TO RUN YOUR LOCAL GROUP AND BE SUCCESSFUL

1. **Share OUT responsibilities** and tasks among the members of the group.
2. **Follow up Amnesty's website**, make sure that you are **UPDATE** with the strategies, priorities and campaigns which are taking place from **HEAD OFFICE**, at the moment.
3. Set up some **goals** during the meetings. Goals should be smart and have to show the interests of individuals in the group.
4. Make a decision if you will send raised money straight to the Amnesty International office or you will set up a local account for the group. **Keep a record** of all raised money that you send to Amnesty or saved instead.
5. Make sure that everyone in the group is **motivated** and learns. Ensure that you know their interests and skills. These **will make the job easy for everyone!**
6. You can integrate the **Urgent Action network**, street actions (see the Activism toolkit to find out how to organise these) or a fundraising event.
7. Making **actions plans**, everyone has to **be flexible** in case things might not go exactly as planned. **Be aware** that your group may make some mistakes and be prepared to learn from your experience and support your group.
8. **Being visible** you will attract more members. It is really important for every new member to be given tasks so that they feel part of an active and exciting movement.
9. Put flyers and posters around your community with your group meetings, time, venue and contact details
10. Be online. **Facebook** is the best window to promote events, and promote your group. We encourage you to create your own Facebook page. Try to update Facebook daily, to make it alive! Facebook will be an amazing tool to reach out to your community.





# HOLD A FILM SCREENING

Who can resist the urge to sit down and watch an engrossing flick with chocolate or popcorn? Screening a film is a great way to use a popular form of entertainment to reach out to people who are concerned about a particular issue.

An AI film night—including film, discussion and action opportunity— is even better, allowing you to educate and inspire others, giving them the opportunity to take concrete action, and to promote your work for Amnesty International effectively.

## Selecting Your Film

There are plenty of human rights-themed feature films out there to choose from. Hotel Rwanda, Blood Diamond, The Killing Fields, Rendition and Kite Runner are just a few examples. There are also excellent documentaries available, if you need more help please feel free to get in touch with your activism officer for advice on the best film to show to highlight your issue.



## Hosting the Event

Choose a well-known and accessible location, and publicise the event well in advance through e-mail, flyers, posters and newspaper calendars. Be sure to ask people to sign in when they arrive, and always include a pitch at the end asking them to join Amnesty International and your group.

Decide how you want to introduce the film's theme (don't forget to mention AI's position on the subject!). Include time after the screening for discussion, an introduction to AI and your group's work, and a concrete action opportunity—preferably one that relates to the film just shown.

Time your agenda to ensure the event isn't too long!

# ORGANISE MARCHES, DEMONSTRATIONS OR PROTESTS



We don't expect you to go out on the street and cause a revolution, even if the Beatles might have sung about it in earnest. However, marches and demonstrations are a more common type of tactic but to have an impact or get the notice you are aiming for, they need to be done well. This often requires large numbers of people, and in order to draw large numbers of people you will have to choose the timing well and pray for good weather (or plan like the Irish- a pair of sunglasses and an umbrella whenever you leave the house)

**Example:** In March 2005, to close a 5-day festival celebrating International Women's Day in Dublin Amnesty International Ireland held a street march that stepped off at 6pm and marched from Temple Bar to the Dáil Éireann. More than 700 people participated in that march at the end a number of speeches were made.

The march was held in the dark so participants were given candles as well as other props to carry. As per prior arrangement, the Gardaí (police) closed the street to car traffic. At Dáil Éireann, while speeches were being made, a giant graphic of our Stop Violence Against Women (SVAW) campaign logo was being flashed onto government buildings.

All in all, this march was very effective in terms of raising awareness about Amnesty's work on the SVAW Campaign. It brought together our many partners on the issue, sent a message to government, and attracted a lot of media attention. However, the street march as well as the 5-day festival required an enormous amount of work. There was a team working full-time on the whole project for 3-months. In the run up to it the street march required several days of ring-rounds to ensure there were good crowds plus we had International Women's Day in our favour.

## Considerations for Street Marches or Demonstrations

**Police cooperation:** It is usually the traffic detail that needs to be notified for any marches that will be in the streets. The police prefer, for safety reasons, that marches go with the flow of traffic. You will need to supply the police with the route, estimated numbers, general reason for the march and if people will be gathering at the end of the march for speeches.

**Slogans:** If marchers are to chant slogans you should decide the slogans in advance. Having a few short slogans that can be periodically changed works well, but you need to make sure that they clearly convey your message.





**Props/ Banners /Posters:** You need to make sure that these also clearly convey your message. People passing by need to be able to read a moving placard and understand what it is all about. Colourful materials, waving flags, dancing candles can all be used to attract attention and actually make the march look bigger.

**Stewards:** It is important that you have volunteer stewards wearing safety vests designated to help organise and line up people at the start, hand out props and placards, keep the march together on route, lead the march on the designated route and collect props at the end. For some reason street marches have a tendency to break up with slower groups becoming separated. It is an important part of the stewards' job to ensure that the front of the march does not move too quickly and leave people behind.

**Demonstrations are slightly easier to organise** in that they are usually located in one place for a set amount of time, for instance, outside City Hall for 30 minutes when the City Council is about to meet. But the above considerations would largely apply to demonstrations as well as street marches.



## CHECK LIST

- Set a date and time? Have you allowed time for preparation?
- Publicity and advertising: have you contacted the media? Have you put out notices in: Al Ireland Ebulletin, Al Ireland website, community newspapers and radio stations? Have you asked for a photographer to come and take pictures that you'll later use for further press coverage and social media?
- Have you done leafleting and postering in places where you will have a likely draw? Universities, schools, community centres, coffee houses.
- Have you contacted all like-minded organisations and gotten their commitment to participate?; including doing ring-arounds, gathering people to travel together, arranging lifts etc.
- Have you designated and publicised the route?
- Have you alerted the Gardaí/police? Giving them the date, time, route (if a march), anticipated numbers, contact person and mobile
- Messaging: What is the aim of the demo? Is it clearly understandable in 1 or 2 lines on banners and posters?
- What are the visuals / symbols / stunts you can use relating to the issues?
- Make sure the visuals work for the time of day (candle lit vigils do not work during the day)
- Who is the target of your demo?
- What are you trying to achieve? Can the target deliver?
- Will your target accept a letter outlining demands as part of the demo? (to be determined in advance with the letter prepared for hand-over)
- Does the location of your demo connect with the target of the demo?

# HOLD A VIGIL

Vigils are typically silent and solemn gatherings held in a public space. Vigils can be a powerful means to raise awareness on an issue, for instance the case of a prisoner of conscience, while engaging members of your community in a meaningful act of solidarity. Consider inviting not only students and community members but other organisations as well. Vigils can also draw attention to other events you have planned, such as a film screening.

## Some points to remember when organising a vigil

- **Obtain permission** from local authorities or your school or university administration. Allow enough time to obtain permit as it can take weeks for it to be issued.
- **Plan your program.** Set the length of the vigil by determining how it will start, how it will end and what will happen in between. Some vigils begin with a few words about the purpose, a reading about a case or a poem that demonstrates the importance of the issue or situation. During the vigil, participants may either maintain a silent focus or choose instead to read names or statements relevant to the issue. To wrap up, give a call to action, and make sure everyone is asked to join AI Ireland.
- To get your message across, be sure to have **clearly worded signs** that demonstrate your purpose. Incorporate photos if possible (i.e., a giant photo of the person or issue you are focusing on).
- Bring lots of **candles**.
- Use wax-paper cups to prevent candles from dripping or blowing out.
- Use the candlelight to create a pattern - a line or a circle - that can easily be seen by others.
- **Don't block entrances**, sidewalks or passages.
- Designate two **spokespersons** to stand apart from the vigil line or circle to distribute action materials and talk to passers-by who want to know more about your action. The vigil itself should be as free from distraction as possible.
- As with any event, **bring a sign up sheet** and clipboard to pass around or to greet people with. Make sure everyone joining the vigil has a good understanding of the purpose of the vigil. Remember to follow up with newcomers afterwards.





# SET UP A PETITION TABLE OR A LETTER WRITING MARATHON ACTION

The most straightforward and often easiest public tactic to organise is tabling for petitions or letter writing marathons. The materials needed are minimal and you can usually get friends and family to volunteer a couple of hours to cover a shift.

What a person passing by sees, feels and thinks about an Amnesty International table is the key to success. Some tables feel uninviting and confusing. Others feel visually attractive, clearly arranged and welcoming



## Tips for a successful action:

- **Choose your location well**– check if there will be steady foot traffic, if you need permission to set up in that area and plan for eventual wet/windy weather.
- Look inviting – **aim to catch people's attention** and draw them towards the display. Give out a clear message that this is Amnesty International by displaying banners and/or signs with the logo.
- Suit the occasion – arrange your table to suit your location and audience.
- Be “up front” – flat tables covered flat with paper will look flat! Create a vertical, high-visibility look to your table using banners, posters, post-boxes etc.
- Create a focus – choose only the most essential items for the display and arrange them in a clear order that will focus and guide people's attention around your table.
- Tools for freedom – include at least one ready-to-sign **appeal letter or petition** and the option to make a financial contribution. This can be a simple donation box beside some friendship bracelets.
- The backdrop – use the backdrop to give out key messages about AI's work and the current activities in your area.
- **Portability** – keep display materials light. Select only what you need.
- Be engaging – stand up and move to the side and front of your table. Wear an Amnesty T-shirt.
- Be confident – remember the important work you're doing, how much activists contribute to the successes Amnesty International Ireland has achieved and do believe that most people respect AI and admire those who are committed to its work, you will get plenty of thank you and smiles. **Be confident that each signature counts.**
- Make a **schedule** – take short shifts and work in pairs. Prepare a schedule in advance and ensure a bit of overlap.
- Create energy – when possible, create the right degree of movement and activity around your display e.g. a TV monitor continuously playing an AI video, an “interactive” project like inviting people to sign. Make it possible for children or people who have difficulty with writing or individuals with special handicaps to send their message to the chosen target.
- Be prepared – **consider questions that you might be asked** and clear and brief answers to these questions. Make sure everyone who takes action is well informed.



# THANKS FOR READING!

All the Amnesty International team is looking forward to working with you on achieving great human rights impact!