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TOGETHER AGAINST INJUSTICE



NEWSLETTER

COVID-19: A HUMAN
RIGHTS CRISIS

DIRECT PROVISION –
20 YEARS TOO LONG

MEMBER'S 'COVID
DIARIES'

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



COVID-19

A HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS

From authoritarian regimes using fear to grab power, to marginalised groups like refugees being left behind by government responses – our fight to protect human rights is more important than ever. Here is just some of our work from this year.

HEALTH WORKERS UNDER ATTACK

In Wuhan, Dr. Li Wenliang tried to warn the world about a mysterious new illness. He was silenced by the authorities and later died from the virus.

We released two global reports on health workers. We found at least 7,000 health workers have died from COVID-19, with a lack of personal protective equipment in nearly all of the 63 countries we surveyed. In some country's healthcare workers are being persecuted for speaking out.

We all owe so much to health workers, and we'll keep fighting for them.

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Human rights defenders (HRD's) in prison are now at risk of COVID.



↑ In Russia, Dr. Tatyana Revva, an intensive care unit doctor, is one of the health workers who we are campaigning for. She has been speaking up about unsafe conditions in hospitals. She could lose her job and is at risk of criminal prosecution.

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In Iran, they released 85,000 prisoners but many HRDs are still held on politically motivated charges. In Turkey and Egypt, they excluded HRDs from their release plans. We are fighting for them.

UK CARE HOMES SCANDAL

Our report, 'As If Expendable', uncovered shocking decisions by the UK government that put older people in care homes at risk. We're calling for an independent public inquiry.

In the first weeks of the pandemic, the government ordered the discharge of 25,000 hospital patients into care homes, including those with COVID-19. Care home managers told us that they struggled to access PPE and testing. The son of a man who died from COVID-19 told us, "The care home was categoric it was probably COVID and he would die of it and he wouldn't be taken to hospital. He was only 76 and in great shape. He died a week later."



Nasrin Sotoudeh, an Iranian human rights lawyer, was sentenced to 38 years in prison for protesting against forced veiling laws. We have evidence of cover-ups of the horrific conditions in Iranian prisons during COVID-19 from leaked documents. Nasrin has decided she has to go on hunger strike. She wrote: 'In the midst of the coronavirus crisis which has engulfed Iran and the world, the conditions of political prisoners have become so difficult...For the demand of the release of political prisoners, I will go on hunger strike.'

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Lissywollen Direct Provision Centre in Athlone
© Vukašin Nedeljkovic/ Asylum Archive

“I am here in an infected hotel with my face facing the wall, with so many questions of worry and sadness. I have almost forgotten the taste of freedom.”

A resident of Skellig Star Direct Provision centre. The handling of an outbreak of COVID-19 by officials caused public outrage.

DIRECT PROVISION

WHAT IS DIRECT PROVISION?

Direct Provision (DP) is the system created by the government to provide accommodation and services for asylum seekers. It was created as an emergency, temporary measure but it has lasted for over 20 years.

The accommodation can be overcrowded, with strangers sharing bedrooms and bathrooms. There are over 7,500 people, including 2,000 children, in DP and some have been trapped in limbo for years while waiting for decisions on their asylum claim. The living conditions can be particularly damaging for children, and for survivors of torture and sexual violence.

There have been COVID-19 outbreaks in DP centres nationwide because the conditions don't allow people to protect themselves. Asylum seekers themselves fought to be heard and have spoken out about being terrified. While public pressure worked and the government has taken some actions, it's still not safe.

HUMAN RIGHTS WIN!

It's because of people like you that this year the government has finally committed to ending DP!

This year alone, we've sent emails to over 33,000 of our incredible supporters. We asked you to call on the government to end DP and to protect people during COVID-19.

You heard the call and took part in 'social media storms' targeting the government. Thousands of you have emailed politicians, joined online protests and donated vital funds. The groundswell of support will protect the lives and human rights of so many people.



Colm with a Bohemian FC jersey
© Amnesty International



We've also been directly advocating towards the government, from publicly calling them out when they've failed to take action during the pandemic, to our submissions to government on why DP violates human rights. We launched a partnership with football club Bohemian FC with a logo on their jersey saying 'Refugees Welcome', which became a bestseller. We've brought important voices into media, like doctors talking about how unsafe DP is during COVID-19, and we are making sure that asylum seekers voices are heard, like through our new online event Fáilte Amnesty.

BUT THERE IS STILL MORE TO DO.

We are at a critical moment. The government is working on plans to end DP, but the system has lasted over 20 years through different governments. No matter what happens in the political landscape, we need a solid plan that can't be undone easily.

So, we're launching a new campaign calling on the government to 'Set the Date' to end DP and to make sure its plans are concrete and will support people's human rights. Keep an eye out and get involved!

AMNESTY AROUND THE WORLD

HERE ARE JUST SOME OF THE SUCCESSES WE HAVE ACHIEVED TOGETHER IN 2020!

YOU HELPED SET THEM FREE!

Rubén González was a trade union leader in Venezuela. He was targeted by the government because he fought for the rights of workers. The military came to arrest him in November 2018. They said he attacked them, and he was sentenced to nearly 6 years in prison, despite a lack of evidence. He has now been set free.

Wang Quanzhang was a Chinese human rights lawyer. He was imprisoned in 2015. It was 3 years before his family were told that he was still alive. We declared Wang a Prisoner of Conscience. We told his story to journalists and our millions of supporters around the world, so the Chinese authorities couldn't cover up their human rights abuses. Now he is finally free and back with his wife and son.

Iranian Human Rights Defender **Narges Mohammadi** had been imprisoned since May 2015 in reprisal for meeting with an EU representative and for her human rights activism. She was also at risk from COVID-19 because of her underlying conditions.

Magai was just fifteen years old when he was sentenced to death in South Sudan. Over 765,000 people all over the world took action as part of our annual Write4Rights campaign. The authorities heard us, cancelled his sentence, and he is no longer on death row.

👁️ → Iranian human rights defender and anti-death penalty campaigner Narges Mohammadi after being released from prison.
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© Getty Images

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Over 1 million of our supporters took action for George Floyd, the black man killed by US police whose death sparked outrage around the world. We documented how police forces committed widespread human rights violations against largely peaceful protests, using tear gas and rubber bullets. The fight for justice and equality continues, but the world has been changed.

NOTHING CAN STOP US STANDING UP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS!

While we couldn't take to the streets, we got creative. Here are just some of the ways our activists fought for human rights from their sitting rooms!

We took part in solidarity protests for asylum seekers in Ireland, calling for an end to Direct Provision. We joined in national moments of recognition and gratitude for health workers and used our social media channels to spread awareness of public health guidelines. We joined protests against anti-abortion and anti-LGBTI movements in Poland, and against police violence and authoritarianism in Belarus. We gave our platform over to activists from Black Lives Matter, and LGBTI human rights defenders from Uganda to Hungary. And we have so much more planned!

"Reunited with my whole family after 21 months deprived of my freedom. I want to thank deeply in my heart, and from all my family, for the support I received from all of Amnesty International. For me, it is an honour to thank you and we want to tell you that we have you in our minds, in our hearts, for that great support."

Rubén González, a trade union leader in Venezuela.

TAKE ACTION, WHEREVER YOU ARE

BEING A 'POCKET PROTESTER' MEANS YOU CAN TAKE ACTION THROUGH SMS, WHENEVER PEOPLE NEED URGENT HELP

www.amnesty.ie/pocketprotest

COVID DIARIES

ADAM LAMBE

Adam Lambe is a Monaghan youth activist with Amnesty, amongst many others! He's currently in 6th year in secondary school.

"I got involved with Amnesty because of workshops they held, and I took part in a campaign on Direct Provision. It was great to see the impact. I've also been working with the National Youth Council on the Youth Manifesto for Climate Justice with Mary Robinson, which was fantastic.

I was already doing a lot online but when lockdown hit, I kind of jumped in as much as I could.

Over the summer, the Black Lives Matter movement took over the world and Ireland too. I remember seeing my friends coming together to support it. Some of those friends have direct experience; it was fantastic to see them being so brave and sending their stories out into the world. And others recognising their own white privilege and educating others about it.

The lockdown affects everyone. And with that, you see there is very little difference between us when we're all going through the same thing. We are all equal. I hope everyone keeps that sense of solidarity.

One of the big things I've seen people struggle with is mental health. It's very important that we recognise how isolation plays a role and how we need to keep connected to people. I hope now there is more self-awareness and more compassion for people with mental health issues."



Mary © Private



Adam © Private

MARY GROVER



Mary Grover is a long-term member of Amnesty, as well as a member of the Clonakilty Amnesty group!

"The reason for me joining Amnesty was caring about people who'd been forgotten, like Prisoners of Conscience. We're an older group; I'm the oldest now at 80 years old. We had to stop meeting in person and haven't been able to do any petitions on the street. We've only been able to write letters. We joined Amnesty's zoom event on Direct Provision, and it was great to see familiar faces.

I'm one of the fortunate ones. We live in the country, so it's easier to isolate. But you think about people in towns near you, who've lost jobs, worried about rent, people with small children. And countries in a worse position. Like India, where all of those people were forced out of their jobs, forced to walk for days just to get home.

The pandemic has affected everybody's mental health. We're all going up and down like a yo-yo. But if you understand anything about mental health, you know we're not as stable as we think and COVID has shown us that. If we can use that knowledge, it might help us bridge the gap between those who are mentally ill and those who aren't.

Surely now we should be able to identify more with Prisoners of Conscience. People are finding the restrictions hard; well think of the people who are kept away from their families for years?

I'm terribly proud of my granddaughters. They insisted on driving a considerable distance to do the shopping for us. You see stories about parties and people being selfish, but there are thousands of young people who are taking it seriously. I find that very uplifting."



WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

**BECOME A YOUTH ACTIVIST,
FUNDRAISE OR JOIN A LOCAL GROUP.
GO TO www.amnesty.ie/get-involved**

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Cover image: An emergency nurse (ICU) dressed in garbage bags and a protective mask loaned altruistically by a private company at the emergency entrance door of the San Jorge hospital on March 31, 2020 in Huesca, Spain. © Getty Images

HOW DOES YOUR SUPPORT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

**WITH YOUR
DONATIONS
AND SUPPORT,
AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL
TURNS KNOWLEDGE
OF HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS INTO
GLOBAL AWARENESS
AND ACTION**

In July 2018, a shocking video on a phone went viral. It shows two women, a little girl and a baby being escorted by several soldiers. The soldiers smack one of the women in the face. They blindfold the women, and pull the little girls top up over her head and then shoot all of them dead.

It was initially dismissed by the Cameroonian government as “fake news” and “nothing but an unfortunate attempt to distort actual facts and intoxicate the public”, but we were able to find out where it happened and who was responsible.

Amnesty International experts analysed the video soon after it went viral. Relying on multiple strands of evidence – including expert analysis of the uniforms and weapons used, and linguistic and other contextual clues in speech that gave away the identities and ranks of the soldiers – within days the organization was able to begin to build a case to counter what the Cameroonian

government were dismissing. The evidence strongly suggested that official Cameroonian soldiers were the ones extrajudicially executing civilians in the video.

A community of open source investigators collaborating on the case were able to pin-point the exact location near the town of Zelevet and narrowed down the date to late March or early April 2015. The case was immortalized by the September 2018 BBC Africa Eye documentary “Anatomy of a Killing”.

Soon after, the Cameroon government launched an investigation.

And in late September 2020, a military court in Cameroon sentenced 4 soldiers to 10 years in prison and 1 other to 2 years for the brutal killing. The sentence breaks the norm in a country where military abuses often go denied.

**THIS IS HOW THE RESEARCH, POWERED BY DONATIONS FROM YOU CAN
MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE, GIVING VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES,
BOTH ALIVE AND DEAD, A CHANCE FOR JUSTICE.**

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

HELP OUR HUMAN RIGHTS WORK LIVE ON

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