

**WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS**

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



**WENDY GALARZA
MEXICO**

SHOT WHILE PROTESTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

20 YEARS OF WRITING LETTERS THAT CHANGE LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

Twenty years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. Over the following years, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to 4.5 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2020, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. Together, these individuals have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, freeing them from torture, harassment or unjust imprisonment.

This year's campaign channels this support towards people targeted for their peaceful activism, views or personal characteristics. This includes LGBTI activists, environmental defenders and peaceful protesters. These individuals have variously been beaten, jailed, shot at, harassed and intimidated. Through Write for Rights, they will receive individual messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. They and their families know that their situations are being brought to public attention and they are not forgotten.

Alongside the letter writing actions, Amnesty also speaks to those who have the power to change these people's situations, such as politicians in their



Amnesty
International
Taiwan
letter writing
event,
December
2020.

countries. Write for Rights also gives visibility to these injustices through public events, and garners international attention on social media.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals, and other people and groups in a similar situation, by the country's authorities. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

■ Read about the people we're fighting for:
www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

■ Contact the Amnesty team in your country:
www.amnesty.org/countries

■ Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R21

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity and any limitations. When participants want to take action on a case, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyze and question issues relating to

the cases. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competences and skills

HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY to form their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.

■ If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/

■ Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn>

YOUR WORDS

ARE POWERFUL



ACTIVIST FREED IN SAUDI ARABIA

Nassima al-Sada, a campaigner for women's freedom, was arrested in 2018 for peacefully defending human rights. While in jail, guards beat her and banned everyone – even her lawyer – from visiting her. But thanks to supporters worldwide who wrote a massive 777,611 letters, tweets and more, Nassima walked free in June 2021, and is back with her family and friends.

FATHER OF THREE REUNITED WITH FAMILY

In April 2018, NGO worker and human rights defender Germain Rukuki was found guilty of a slew of sham charges and sentenced to 32 years in prison in Burundi. He was jailed before getting a chance to hold his youngest child, born just weeks after he was arrested. His family fled the country for fear of reprisals. On 30 June 2021, Germain was finally freed and reunited with his family, thanks in part to the more than 436,000 actions calling for his release.



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ONE STEP CLOSER TO JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Friends Popi Qwabe and Bongeka Phungula were murdered while heading for a night out in May 2017. Until recently, their families had been distressed by irregularities and delays in the police investigation. However, in March 2021, police revived the case after receiving 341,106 petition signatures from the families' supporters worldwide. The police have completed their investigation and handed over the case to the country's National Prosecuting Authority. "I feel optimistic," said Popi's sister Thembelihle. "I feel like finally, something is about to change."



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ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



Amnesty International Benin letter writing event, December 2020.



THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed that they are bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that they will abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up on the basis of its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.



UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



CIVIL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES

Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.

- Article 1** Freedom and equality in dignity and rights
- Article 2** Non-discrimination
- Article 3** Right to life, liberty and security of person
- Article 4** Freedom from slavery
- Article 5** Freedom from torture



LEGAL RIGHTS

Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.

- Article 6** All are protected by the law
- Article 7** All are equal before the law
- Article 8** A remedy when rights have been violated
- Article 9** No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile
- Article 10** Right to a fair trial
- Article 11** Innocent until proven guilty
- Article 14** Right to go to another country and ask for protection



SOCIAL RIGHTS

Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.

- Article 12** Privacy and the right to home and family life
- Article 13** Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders
- Article 16** Right to marry and start a family
- Article 24** Right to rest and leisure
- Article 26** Right to education, including free primary education



ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.

- Article 15** Right to a nationality
- Article 17** Right to own property and possessions
- Article 22** Right to social security
- Article 23** Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union
- Article 25** Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being



POLITICAL RIGHTS

Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion

- Article 18** Freedom of belief (including religious belief)
- Article 19** Freedom of expression and the right to spread information
- Article 20** Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way
- Article 21** Right to take part in the government of your country



CULTURAL RIGHTS, SOLIDARITY RIGHTS

Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

- Article 27** Right to share in your community's cultural life
- Article 28** Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized
- Article 29** Responsibility to respect the rights of others
- Article 30** No taking away any of these rights!



ACTIVITY

END EXCESSIVE USE OF
FORCE BY POLICE

KEY CONCEPTS

- Law enforcement / policing
- Use of force
- Peaceful assembly
- Impunity
- Reparations
- Gender justice

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about law enforcement, the role of the police during protests in Mexico, and the specific violence that women and girls experience. They will find out what the police are allowed to do under human rights law, specifically when policing assemblies. They will explore what can be done when police officers do not uphold international standards on the use of force and firearms.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the role of the police in protecting human rights and relate it to their own lives;
- **describe** the standards that apply for the use of force by police and how they relate to specific human rights;
- **understand** the specific situation that women and girls are facing when demonstrating for their rights in Mexico;

- **feel empathy** with women whose rights have been violated by the police;
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign;
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Wendy Galarza.

AGE: 13+

TIME NEEDED:

60 minutes.

MATERIALS

- **Background information: Use of Force & Human Rights** (page 9)
- **Handout: Wendy Galarza's story** (page 11)
- **Handout: Protesting for women's rights in Mexico** (page 10)
- Optional: Letter templates from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/

PREPARATION

- Optional: Print handouts for each participant/group

FOLLOW COVID-19 MEASURES

Be sure to comply with public health advice in your area during the Covid-19 pandemic. Conduct your activity in a way that ensures the safety of all participants and respects any necessary physical distancing measures.

If you are doing the activity online:

- **Choose** a platform that provides participation and interaction while being secure
- **Adapt** the activity to allow for relevant reflections and debriefing (in small groups)
- **Provide** technical support for participants to allow for good participation.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF THE POLICE

Ask the participants to think about the role that the police should play in society.

- Why do we have police?
- What do you think they should do?
- How do you think they should act?

If not mentioned by participants, remind them that in most countries, the police have the following key roles:

- Making sure people obey the law (enforcing the law).
- Protecting people and property and keeping public order.
- Investigating crimes and making arrests.

Highlight some of the points in the **Background information: Use of Force & Human Rights** (page 9). You can print this for participants, or just discuss it.

2. INTRODUCING WENDY GALARZA

Read out the short passage below. Tell participants that the events described really happened:

On 9 November 2020, Wendy Galarza attended a march organized by feminist collectives in Cancún, Mexico, to demand justice for the murder of a woman known as Alexis. But when

 10 MINUTES

 35 MINUTES

a group of demonstrators began pulling down and burning some wooden barriers that were blocking their protest, the situation quickly deteriorated and it became unsafe. Wendy ran to get out of the crowd. But, later, she discovered that she had bullet wounds in her leg and vulva.

Ask participants for their reaction (10 minutes)

- What do you think happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What should the police do, given that Wendy Galarza was injured by a firearm?

Divide participants into small groups and give each group the handouts **Wendy Galarza's story** (page 11), and **Protesting for Women's Rights in Mexico** (page 10). Give them time to read these.

Optional: If you do not have enough time you can read out **Wendy Galarza's story** to explain to participants what happened and how Wendy was injured.

Ask each group to answer the following questions (15 minutes)

- What issues do women and girls protest about in your country?
- Does anything surprise you about the situation in Mexico? Does this happen in your country?
- What should the police have done or not done?
- Do you think it was justified for the police to use guns in these circumstances?
- What should be done to make sure that Wendy Galarza's shooting is investigated effectively and that anyone suspected of committing a crime against her is brought to justice?

Come back together and share the groups' answers (10 minutes). Possible questions to reflect on:

- Do your conclusions change depending on who shot the bullets?
- Should the same investigation be carried out if the injury was caused by the police?

This will be addressed in more depth in the next part of the activity.

Conclude by explaining that, in Mexico, various police forces have violated women's and girls' rights. This includes the rights to peaceful assembly; to liberty; to physical integrity; to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment; and to a life free from violence. Amnesty International has found that the authorities have responded to protests by women with excessive and unnecessary use of force, with illegal and arbitrary arrests, with verbal and physical abuse against women and with sexual violence.

3. THE USE OF FORCE BY POLICE

Hand out or present the **Background information: Use of Force & Human Rights** (page 9).

Read out the list of standards on the use of force, and the principles for policing protests, one by one. Ask participants to identify whether they think the police upheld these standards in Wendy Galarza's case.

You could ask participants to stand up if the standard was violated and remain seated if not. Ask both standing and seated participants why they think this standard was upheld or not. Alternatively, pair up the participants and ask them to mark which standards are most relevant for Wendy Galarza's case, and how this relates to their answers in the previous exercise on what the police should have done.

Conclude by asking:

- Do you think it was justified for the police to use guns in these circumstances?
- What could help Wendy Galarza put this in the past and get her life back on track?



End by highlighting the fact that, in Mexico, women and girls who demonstrate against gender-based violence are at particular risk of human rights violations. The Mexican authorities know this, and must bolster their obligation to respect, protect and guarantee all the human rights of women and girls who protest.

4. TAKE ACTION FOR WENDY GALARZA

 15-30 MINUTES

Explain about Amnesty's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty is encouraging people to demand justice for Wendy Galarza. Give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be.

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards, or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

■ If you have time, you can share this five minute introductory video about Write for Rights: <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide>

■ Show participants the video of Wendy which can be found here: www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos (available in English).

WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Attorney General of Quintana Roo using the following information.

Participants can use the letter template available at: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/ or you can give them the following guidelines to write a more personal letter:

- Tell the Attorney General something about yourself.
- Tell him what shocks you about Wendy Galarza's case.
- Demand that he ensures that there is a **prompt investigation into what happened to Wendy Galarza and that those suspected of being responsible face justice.**

Óscar Montes de Oca,
Attorney General of Quintana Roo,
Av. Adolfo López Mateos No.500,
esquina Nápoles,
Colonia Italia, C.P. 77035,
Chetumal, Quintana Roo,
Mexico

Salutation: Dear Attorney General

Email address: fiscal.general@fgeqroo.gob.mx

Phone: +52 983 83 5 0050, ext.1114

Twitter: [@FGEQuintanaRoo](https://twitter.com/FGEQuintanaRoo),

Facebook: www.facebook.com/FGEQuintanaRoo

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Explain to participants that Wendy Galarza loves children and believes they have very important things to say. Encourage participants to show solidarity by writing or drawing a message telling her how much they admire her for standing up for the rights of women and girls and expressing solidarity with her fight for justice.

Post messages on Twitter, mentioning **@ShoutForWendy** and using the hashtag **#ShoutForWendy** or **#GritoPorWendy**. Photos of handwritten messages and drawings are more personal and would help to strengthen Wendy's resolve.

Messages can also be sent physically to Wendy using the following information:

Amnesty International Mexico Office,
Matías Romero No 116,
Colonia Del Valle,
Alcaldía Benito Juárez,
C.P. 03100,
Ciudad de México,
Mexico.



HANDOUT

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

USE OF FORCE & HUMAN RIGHTS

Police officers are allowed to do things that ordinary people cannot – for example, use force to arrest someone, detain someone in a prison cell, or carry weapons. The police are given these additional powers so that they can carry out their responsibility to protect people and keep public order.

However, with power comes responsibility: the police are permitted to use force against others, but they must always do so in accordance with the law and human rights standards. This is particularly important where the use of force carries a threat to someone's life or risks causing serious injury.

STANDARDS ON USE OF FORCE

- The use of force must be strictly necessary: it must be used only when there is no alternative and with the lowest level of force needed to achieve a legitimate objective.
- The force must be proportionate to the risk or the danger (for example, you cannot shoot someone for littering).
- Where use of force by the police has resulted in injury or death, a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation must be carried out.
- Police officers must be held accountable if they misuse their powers and they must face due process of law.
- Law enforcement agencies must create clear instructions for what to do in situations that police officers may face during their work, including decisions about whether the use of force is appropriate.

POLICING PROTESTS

Governments have an obligation to make sure that everyone can enjoy the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, including attending protests. There are clear international guidelines for police conduct during protests. It is the role of police to facilitate peaceful protests and ensure everyone can exercise their rights peacefully and without fear of reprisals. If tensions arise, the police have a duty to de-escalate them, taking into account these principles:

- If some protesters engage in violent actions, this does not turn the otherwise peaceful protest into a non-peaceful assembly. Police should ensure those who remain peaceful can continue protesting.
- Acts of violence by a small minority do not justify indiscriminate use of force.
- If use of force is unavoidable to secure the safety of others, police must use the minimum force necessary.
- The decision to disperse a protest must be a last resort, when all other less restrictive means have proven to be unsuccessful.
- Tear gas or water cannons to disperse a protest should only be used if people can leave the scene. They may only be used in response to widespread violence and where more targeted means have failed to contain the violence.
- Firearms should NEVER be used to disperse a crowd.



Wendy Galarza

HANDOUT

PROTESTING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN MEXICO

Violence against women and girls is a major issue in Mexico, and it is increasing. Surveys by Mexico's national statistics agency (INEGI) show two-thirds of women aged 15 years and older in Mexico have experienced some form of violence, with almost 44% suffering abuse from a partner. In 2020, more than 260,000 emergency calls were made about violence against women compared to less than 198,000 the previous year.

Violence against women and girls is largely invisible and even normalized in Mexico, with low rates of prosecution for offenders, and women being excluded from exercising their human rights. In recent years, growing numbers of women and girls have taken to the streets to protest the many femicides (murders of women because they are women) and other forms of violence against women and girls, and against the high rates of impunity and lack of access to justice for women. In response to these protests, various police forces have violated women's and girls' rights, including the rights to peaceful assembly; to liberty; to physical integrity; to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment; and to a life free from violence.

Amnesty International has found that the authorities have responded to protests by women with excessive and unnecessary use of force, illegal and arbitrary arrests, verbal and physical abuse against women, and sexual violence.

These protests and demonstrations calling for an end to violence against women have mostly been peaceful. Yet they have started to be stigmatized as violent. By characterizing the protests in this way, the authorities and various parts of the media create an environment that is hostile to women's right to freedom of assembly, undermines the legitimacy of their activism and makes violence against women by both the authorities and private individuals more likely. The stigma faced by women taking part in these demonstrations is based on and reinforces harmful gender stereotypes about women and their role in society. For example, stereotypical attitudes say that women should stay at home instead of making trouble for themselves by demonstrating. Indeed, trying to justify the human rights violations experienced by women on the basis of the behaviour of the women themselves constitutes, in itself, a stereotype that discriminates against them for daring to protest.



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Wendy Galarza



HANDOUT

WENDY GALARZA'S STORY

Wendy Galarza is a dedicated childcare worker. She's passionate about supporting children in their youngest years, because she believes it is the best way to create kinder and more compassionate societies. This is a goal that Wendy works hard for in Mexico, where women are often degraded, attacked and killed for being women. As a feminist activist, she too almost lost her life for denouncing such violence.

On 9 November 2020, Wendy attended a march organized by feminist collectives in Cancún to demand justice for the murder of a woman known as Alexis. But when a group of demonstrators began pulling down and burning some wooden barriers, police fired shots into the air and, some say, into the crowd. Later, Wendy discovered she had bullet wounds in her leg and vulva.

Two days later, she lodged a complaint against the police. It took months for the State Prosecutor to accept her additional evidence, which included clothing showing bullet holes from the day of the protest. Today, the case continues. Those suspected of criminal responsibility for her shooting have not been brought to justice.

Undeterred, Wendy set up a collective with other women who were assaulted during the protest.

"I will never let 9N [9 November 2020] be forgotten," she says. "I will continue to raise my voice and defend the human rights of myself and my partners in struggle." Wendy says.



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ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 10 million people who take injustice personally. We are campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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