

JUSTYNA WYDRZYŃSKA

# PROSECUTED FOR DEFENDING

# SAFE ABORTION

Poland

WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



## WRITE FOR RIGHTS

## MORE THAN 20 YEARS OF WRITING

## LETTERS THAT CHANGE LIVES

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

Some 20 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 more than 5.3 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2022, 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.

Once again, this year's campaign features people from around the world, all connected because their human rights have been violated. Some by their governments, others by the police, or even big corporations. All because of who they are or because they simply exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for their rights. Through Write for Rights, they will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And by writing directly to the authorities to demand they take immediate action to remedy injustice we can create a more just and equal world.

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

*"From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there"*

Jani Silva,  
environmental defender, 2021

## 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 context and 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, delivering it in-person or online, 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, analyse and question issues relating to the cases. This methodology allows participants to:

**DEVELOP** key competencies and skills

**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.



Letter writing event in Antwerp, Belgium, for Write for Rights 2022.

Read about the people we're fighting for:  
[amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country:  
[amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to  
[@Amnesty](https://twitter.com/Amnesty) using the hashtag #W4R23

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://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**: [academy.amnesty.org/learn](https://academy.amnesty.org/learn)

## YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

### ACTIVISTS ACQUITTED

After leading an anti-government protest in May 2020, Cecilia Chimbi, Joana Mamombe and Netsai Marova were arrested, taken to a police station, forced into an unmarked car, and driven out of the city of Harare, Zimbabwe. They were subsequently beaten, tortured and left on the side of the road. While hospitalized, the women were charged with criminal offences relating to the protest. Later, they were also charged with communicating falsehoods and obstructing the course of justice, for speaking about their ordeal. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After featuring in Write for Rights 2022, where more than half a million actions were taken on their behalf, Cecilia and Joana were acquitted by the High Court on 4 July 2023.



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### FREED FROM DEATH ROW

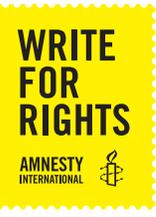
Magai Matiop Ngong from South Sudan was just a schoolboy when he was sentenced to death on 14 November 2017 for murder. Magai recounted how he told the judge the death was an accident and that he was only 15 years old at the time. Yet Magai was tried for capital murder without any access to a lawyer. More than 700,000 actions were taken for Magai during Write for Rights 2019. In March 2022 the High Court agreed that, because he had been a child at the time, he should be released. Magai is now safely out of the country and determined more than ever to help people like him.

### HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER FREED

Bernardo Caal Xol, a teacher and father, worked tirelessly to defend communities affected by hydroelectric projects on the Cahabón river, in northern Guatemala. In November 2018 he was sentenced to more than seven years in prison on bogus charges aimed at preventing his human rights work. During Write for Rights 2021, more than half a million actions were taken for Bernardo and, in March 2022, he was released from prison.



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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.

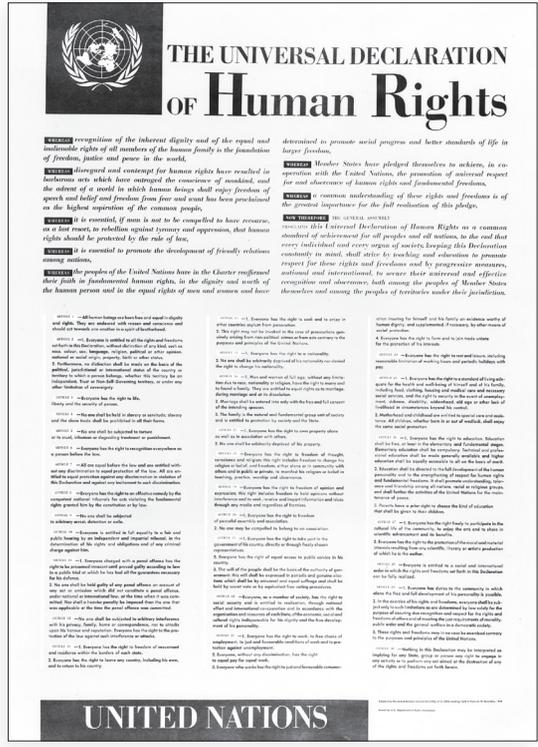
Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen 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.



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Launch of Write for Rights 2022 in Lomé, Togo.



## 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 to be 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.

© UN Photo

# UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p><b>CIVIL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES</b> Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p><b>Article 1</b> Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p><b>Article 2</b> Non-discrimination</p> <p><b>Article 3</b> Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p><b>Article 4</b> Freedom from slavery</p> <p><b>Article 5</b> Freedom from torture</p>
 <p><b>LEGAL RIGHTS</b> Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p><b>Article 6</b> All are protected by the law</p> <p><b>Article 7</b> All are equal before the law</p> <p><b>Article 8</b> A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p><b>Article 9</b> No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p><b>Article 10</b> Right to a fair trial</p> <p><b>Article 11</b> Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p><b>Article 14</b> Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p><b>SOCIAL RIGHTS</b> Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p><b>Article 12</b> Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p><b>Article 13</b> Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p><b>Article 16</b> Right to marry and start a family</p> <p><b>Article 24</b> Right to rest and leisure</p> <p><b>Article 26</b> Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p><b>ECONOMIC RIGHTS</b> Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p><b>Article 15</b> Right to a nationality</p> <p><b>Article 17</b> Right to own property and possessions</p> <p><b>Article 22</b> Right to social security</p> <p><b>Article 23</b> Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p><b>Article 25</b> Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p><b>POLITICAL RIGHTS</b> Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion</p>	<p><b>Article 18</b> Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p><b>Article 19</b> Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p><b>Article 20</b> Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p><b>Article 21</b> Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p><b>CULTURAL RIGHTS, SOLIDARITY RIGHTS</b> Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p><b>Article 27</b> Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p><b>Article 28</b> Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p><b>Article 29</b> Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p><b>Article 30</b> No taking away any of these rights!</p>

## ACTIVITY

## ABORTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

## KEY CONCEPTS

- Women human rights defenders
- Sexual and reproductive rights
- Right to health
- Access to safe abortion

## ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the challenges faced by women human rights defenders, the right to health and the importance of access to safe abortion services through the real story of Justyna Wydrzyńska who has been convicted for helping another woman access abortion pills. As part of the activity, participants are encouraged to write a letter to call on the Polish Prosecutor General to overturn Justyna's unjust conviction, and to show solidarity with Justyna.

## AGE: 14+

## TIME NEEDED

90 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the importance of access to safe abortion services and the consequences of their denial.
- **explore** the challenges faced by women seeking sexual and reproductive health services.
- **understand** the challenges faced by women human rights defenders.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Justyna Wydrzyńska.

## MATERIALS

- **Handout: Index Cards** (page 12)
- **Handout: Linking Abortion and Human Rights** (page 13)
- **Handout: Justyna's story** (page 15)
- **Background information** (page 14)
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Video of Justyna Wydrzyńska from [amnesty.org/w4r-videos](https://www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos)
- Optional: Template letters from [amnesty.org/writeforrights/](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/)

## PREPARATION

- Print copies of the handouts for each participant.
- Read the background information on page 14, the handout on Linking Abortion and Human Rights on page 13 and Justyna's story on page 15.

## MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on women's rights: [amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/womens-rights/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/womens-rights/)
- For more information on access to safe abortions and human rights: [amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/sexual-and-reproductive-rights/abortion-facts/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/sexual-and-reproductive-rights/abortion-facts/)
- 20-minute course on Write for Rights: [academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide](https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/145/write-for-rights-a-short-guide)

## PRECAUTIONS

This activity includes references to abortion and women's rights, which may be contested in some communities, religions or individuals' beliefs. It is crucial to approach this activity with sensitivity and respect for diverse perspectives and experiences. As a facilitator, create a safe and inclusive environment where all participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. Prior to the activity, inform participants about the topics to be discussed and provide them with the option to step out if they feel uncomfortable at any point. The goal is to foster understanding and empathy, so always use respectful and non-judgemental language and encourage the same from participants. Be prepared to provide support or resources for participants who may be personally affected by these discussions.

## BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

The topic of abortion can provoke strong emotions. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the content and anticipate potential areas of sensitivity. This will enable you to navigate the discussions with empathy and understanding. Regularly check in with your participants during the activity to gauge their comfort levels. This can be done through non-verbal cues, private dialogue or brief pauses for reflection. During and after the activity, allow participants to express their feelings and thoughts about the activity and the topics discussed. This can help them process any strong emotions they might have experienced.

The entire activity is designed to take approximately 90 minutes to complete. It is strongly recommended that you follow all the steps, as each activity builds upon the previous one, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the topic. If you are conducting this in a classroom setting, you might need to allocate two sessions to cover all the activities.



20 MINUTES

## 1. CIRCLE OF REFLECTION: CAN YOU RELATE?

Ask the participants to form a circle, either sitting or standing. Explain that you will read out some statements and invite them to reflect whether the statements apply to them or not. You will read out the statements one by one. If a statement resonates with a participant, they should make that known, for example by raising their hands up in the air, drumming on their legs or by clapping twice. Explain that this is an exercise for participants to express themselves, not to explain themselves. They will not be asked to speak or explain why or how this resonates with them.

Statements:

- I have been criticized or threatened because of something that I believe in.
- I have felt scared because of something I've said or done that others didn't agree with.
- I have been frustrated by rules or laws that I think are unfair.
- I have felt unsure when I had to decide something important about my future.
- I have felt like I couldn't make choices about my own body.
- I have had to make a choice about what's best for my health or body.
- I have felt happy when I was able to solve a problem on my own.
- I have felt proud of myself for finding a way to make things better when I was in a tough situation.
- I have felt proud of a time when I listened to myself and made a healthy choice for myself and my life.
- I have felt the joy and satisfaction of supporting someone in challenging times.
- I have felt the joy and relief of being helped by someone when I thought I had to face a difficult situation alone.

Debrief by taking responses to the following:

- **If you feel comfortable doing so, share some thoughts on how this exercise made you feel.**
- **Why is it important that we seek support and connection with other people when faced with challenging situations?**
- **Have you ever received help from an unexpected source? How did that make you feel?**

Find some common ground and end the debrief on a note of empathy, for example by saying that facing challenges, feeling scared or misunderstood or struggling in some way are normal parts of human experience. Say that it is through empathy in these shared emotions and experiences that we can find understanding, support and connection with each other and that helps us to grow and flourish.

Highlight that some of the statements were about being able to make decisions about one's own future, and about choices relating to your own body and health. Ask participants:

- **Why is it important that we can make our own decisions about our body and our health?**
- **What happens if other people get to decide for us?**

If you are worried participants might feel uncomfortable or exposed, you can ask everyone to close their eyes and use sounds like drumming or clapping. Alternatively, this could be a silent exercise based on personal reflection, without any form of expression. But by expressing themselves, participants get an opportunity to see or hear that other people face similar challenges and situations, and that they are not alone.



30 MINUTES

## 2. ABORTION AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

Copy and cut out the **Index Cards** from page 12 or write your own on separate pieces of paper.

Start by acknowledging that, when it comes to making decisions about our body, our health and our future, the topic of abortion is often complex and brings up mixed feelings and diverse opinions in society.

Explain that we will play a word association game and that you will pass around index cards with different themes written on them. When participants receive the card, they are invited to share the first word, thought or feeling that comes to mind when they think of that theme. Establish the ground rules:

- There are no right or wrong answers, and you should not feel pressured to explain your response.
- It is okay to pass on a card if you don't have an immediate association or if you're not comfortable sharing at that moment.

Start the activity by picking the first card yourself to demonstrate. For example, if you pick "Choice", you might say, "Freedom". Pass the card to the person next to you in the circle. They will say their association, then pass the card to the next person, and so on. Continue this process until all cards have been passed around and everyone has had a chance to associate with each theme.

After all the cards have made their way around the circle, open up a brief discussion about the common themes or surprising insights that emerged:

- **Did this exercise surprise you in some way? Why?**
- **Were there any common themes or feelings that came up in our associations?**
- **How do these themes and our associations with them relate to human rights and the wider discussion in society about abortion?**

To close the discussion, remind everyone that the purpose of this activity was not to reach a consensus or to change anyone's mind about abortion. Instead, the goal was to foster understanding and respect for diverse perspectives, and to highlight the complexity of the issue in relation to society and to human rights.

Acknowledge the courage it takes to share personal thoughts and feelings on such a sensitive topic. Thank everyone for their openness and willingness to engage in the activity. Encourage participants to continue reflecting on the themes and associations that came up during the activity, and how they relate to their own views on abortion and human rights.

Finally, remind everyone that discussions about sensitive topics like abortion should always be approached with empathy, respect and a commitment to understanding different perspectives, even when they differ from our own.

*Women human rights defenders and activists from the Polish NGO Abortion Dream Team. From left to right: Natalia Broniarczyk, Justyna Wydrzyńska, Kinga Jelinska and Karolina Więckiewicz.*





25 MINUTES

### 3. DEFENDING SAFE ABORTION: JUSTYNA'S STORY

Explain that we are going to look at a real-life case of a woman who was convicted for helping another woman access abortion pills. Read the following out loud:

*"Justyna Wydrzyńska is human rights defender and a doula from Poland. She is part of a group that identify as an 'activist collective' campaigning against abortion stigma in Poland. They offer trainings and non-judgemental advice on how to access a safe abortion. In March 2023, Justyna was sentenced to eight months' community service for helping a pregnant woman to access abortion pills. Justyna's lawyers have appealed the conviction and the appeal is currently pending. Ania (not her real name) – the woman who sought help from Justyna – is a survivor of domestic violence. Justyna learned about Ania's situation via her network and decided to help as she herself had been in an abusive relationship in the past and could understand her fears. Justyna sent Ania her own abortion pills by post, but the package was seized by Ania's husband who reported the action to the police. Ania never took the pills and instead resorted to a dangerous unsafe abortion to terminate the pregnancy."*

Hand out copies of **Justyna's story** (page 15) and **Linking Abortion and Human Rights** (page 13). Give participants some minutes to read the information. Then bring participants together and guide a discussion using some of the following questions. You can use the **background information** (page 14) to help guide the conversation.

- What are some of the barriers to accessing safe abortion as part of broader sexual and reproductive services that Ania faced? How did these barriers affect her choices and her health?
- Justyna's work supports the right to health and the right to bodily autonomy. What do these rights mean to you?
- Why is Justyna's work important?
- Can you imagine helping people like Ania or Justyna considering the difficult situations they are facing? What would you need to be able to do so? Or, on the contrary, what would stop you?
- How do you think Justyna's story illustrates the challenges faced by women who defend human rights and specifically women's rights?
- What are some ways that we, as individuals or as a community, can support human rights defenders like Justyna?

**Doula:** a person who accompanies pregnant people and provides non-judgemental emotional, informational, physical and logistical support during different phases of a pregnancy, including birth or the possible abortion or termination of a pregnancy.



15 MINUTES

## 4. TAKE ACTION

Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to demand justice for Justyna Wydrzyńska. You can give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch this one-minute video from Moses Akatugba who was freed from death row thanks to the actions of people during Write for Rights 2014: [youtu.be/8cU6EPY5r\\_c](https://youtu.be/8cU6EPY5r_c) (available in English only).

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.

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



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On 29 January 2021, thousands of people marched through the Polish capital Warsaw to mark 100 days of protest against the near-total ban on abortion in Poland.

## WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Polish authorities using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the authorities something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell them what shocks you about the case of Justyna Wyrzyńska.
- Tell them why you think no one should be punished for supporting a woman who asked for help with a safe abortion.
- Tell them to **take all necessary measures to ensure that Justyna Wyrzyńska's unjust conviction is overturned and to refrain from bringing any other charges against her for carrying out her legitimate defence of human rights.**

**Prosecutor General**

National Prosecutor's Office  
ul. Postępu 3  
02-676 Warsaw  
Poland

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Email: [biuro.podawcze.pk@prokuratura.gov.pl](mailto:biuro.podawcze.pk@prokuratura.gov.pl)

Twitter / X: [@PK\\_GOV\\_PL](https://twitter.com/PK_GOV_PL)

Hashtags: #IAmJustyna #W4R23

## SHOW SOLIDARITY

Show Justyna that you stand with her. Send her your message of solidarity and hope. Be creative! Post it to your social media using the hashtags #IAmJustyna and #W4R23. Then, mail your message to the address on the right.

Some tips:

- You may want to focus on the importance of helping others and supporting them, or tell her why access to abortion is important to you personally.
- You can draw images of abortion pills, to stress they are a safe method. Green is a universal colour in the fight for the right to safe abortion.

Please do not use images of coathangers. While they are a symbol for unsafe abortions in certain countries, it is not a method used for abortions in Poland and hence can be stigmatizing.

Justyna speaks Polish and English. Here is an example message to include:

**Wspieram Ciebie, Justyna. Dziękuję Ci za Twoją pracę.** (Polish)

**I support you, Justyna. Thank you for your work.** (English)

**Justyna Wyrzyńska**

c/o Amnesty International Polska  
Sapieżynska 10A  
00-215 Warsaw  
Poland

Email: [dlajustyny@amnesty.org.pl](mailto:dlajustyny@amnesty.org.pl)



Amnesty International staff display their solidarity with Justyna Wyrzyńska.

**HANDOUT**

**INDEX CARDS**

**ABORTION**

**EQUALITY**

**ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE**

**REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

**CHOICE**

**“MY BODY, MY RIGHTS”**

**CONTROL**

**WOMEN’S RIGHTS**

## HANDOUT

## LINKING ABORTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

We all have human rights. These include the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, to be educated, to freely express ourselves, to vote, to a fair wage and equal pay for equal work, and to live free from violence and discrimination, among others.

But across the globe many people still face discrimination, for instance on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. Gender inequality underpins many problems which disproportionately affect women, girls, LGBTI people and gender diverse people, such as domestic and sexual violence, lower pay, lack of access to education and inadequate healthcare.

Everyone should be able to make decisions about their own body as we all have the right to bodily autonomy and everyone has sexual and reproductive rights. This means people are entitled to access sexual and reproductive health information, goods and services – such as modern contraception and safe abortion – which are available, affordable, acceptable and of good quality. People are also entitled to choose if, when and with whom they have an intimate relationship or get married, whether they want to have children, and if so, how many, when and with whom.

At its core, the issue of abortion is about a person's ability to make decisions about their own body, health and future. When people have the freedom to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy, they can better control their health, plan their lives and live in dignity.

Consider how these human rights are related to abortion:

**Rights to health and life:** If abortion is restricted or fully banned, people may resort to unsafe methods that can lead to serious health complications or even death. Therefore, ensuring access to safe abortion services is crucial for protecting the rights to health and life.

**Right to live in dignity:** The ability to make decisions about one's own body, including the decision to have an abortion, is a fundamental aspect of living in dignity. Forced continuation of pregnancy can have significant physical, emotional and socioeconomic impacts, potentially undermining a person's right to dignity.

**Rights to autonomy and privacy:** These rights are about having control over one's own life and body, and making decisions without interference from others. In the context of abortion, this means the freedom to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy, without undue interference or coercion.

**Right to liberty and security of person:** In some countries, abortion is criminalized and people are punished and imprisoned for having an abortion or facilitating access to abortion. This infringes on the right to liberty.

**Rights to equality and non-discrimination and equal protection of the law:** These rights mean that everyone should be treated without discrimination and receive equal protection under the law, regardless of their personal characteristics or circumstances. Restrictive abortion laws disproportionately affect women, girls and people who can become pregnant from certain groups, such as those who are poor, young or from marginalized communities, violating these rights.

**Right to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment:** In certain cases, the denial or delay of safe abortion or post-abortion care constitutes cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and may amount to torture. It is also a form of gender-based violence.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

# ABORTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Criminal and other punitive laws and policies that restrict or deny access to abortion often compel women, girls and others who can become pregnant to seek clandestine and/or unsafe abortions or to continue pregnancies that may damage their physical and mental health. Women, girls and people who can become pregnant have the rights to personal and bodily autonomy, liberty and security of person, dignity and equality and non-discrimination, among other rights. All of these are put at risk by a lack of access to abortion. The criminalization of abortion services can also lead to human rights violations because it forces pregnant people to resort to unsafe abortions, in some cases leading to preventable deaths and injuries.

Women human rights defenders like Justyna are women who engage in the defence of any human right and people of all genders who defend the rights of women and rights connected to gender equality including sexual and reproductive rights. Because of who they are and what they stand for, they are systematically stigmatized and attacked in a world dominated by patriarchal conventions where gender, social and economic inequalities, and gender-based and intersectional discrimination are deeply entrenched.

All over the world, women human rights defenders are speaking out against injustice, human rights violations and abuses, and discrimination, often because they have experienced these things first-hand. Their work is central to human progress: they fight for human rights and against patriarchy and racism, while pushing for ground-breaking reforms on so many fronts. The actions of women's rights defenders, by their very nature, challenge patriarchal power structures, harmful social norms and stereotyped gender roles. Governments must live up to their commitment to ensure these activists can operate freely and safely.

Finally, it is important to note that international human rights law and standards are clear that human rights apply after birth, not before. Some countries have adopted and enforced laws and policies that attempt to accord human rights protection to fetuses, embryos, zygotes and gametes, to the detriment of the human rights of women, girls and all people who can become pregnant. Opponents to abortion who advocate for its criminalization also often try to assert that abortion is incompatible with a foetus's "right to life". However, this argument is false. International and regional human rights treaty provisions protecting the right to life, and the official bodies that interpret articles protecting life and other human rights guarantees, do not extend such protections before birth. No international human rights body has ever recognized a foetus as a subject of protection under the right to life provided by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child or other international human rights treaties. Additionally, no human rights body has ever found abortion to be incompatible with human rights, including the right to life.

Amnesty International refers to women and girls, people who can get pregnant and pregnant people or individuals. This framing recognizes that, while the majority of personal experiences with abortion relate to cisgender women and girls (that is, women and girls whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with the sex they are assigned at birth), intersex people, transgender men and boys, and people with other gender identities may have the reproductive capacity to become pregnant and may need and have abortions.



# JUSTYNA'S STORY

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Justyna Wydrzyńska's own abortion experience, with no support or access to reliable information, gave her the strength and motivation to help others make informed decisions about their reproductive lives. Justyna co-founded Abortion Dream Team, an activist collective campaigning against abortion stigma and offering advice on accessing safe abortion in Poland, where abortion laws are among the most restrictive in Europe.

In February 2020, Justyna was put in contact with Ania (not her real name). Ania was in an abusive relationship, pregnant and desperate, saying she would rather die than continue with her pregnancy. Justyna, a survivor of a violent relationship herself, knew she had to help. She sent Ania her own abortion pills through the post, but Ania's partner intercepted the package and contacted the police, who confiscated the pills.

In November 2021, the public prosecutor brought charges against Justyna for "helping with an abortion". In March 2023, she was found guilty and sentenced to eight months' community service. Her lawyers have appealed.

Justyna's conviction sets a dangerous precedent. Without the support and trustworthy information that she and other activists provide, people like Ania would be alone and without access to safe abortion.

Demonstrating her courage in spite of the hostility she faces, Justyna says: "I was driven by the will to help when no one else wanted to or could help. For me, helping Ania was an obvious, decent and honest thing to do."



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Top: Justyna Wydrzyńska.

Centre: Justyna leaves a hearing in the case brought against her for aiding an abortion in Poland, July 2022. A large crowd had gathered outside in solidarity with her.

Bottom: Attendees of the European and Central Asian Regional Forum in Berlin in 2023 showing their solidarity with Justyna.

## ABOUT

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. 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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