

How to Earn Media Coverage of Your Write for Rights Party or Event

Amnesty International's Write for Rights may be the world's largest annual human rights letter writing event. Every fall, to mark International Human Rights Day on December 10th, the campaign brings together people all over the world to help end cases of urgent human rights abuses. We write letters to stop torture, halt executions, and free people unjustly detained—including prisoners of conscience—people jailed solely for the peaceful expression of their beliefs or identity.

We have heard over and over again from former prisoners of conscience, human rights defenders, torture survivors, and death row prisoners that letters and online actions by Amnesty International activists as part of Write for Rights saved their lives and gave them hope. We also have heard from current and former government officials that our activism can change the minds of decision makers.

This year, Write for Rights focuses on the right to protest. We are drawing attention to the systemic violations that the individuals in our 10 cases face and earning media coverage in your local press can help. We let our cases know about any coverage, which will give them hope. We will also use the coverage in our follow-up advocacy with government officials, which will help increase the pressure on them to act on these cases.

Getting Coverage

It's important to research before reaching out to reporters. You should look to identify journalists who may be interested at:

- Newspapers (metro edition, reporters, columnists, editorial writers)
- Radio (talk show hosts/producers)
- TV (assignment editors)
- Online (local blogs, community bulletins)

Tools in Your Toolbox

Here is a guide to the tools you can use to reach out to the press:

Advisory – Advisories can help get your event on the daybooks, so make sure to send to calendar and assignment editors. You should send one-page advisories three weeks prior to the event. Alert journalists to your event with the basic facts: who, what, where, when and why. Make follow up calls after you send it out.

Press Release – Press releases are a good way to inform reporters about your event and provide them with quotes for their story. You should keep press releases to one page. The release can look a lot like the advisory. Include details about the event (number of people who attended, impact, etc.) as well as a quote or two that reporters can plug into their story if they don't have time to contact you directly. You should always include the name of a spokesperson and their contact information. Send to news and/or local metro editors. We have posted a sample press release on our website

Letter to the Editor – Has there been a story published recently on the case, topic or country? Can you sum up your point concisely? LTEs should be brief responses to recently published stories. Check the newspaper’s submission guidelines for word limits, as they’re rarely over 200 words. You can use relevant information, as well, such as current events, anniversaries, etc. as the “hook” for your letter to the editor (LTE). If possible, include Amnesty International in your letter and notify the regional and/or national office of your submission.

Op-Ed –A good opinion editorial is timely, factual, and contains powerful language to convey a larger point. It should be less than 800 words. Focus on one idea, briefly express your opinion in the first paragraph, then use the following paragraphs to back up your viewpoint with facts and statistics. Writing about a hot issue, arguing an unexpected point of view, or co-authoring a piece with someone who the reader might not expect will help your piece stand out. When submitting, make sure to include a brief bio, along with your phone number and email address. Pitch one outlet at a time. Remember, most places won’t run something that has appeared elsewhere.

Pitching – Reaching out directly to reporters can also be a useful way to obtain media coverage. Contact reporters through email first and follow up by phone. When crafting your pitch, use the most engaging and crucial information to convey your story idea. Think of what would peak your interest if you had to write the story. Take note that many reporters are on deadline, and if they are interested in your story, may pursue it very quickly or not at all. If you don’t hear back, don’t get discouraged!

Timing

The official Write for Rights time period is from November 14 through January 31, but you don’t necessarily have to wait until then! Any letters that you generate now until January 31 will count toward the total.

- If you want to have an event or a letter writing party, you should send out a media **advisory** at least a week beforehand to a wide range of calendar and assignment editors. Make sure to also invite specific reporters directly. It’s always a good idea to send a reminder early on the day of the event.
- You can look up relevant reporters by checking the contact sections of the websites of your local outlets. You’ll sometimes find a listing for news tips, or the contact info for an assignment editor. Sometimes social media helps, and you can find that information in the Twitter profile bios of outlet reporters. If that information is not available, contact the general email or phone line, describe your event, and ask who the best contact would be to send an advisory or release.
- You should also send a **press release** right after or before your event to increase the probability that it will be covered. If possible, also send a few photos along with the release. Make sure to send them as a URL link, like Google Drive, and not an attachment. Try not to wait too long after the event to send this out.

- You can send a **letter to the editor** at any time, especially if you see a news story in your local paper that pertains to one of the Write for Rights cases.
- You may also want to draft an **op-ed** about a particular case, or about the work Amnesty International does in your community. The latter is especially effective in small media outlets. It's a good idea to have a hook rather than just submitting something out of left field. For example, you can submit something for Human Rights Defenders Day on December 9 or Human Rights Day on December 10. Check the website of your local news outlets for details on how to submit a letter to the editor or op-ed.
- Finally, if your event is covered, or if you get a letter or op-ed published, **please let us know** so that we can add it to our tally and share with our cases and their families. Please email W4Rs@aiusa.org