

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

APPENDIX A – Four Stories and a Poem

The following are true stories. Some names have been altered to protect identity.

1. Amerigo – My name is Amerigo. I am 13 years old and I live on the street alone. My mother doesn't want me. She told me to go away, otherwise she would kill me. My father lives very far away. I want to go to him. I begged him to send me some money so I could buy a bus ticket. I am still waiting. He hasn't answered. Sometimes I find work. I used to collect trash and sell it. I stopped doing that after I got an infection and a doctor told me to stay away from the trash dump. My friends who work sorting rubbish in dumps often suffer from serious diseases. One of them was recently killed after he fell into a hole that opened up in a pile of trash. Many of us work for 10 to 12 hours and get so little that we can't even buy food. A few of my friends also work in factories and workshops. A boy I know lost one of his eyes after a piece of hot glass flew into his eye at the glass factory where he worked. The owner refused to pay for medical help and fired him. For me, it is very hard. I am always hungry, and I don't know where I will sleep the next night. I would like to live in my own home and sleep there. The nights are very cold in winter.
Source: www.cyberschoolbus.org (May 2007). Country not identified (possibly Brazil).

2. Dawn – “If I try to get help, it will get worse. They are always looking for a new person to beat up. If I ratted, they would get suspended and then there would be no stopping them. I love you all so much.” These were Dawn's last words to her family. According to the newspaper, Dawn was “a pretty and friendly teenager, described by those who knew her as a typical 14-year-old, who occasionally had disagreements with her parents. But she had to deal with more. She was the target of incessant harassment by bullying schoolmates, whom she called the ‘toughest girls’ in school.” For Dawn, school was like entering an “everyday war zone.” She was found by her younger brother in her bedroom. She had hung herself with a dog leash.
*Source: *The Globe & Mail* (November 2000), Canada.*

3. Josimene – Josimene, 10, looks at a black and white Polaroid of herself. There are no mirrors in the two-room house where she works as a live-in maid, or “restavec,” for a family of four. Josimene's family lives in a remote part of Haiti's interior, hours by car and foot from Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital. Her parents are small farmers. Two years before, they asked a local woman to find a family that would take Josimene as a servant. Josimene bathes the children, aged five and four, cleans the two-room house, washes dishes, scrubs laundry by hand, runs errands, and sells small items from the family's home store. “I would like to see my brothers and sisters,” she says. “I miss them and my parents. I would rather wash dishes and clean the house for my mother than for these people.” Josimene owns one dress, two pairs of shorts, one skirt, a couple of shirts, a school uniform, and flip flops.
Source: www.childlaborphotoproject.org (May 2007), Haiti.

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

4. David – David was born in Ottawa and attended school in Toronto. His father, a Canadian citizen, was born in Chechnya. When he returned there to join a resistance group fighting for independence, he took David with him. David lived at a military training camp and soon became involved in training, even going to combat. When he was 15, he threw a grenade and killed a Russian soldier. He was captured. When he asked for pain medication for his wounds, he was refused. In jail, a bag was placed over his head and military dogs were brought in to frighten him. Cold water was thrown over him. His hands were tied above the door frame, and he was forced to stand in this position for hours, sometimes urinating himself. Soldiers came in to laugh at him. Sometimes he was beaten. Once when he soiled the floor, guards poured a pine-scented cleaning fluid over him and used him as a human mop to clean up his own urine and feces. For five years, Russia has refused to allow him to see a Canadian lawyer. The Canadian government has said very little because Russia is regarded as an important trading partner. David is still there, waiting for someone to help him.

Source: Amnesty International (May 2007), Canada.

5. Poem *Letter from Ethiopia*

*when the flood came
our myths fled to the hills
our castles drowned
some of us moved to new homes
built by a Saudi billionaire
to make way for the Sheraton
three hours' walk from the market
through forests filled with hyenas*

it is what it is

*some of us have regular jobs
and make up to 28 cents a day
others must work with their imagination
to stay out of death's reach
we broker used or stolen goods
finding tires for an old Peugeot
each from a different place
some of us fish in the filthy river
for combs and plates and toys, or discarded clothing
to sell, some gather shredded cloth and bits of wood
to make mops, still others ask
the broker to find them a blind child
to beg sweetly for them in the street*

imagine being her

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

*what can you see
when your myths are hiding in the hills?*

Adapted by Alys Skel from ideas and language in an article, "From an Ancient Cloud," in *Harper's Magazine* (May 2007) by Toronto writer, Yohannes Edemariam.

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

APPENDIX B – Universal Declaration of Human Rights / simplified

Article 1 – UNIVERSALITY – Human rights are *universal*. *Everyone* has a right to freedom, dignity, and equality.

Article 2 – EQUALITY – Human rights are *inclusive*. No one can be discriminated against for any reason whatsoever.

Article 3 – SECURITY – Everyone has the right to be *safe* from harm.

Article 4 – FREEDOM – No one shall be made a *slave*.

Article 5 – DIGNITY – No one shall be *tortured* or subjected to cruel and degrading treatment.

Article 6 – PERSONHOOD – Everyone shall be considered as a *person* before the law.

Article 7 – PROTECTION – Everyone is entitled to *equal protection* under the law.

Article 8 – REDRESS – Everyone is entitled to seek *remedies* under the law.

Article 9 – LIBERTY – No one shall be arrested or exiled from a country *without cause*.

Article 10 – JUSTICE – Everyone is entitled to a *fair trial*.

Article 11 – INNOCENCE – Everyone has the right to be *presumed innocent* until proven guilty.

Article 12 – PRIVACY – Everyone has the right to privacy and *freedom from harassment*.

Article 13 – MOBILITY – Everyone has the right to *move about freely*, including in and out of his or her country.

Article 14 – ASYLUM – Everyone has the right to seek *safety in another country*, unless he or she has committed a crime.

Article 15 – NATIONALITY – Everyone has a right to *citizenship* in a country. No one can be stateless.

Article 16 – MARRIAGE – Everyone has the right to *marry freely*, without loss of protection or status as a person.

Article 17 – PROPERTY – Everyone has the right to *own property*.

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

Article 18 – BELIEF – Everyone has the right to *believe freely* from religion or individual conscience.

Article 19 – SPEECH – Everyone has the right to *his or her own opinion* and to speak freely.

Article 20 – ASSEMBLY – Everyone has the right to belong to a *free and peaceful association* with a group.

Article 21 – DEMOCRACY – Everyone has the right to participate in *elections and in the public service*.

Article 22 – WELFARE – Everyone has the right to *basic social security*, and not to be homeless or held an outcast.

Article 23 – EMPLOYMENT – Everyone has the right to seek *fair and favourable employment* and to join a trade union to protect such employment.

Article 24 – LEISURE – Everyone has the right to *reasonable work hours* and periodic holidays.

Article 25 – WELL-BEING – Everyone has the right to enjoy *minimum standards* of health, sustenance (food & shelter), social service, and other benefits of ordinary living, regardless of circumstance.

Article 26 – EDUCATION – Everyone has the right to an education and to opportunities for the *full development* of their personality.

Article 27 – CULTURE – Everyone has the right to participate in the *cultural life* of the community, including copyright protection.

Article 28 – ORDER – Everyone has the right to live in an *ordered society*.

Article 29 – RESPONSIBILITY – Everyone’s rights are possible, and therefore limited, by the duty and respect they owe to the equal rights of others.

Article 30 – FIDELITY – No right (in this Declaration) may be interpreted in such a way as to render any other right in this Declaration meaningless.

Technically speaking, Articles 28-30 describe “negative rights,” that is, responsibilities or obligations we have to the collective rights of others. Without an expectation of responsibility from others, and from ourselves to others, rights cannot exist.

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

Appendix C – Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) / orientation

Child hunger, child labour, child poverty; the plight of refugee children and child prostitution; the application of the death penalty to children, child abandonment and child slavery – all of these extreme circumstances for children have led to the adoption in 1989 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The Convention defines a child as anyone 18 years and younger. There are 54 articles in the CRC. The Convention recognizes that, as dependents, children are entitled to special protections. These are both similar to, and different from, the rights that pertain to adults.

Broadly speaking, the categories fall into four main areas: subsistence rights (e.g., food and shelter), development rights (education), protection rights (vs. exploitation, cruel treatment), and participation rights (speech, play).

The full text of the CRC is available through the Amnesty website. A simplified version of the CRC, courtesy of the Amnesty International Human Rights Kit, is presented below.

All children, from birth to 18 years, have the following rights:

1. The right to life.
2. The right to a name and nationality.
3. The right to be with their parents or with those who will care for them best.
4. The right to have ideas and say what they think.
5. The right to practice their religion.
6. The right to meet with other children.
7. The right to get information they need.
8. The right to special care, education, and training, if needed.
9. The right to health care.
10. The right to enough food and clean water.
11. The right to free education.
12. The right to play.
13. The right to speak their own language.
14. The right to learn about and enjoy their own culture.
15. The right not to be used as a cheap worker.
16. The right not to be hurt or neglected.
17. The right not to be used as a soldier in wars.
18. The right to be protected from dangers.
19. The right to know about their rights and responsibilities.

Question #1 – Which broad category of right is most common in the list of rights above: subsistence, development, protection, or participation?

Question #2 – Two countries have declined to ratify the Convention of the Rights of the Child, Somalia and the United States of America. Why?

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

APPENDIX D – To the Student / Computer Lab Instructions (Lesson 2)

The purpose of this lesson is to help you identify a particular country and human rights story for your letter.

STEPS 1-3 WILL FAMILIARIZE YOU WITH THE WEBSITE (10 minutes)

1. Go to www.amnesty.ca. Amnesty's homepage logo, a candle encircled by barbed wire, represents hope. Scan the windows, Quick Links, and other information. Move your cursor over one of the images in the Action window. This is one method for finding a good story. Identify one here. _____
2. Click *Publications & Resources* in the menu bar. In the left-hand column, note that you can contact the AI librarian! Click *About Amnesty International and Human Rights*. Then click *Frequently Asked Questions*. Now click *What Amnesty International does*. Here you will find Amnesty's one-page tutorial on human rights.
3. Return to *Publications & Resources*. In the main window, click *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Write the Article number and a key phrase for the right you explored from Lesson 1. _____
Note that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is also available on this page.

FIND YOUR COUNTRY & STORY

4. On the homepage, click *Take Action to end abuses*. Then click *by country* or *by region* in the boxed insert in the main window. The country option will show Amnesty Canada's priority work. The region option will allow you to find all the rest. Follow the links.
5. Alternatively, click *by issue* in the boxed insert. Follow a link that interests you. It might be *Women* or *War on Terror*. These topics will lead you to work on various countries.
6. You may also click *Priority Concerns* on the homepage menu bar. Follow the links. Or click the *Youth* link above the homepage menu bar. Then click *Take Action* in the column window on the left. Note that the action here may be restricted to only one country.
7. Alternatively, you may try Amnesty's main website www.amnesty.org. You may also go to other human rights websites. Try Human Rights Watch at www.hrw.org or Free the Children at www.freethechildren.com.

COUNTRY SELECTED _____

HUMAN RIGHTS STORY _____

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

APPENDIX E – To the Student / Computer Lab Instructions (Lesson 3)

The purpose of this lesson is to establish your country's profile, give you time for further research, and establish the target address for your letter.

1. COUNTRY PROFILE (see other page) (20-25 minutes)

Most of the information needed can be obtained from www.cia.gov. Click *Library*. Then click *World Fact Book*. Enter your country and scroll down. Profile categories not found here can be obtained from Encarta (En) at www.encyclopedia.msn.com or Wikipedia at www.wikipedia.org. Enter the country name. At Encarta, click *Quick Facts*.

A profile is shown for Canada as a comparison. If you have chosen Canada for your human rights story, then select a different country for this exercise. Write your country name in the space provided.

A country's profile gives a quick glimpse of its health, wealth, and size, among other things. The human rights websites give you a much more detailed picture. You can also go to the New Internationalist website, which maintains country profiles linked to human rights. Go to www.newint.org and click *Columns* in the menu bar.

2. FURTHER RESEARCH ON YOUR HUMAN RIGHTS STORY

Your main object in the remainder of this lesson is to identify the target address for your letter. These addresses are easily found on the Amnesty websites through Take Action and other links.

For more in-depth research, go to www.web.amnesty.org and click *Library* in the menu bar. Follow the links to countries, regions, documents, and themes. All of the other buttons in the menu bar – New, Act Now, Campaigns, Resources & Links – will give you a wealth of other information. (Beware!)

Write the name and address of the person(s) you are writing below (you will copy one):

1. _____	2. _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

Country Profile

Country	<u>CANADA</u>	_____
Motto (Wikipedia)	From Sea to Sea	_____
Area	9.98 M sq km	_____
Population	33.4 M	_____
Infant mortality rate	4.6 / 1,000	_____
Life expectancy	80.5 years	_____
AIDS rate	0.3% pop. (2003)	_____
People per doctor (En)	477	_____
Religion	Roman Catholic 42.6%	_____
Language	English 59.3%	_____
Literacy	99%	_____
Students per teacher (En)	17	_____
Government type	Parliamentary democracy	_____
Capital	Ottawa	_____
GDP per capita	\$35,200 US	_____
Unemployment rate	6.4%	_____
Pop / below poverty line	15.9%	_____
Current account balance	\$20.56 billion (2005)	_____
Debt (external)	\$684.7 billion (2006)	_____
Cell phones	16.6 M (2005)	_____
Internet users	21.9 M (2005)	_____
Airports	1,337	_____

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

APPENDIX F – Sample Business Letter and Human Rights Letter

The following business letter is a letter by a consumer appealing a decision of a company. A letter of appeal resembles a human rights letter in that it is based on a complaint, grievance, or concern of some kind and is asking for an action.

350 Any St., Unit 101
Toronto ON M5A 2G7

October 24, 2005

Nancy Decider, Supervisor
Group Benefits, Big Insurance
380 Further Street South
P.O. Box 1000
Waterloo ON N2J 4V7

RE: PLAN NO. 8000, CERTIFICATE NO. 10001
DEPENDENT: Angel Blue

Dear Nancy Decider:

Thank you for your letter of October 4, 2005. I am asking you to re-consider your decision based on the information I give below.

Angel's medical letter identified his date of diagnosis. However, it did not make it clear that his disability dates back to elementary school. Over that time, he saw several doctors and school counselors for suspected depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. He either resisted therapy or was not prescribed medication. I will have Dr. Galen, his current psychiatrist, verify that Angel has been suffering from depression for a long time.

Allow me to point out that had your disqualifying clause been related to onset of diagnosis rather than onset of disability, I would have had some concerns about the equity position of Big Insurance. In closing, I trust that with the amended information you will be able to make a correct judgment based on the current language.

I will look forward to a decision by the end of November. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Neo Blue

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
60 Mobile Dr., Toronto ON M4A 2P3

December 22, 2006

Minister of the Interior and Justice
Sr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega
Ministro del Interior y de Justicia
Ministerio del Interior
Av. Jimenez No. 8-89
Bogota, COLOMBIA

Dear Minister:

Pleased be advised that the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF), representing 70,000 members in Ontario, Canada, has been supporting FENSUAGRO, a union of peasant farmers in your beautiful country, since 2003. We are very concerned about our Colombian colleague, MIGUEL ANGEL BOBADILLA, National Director of Education & Rural Youth for our sister union.

The arrest and imprisonment of MIGUEL ANGEL BOBADILLA on a charge of "rebellion" is deeply troubling to us. As you are aware, over 300 teachers and activists with FENSUAGRO have been assassinated in the last ten years. No one has been arrested or prosecuted for these crimes. In September 2006, Amnesty International expressed concern that the government of Colombia has given the "green light" for renewed attacks on FENSUAGRO and other union activists. You can understand why we are alarmed.

The OSSTF urges you to look closely into the circumstances of the arrest of MIGUEL ANGEL BOBADILLA and to obtain his release so that he may be re-united with his family and continue his human rights work.

Sincerely yours,

Melody Chips, Human Rights Officer
OSSTF

cc. Matthew Levin, Canadian Ambassador to Colombia
The Honourable Peter Mackay, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada
Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada
FENSUAGRO, Colombia

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

APPENDIX G – Writing the Human Rights Letter

The purpose of your letter is to help someone. The best way to do that is to make sure your letter has the following characteristics.

1. **BE PERSONAL** - This is best achieved by identifying clearly who you are and by writing in your own words. The reader will feel more responsible to someone whose voice and identity are clear. Five people writing personally have more impact than 100 people sending a form letter.
2. **BE RESPECTFUL** – Assume that the person you are writing does not know about the situation you describe and will want to cooperate. Indignation and anger make people defensive – criticism also – and this could end up hurting the person you are trying to help. Don't be judgmental. Respect different belief systems. Express your concerns solely in terms of human rights.
3. **BE SIMPLE** – Write in clear, straightforward language. Avoid complicated or flowery language. The reader wants to know what you are saying. Remember, in many countries, your letter in English will have to be translated.
4. **BE BRIEF** – Short letters have a better chance of being read. You are likely writing a high-level official. They are busy people. Other people are likely also writing them on the same subject.
5. **BE ACCURATE** – Don't say anything that is not supported by your research. Don't speculate or drift off topic. If you are writing an Amnesty letter, follow their guidelines (but not necessarily their wording) very closely. Facts work because they are true. They also show that you know what you are talking about (dates, what happened, to whom, why it's wrong in law, and so on).
6. **BE STRATEGIC** – Find some way to *highlight* the name of the individual or issue that you are writing about – all capital letters, yellow highlighter, banner format, repetition, whatever works. That way, even if the letter is mostly unread, the reader will know who it's about.
7. **BE VIVID** – Use short sentences and active verb tenses (e.g., “I know” or “I worry that” is better than “it is reported”), so that your language feels alive. State clearly what you want to see happen. Close your letter with a question (e.g., “Will you take prompt action?”) so that your reader is prompted to act or reply.

OTHER TIPS

Express an interest in the country if you can. Indicate any personal connection you might already have with it. Throw in a (honest) compliment.

The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

Be positive. Help the reader see the benefits of performing the action you are requesting, e.g., by maintaining its traditions or values, strengthening its reputation in the eyes of others, and so on.

Copy your letter to at least one other reader (see example HR letter). Amnesty will usually have given at least two addresses.

Finally, if you want to be even more effective, write a “*we*” letter rather than an “I” letter. In other words, have two of your friends sign the letter also. This helps to spread human rights awareness around!

STRUCTURE OF THE LETTER

Like the letters shown, your letter will have a return address, a date, an inside address, a salutation, the text or body of the letter, and a closing.

The “attention line” shown in the business letter (above the salutation) is optional in the human rights letter. Remember that you will be “highlighting” the name of your issue or person in the body of the letter.

SHORT LETTER – The body of a letter is usually three paragraphs, occasionally four. If you were writing just one sentence for each of these paragraphs, your “short letter” would do the following:

- *Introduce* yourself and where you are writing from.
- *Describe* the issue or person you are writing about.
- Make a specific *call for action* to address the problem.
- *Ask* for a reply.

LONG LETTER – The longer letter simply elaborates on these same ideas. Here is a plan for a three-paragraph letter.

- *Opening Paragraph* – Establish who you are and who or what it is you are writing about. This is a short paragraph of two or three sentences.
- *Middle Paragraph* – Organize this paragraph around the call to action and/or the description of the issue or person (see notes for the short letter above). This is the long paragraph in your letter, perhaps 4-7 sentences.
- *Closing Paragraph* – You could save the call to action for the closing. Your closing is intended to request a reply or ask some other question to prompt an action or reply. The closing paragraph is only one or two sentences.

Good luck!