

# Pressure groups - amnesty international

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In Great Britain, the number of political parties is very small, whereas the number of pressure groups runs into thousands; as the membership of political parties has fallen, that of pressure groups has increased. The aim of all pressure groups is to influence the people who actually have the power to make decisions. A pressure group is an organised group that seeks to influence the government decisions or protect or advance a particular cause or interest. Groups may promote a specific issue and raise it up the political agenda. Pressure groups are sometimes able to gather sufficient support to force government to amend or even scrap legislation. For example, in March 1998 around 300, 000 people went to London to protest about the Labour government's rural policies - the ' Countryside March' - the government reacted by announcing plans for a Ministry of Rural Affairs and by publishing a white paper investigating all aspects of rural life. In return, these groups have an input into the making of decisions. My presentation is mainly focused on the one of the most influential pressure group and human rights organisation in the world, called Amnesty International. Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights to be respected and protected for everyone. It undertakes research and takes action aimed at preventing and ending grave abuses of these rights, demanding that all governments and other powerful entities respect the rule of law. It campaigns globally and locally. Amnesty International members and supporters exert influence on governments, political bodies. Activists take up human rights issues by mobilizing public pressure through mass demonstrations, vigils, direct lobbying, publication and promotion of research findings, human rights

education or co-operation with student groups. Amnesty International works with and for individuals the world over. For example, it takes action to : stop violence against women or abolish the death penalty. Ever since Amnesty International started campaigning in 1961, it has worked around the globe to stop the abuse of human rights. In 1961 Peter Benenson launched a worldwide campaign, ' Appeal for Amnesty 1961' with the publication of a prominent article, ' The Forgotten Prisoners'. The imprisonment of two Portuguese students, who had raised their wine glasses in a toast to freedom, moved Benenson to write this article. His appeal was reprinted in other papers across the world and turned out to be the genesis of Amnesty International. The first international meeting was held in July, with delegates from Belgium, the UK, France, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland and the US. They decided to establish " a permanent international movement in defence of freedom of opinion and religion". On Human Rights Day, 10 December, the first Amnesty candle was lit. In January 1962 the first research trip was undertaken. This trip to Ghana, was followed by Czechoslovakia in February (on behalf of a prisoner of conscience), and then to Portugal and East Germany. Moreover, At a conference in Belgium, a decision was made to set up a permanent organization that will be known as Amnesty International. During all these years Amnesty International has undertaken many of the campaigns and actions and developed human rights. It broaden its territory and became one of the most stronger human rights protector. In January 1969, UNESCO granted Amnesty International consultative status as the organization reached another milestone — 2, 000 prisoners of conscience released. In 1977 the organisation was awarded

Nobel Peace Prize for its " campaign against torture", and the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights in 1978. After 30 years the organization broaden its scope to cover work on abuses by armed opposition groups, hostage taking and people imprisoned due to their sexual orientation. Thousands of Amnesty International members respond to Urgent Action appeals on behalf of individuals at immediate risk. Publicity through the news media and the internet takes its message in many languages to millions of people. It is an organisation independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, it is democratic and self-governing and financially self-sufficient. Amnesty International has more than 2. 8 million members, supporters and subscribers in over 150 countries and territories, in every region of the world. It has offices in 80 countries around the world, for example in Sweden, Senegal or Bangladesh. Amnesty International research teams focusing on particular countries and themes investigate reports of human rights abuses, cross checking and corroborating information from a wide variety of sources and contacts. It receives information from many sources, including: prisoners and others suffering other human rights abuses and their representatives, lawyers and journalists, refugees, community workers and human rights organizations and defenders All Amnesty International campaigning and research is fact based. Among the many activities it carry out, it sends experts to talk with victims, observes trials, monitors global and local media, publicizes its concerns in documents, leaflets, posters, advertisements, newsletters and websites. Amnesty International's current six year ( 2010 -2016) strategy

aims to empower rights-holders whose rights are challenged and strengthen the human rights movement.