



LETTER WRITING MARATHON FOR SCHOOLS 2022

What are human rights?



<https://youtu.be/6e8m8L9BFa4>

The right to defend human rights

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<https://youtu.be/3okyEcNg38o>

What we are is up to us

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoxxXQe1ogU>

Change the world



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3TA7mJqN08>

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?



All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

- Article 1, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Human rights belong to all people, everywhere and at all times. In their core they protect human dignity.

Only the most important rights are human rights. All rights are equally important and they are connected to each other.

Ensuring the respect of human rights is everyone's responsibility. States are legally obligated to respect human rights, for individuals the obligation is moral. In international human rights treaties states are committed to respect, protect and to fulfill these rights.

EXAMPLES OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

The right to life, liberty and security

Right to not be discriminated against

Prohibition of torture

Freedom of expression

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Right to a fair trial

WHAT IS AMNESTY?

The world's biggest human rights organisation, founded in **1961**.

Works in over **150** countries, and has over **10 million** supporters.

Amnesty is politically and religiously non-partisan.

Amnesty researches **grave human rights violations** and works to prevent and end them.

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CHOW HANG-TUNG



HONG KONG

Chow Hang-tung, a young human rights lawyer, is imprisoned in Hong Kong for holding vigils to commemorate the victims of the Tiananmen Square crackdown.

A brilliant student from a top university, Chow could have pursued any high-flying career. Instead, she's dedicated her life to fearlessly protecting people's rights as a human rights lawyer and activist.

Chow was the vice-chairperson of the Hong Kong Alliance, which organized the world's biggest candlelight vigil commemorating victims of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. In 1989, hundreds – possibly thousands – of people were killed in the streets around Tiananmen Square, Beijing, as troops opened fire, killing protesters peacefully calling for economic and social reforms.

The Chinese government wants people to forget, but Chow has made it her mission to remember the victims.

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LUIS MANUEL OTERO ALCÁNTARA



In July 2021, Cuban artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara posted a video saying he would be attending a protest in his hometown of Havana. Before he could get there, he was arrested and later sentenced to five years in prison.

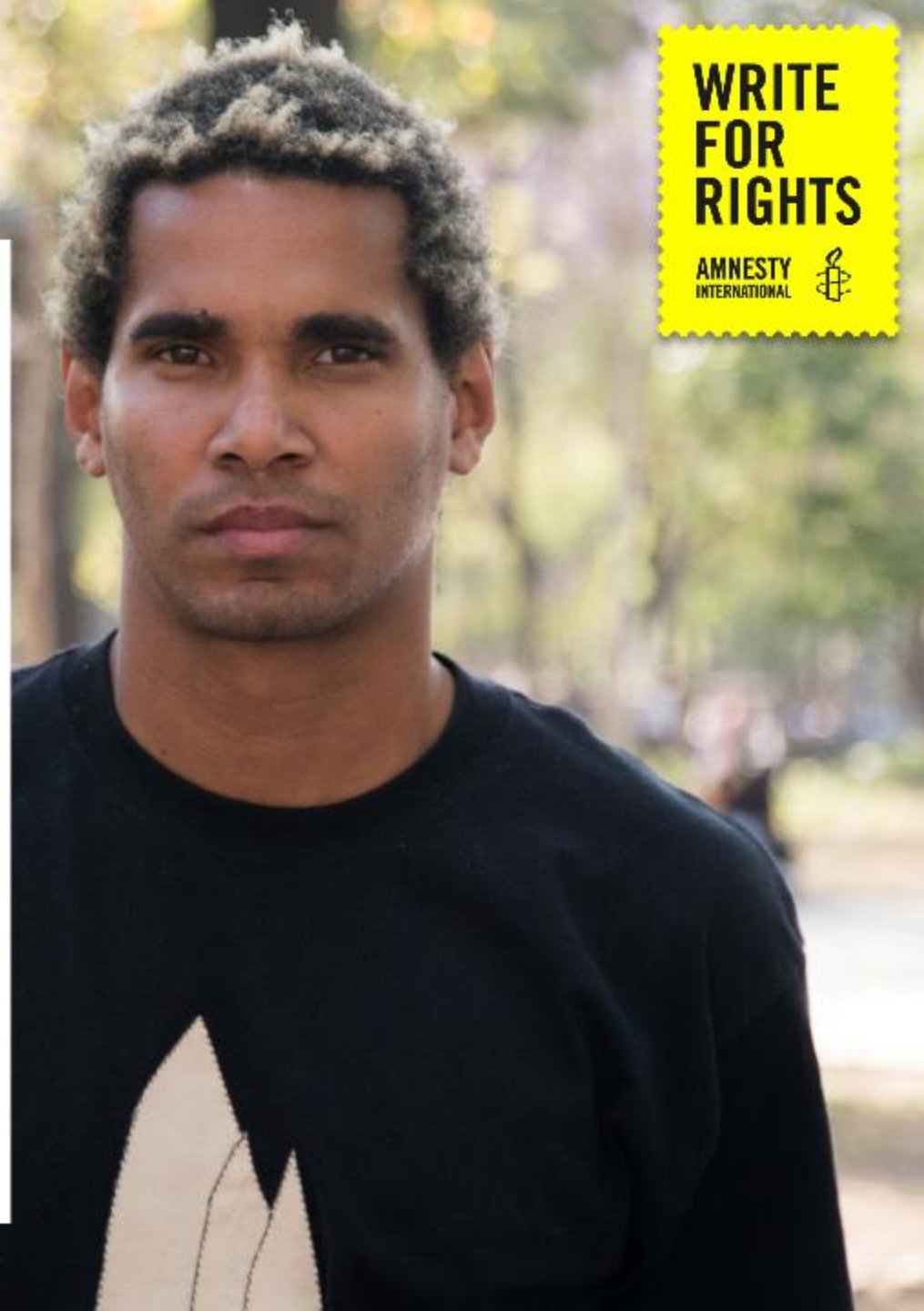
Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara is a self-taught Black Cuban artist and activist. He loves to paint, dance, and wear bright pink suits. His home in San Isidro, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Havana, is a haven for the community – an open house for people to meet and connect.

Frustrated by a law seeking to silence critical artists, Luis Manuel became a leader of the San Isidro Movement: a diverse group of artists, journalists, and activists defending the right to freedom of expression whose members were intimidated, surveilled, and detained.

On 11 July 2021, Luis Manuel posted a video online, saying he would be taking part in one of the largest demonstrations Cuba had seen in decades. Luis Manuel was arrested before he joined the protest and taken to Guanajay maximum security prison, where he remains. On 24 June 2022, he was sentenced to five years in prison, after a trial behind closed doors. In prison, Luis Manuel's health is declining and he's not getting proper medical care.

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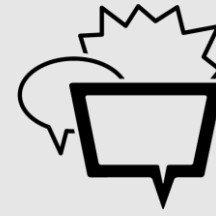
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<https://youtu.be/3OM6MrfQX8I>

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

- Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The right to freedom of expression guarantees us all the right to keep and express opinions freely without interference from the state. This right includes the right to express opinions in demonstrations or through writing, art, the media or the internet. Freedom of expression is an important right in all societies. We need the free exchange of thoughts, so that as many views as possible will get heard. If the freedom is restricted, it may have an impact on other human rights as well as on us receiving important information. Without the right it is difficult to defend other human rights.

Human rights treaties allow the restriction of the freedom of expression only in specific instances. In many countries, for example, racist or otherwise discriminatory speech is prohibited. Freedom of expression can only be restricted in situations where it is absolutely necessary. Necessary reasons can be such as protection of individuals or groups of people, national security, public order, public health or morals.

RIGHT TO PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY



- 1.** *Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*
- 2.** *No one may be compelled to belong to an association.*

- Article 20, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees us all the right to gather together and form groups and associations. The right to peaceful assembly means the right to gather at public places for a common cause. Gatherings can be, for example, meetings, strikes or demonstrations. The right means that people have the right to peacefully meet with others without having to fear being arrested or harassed by the police. The authorities have a duty to protect and ease the organisation of peaceful assemblies and the police have a duty to ensure the safety of the demonstrators as well as the audience.

RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL



1. *Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.*

2. *No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.*

- Article 11, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

We all have the right to a fair trial whether we are the suspects or victims of a crime. The purpose of a fair trial is to guarantee people a just and open hearing in a nonpartisan and an independent court of law within a reasonable time. The purpose of a fair trial is to ensure that innocent people are not convicted. Intimidation, extortion, or violence have no place in a fair trial process. The evidence used in court must be gained in a fair and transparent way. The judge, jury or other authorities in the trial must be impartial. The trial must happen within a reasonable time from the suspected crime and all parties must be guaranteed the opportunity to present evidence. A person must be assumed innocent until proven guilty. The accused has the right to receive legal aid if their financial situation doesn't allow them to seek private legal assistance. It doesn't matter whether a person is accused of shoplifting or of murder – everyone has the right to a fair trial.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



What happens when I send the letter?

Sometimes you might receive a reply, but this doesn't always happen. Your letter will still have an impact.

What do I do if I receive a reply?

We hope that you send Amnesty a copy of the message.

Is it dangerous to sign the letter with my own name?

Thousands of people write letters and we haven't heard of anyone getting into trouble because of it.

However, please note
that ...



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Exceptionally this year, we ask students who want to write appeal letters or solidarity messages to or on behalf of Chow Hang-tung to sign the messages only with their first name and to leave out their own or the school's address information.

This is due to the national security law that came into force in Hong Kong in 2020, which is intended to be applied globally. The law is so imprecisely worded that practically anything can be considered "endangering national security" in China. There is a risk that the Hong Kong government would consider acting on behalf of Chow Hang-tung to be "endangering national security" in Hong Kong.

According to Amnesty's assessment, it is unlikely that the authorities would press charges for participating in this activity. However, we recommend that anyone who has contacts in or plans to travel to Hong Kong to skip this action.

Amnesty does not pass on the names or contact information of the schools that participated in the campaign to the recipients of the letters.

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**WHAT HAS THE CAMPAIGN
ACCOMPLISHED?**

MOSES AKATUGBA

In 2014 schools acted for the release of Moses Akatugba, a young man from Nigeria who had been tortured in prison and sentenced to death. Over 800 000 messages were sent globally on behalf of Moses. In May 2015 Moses was finally released after spending almost a decade behind bars. In November 2016 Moses travelled to Finland and visited schools that had campaigned for him.



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VITALINA KOVAL

In 2018 almost 400 000 people all over the world demanded the officials in Ukraine to investigate attacks against Vitalina Koval, an LGBTIQ+ and women's rights activist. Thanks to the campaign Vitalina was able to organise a women's day demonstration in 2019 for the first time in three years without harassment. During the campaign Vitalina visited Finland and met with students who took part in the letter writing marathon.

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GRASSY NARROWS

In the 2019 campaign students in Finland wrote letters for human rights defenders in Canada. Over 400 000 people all over the world petitioned for the Grassy Narrows indigenous community, who had been suffering from mercury poisoning for over 50 years. In April 2020 the Canadian government signed a contract worth \$ 19,5 million to build health services for those affected by the mercury poisoning. The contract is an important step towards justice and a clear victory for the Grassy Narrows community.



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METU PRIDE DEFENDERS

In 2020 around 445 000 people around the world appealed on behalf of students from the METU University in Turkey. The students organised a peaceful demonstration in 2019 where they opposed the university's principals prohibition to organise Pride events on the university campus. The police violently dispersed the demonstration and arrested multiple participants.

Melike Balkan, Özgür Gür and 16 other students at the university were accused of illegal gathering and disobeying the police orders.

In October 2022 all charges against Melike, Özgür and the remaining students were dropped!

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**THANK YOU FOR DEFENDING
HUMAN RIGHTS!**