

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

*"Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."*

Nelson Mandela

**A**mnesty International is launching a global campaign on poverty and human rights in 2008.

Poverty is not just a lack of income; it is the denial of access to the resources, capability, security and power that people need in order to realize their human right to live with dignity.

Universal human dignity can only become a reality through respect for the full range of human rights – from adequate housing and physical integrity to access to information.

As we approach the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the aspiration for a world free from want as well as fear is unrealized for millions of people living in poverty, routinely denied many if not all of their human rights.

Behind the bald statistics of poverty are individual and usually untold stories of discrimination, neglect and abuse. Poverty results from negligence and discrimination by governments and others in power, and from an unwillingness to change the status quo. Yet those responsible for the violations that create poverty are not held accountable, and those affected are denied the knowledge and power to shape their future.

Poverty is caused by human beings – it results from decisions made by governments, companies, institutions and others who hold the power to change people's lives for the better. It is possible to break the vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion by combating the human rights

violations that drive and perpetuate them. Yet, those in power do not take full responsibility for the impact of their actions on the human rights of people living in poverty. Not all human rights are legally enforceable, and this is particularly true of the violations at the heart of poverty. It is still difficult to hold to account those who undermine human rights and drive people into poverty. Governments deny responsibility for the impact of their policies on human rights of people beyond their borders; companies often seek to avoid responsibility for the impact of their activities on human rights of people at home and abroad.

Global development programmes do not take full account of the rights of those living in poverty, and do not yet promote universal access to human rights. People living in poverty are often voiceless and excluded from decisions that shape their lives – development is still too often something that happens to them, rather than in consultation with them. The impact of development on the human rights of people living in poverty is still too rarely measured.

Civil society movements have gathered behind calls for a response to poverty which recognizes human rights. Recent years have seen unprecedented activism in support of global responsibilities for the eradication of poverty. Building on this, AI will campaign for a response which emphasizes the obligations of those in power to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of everyone, including the most marginalized and the rights of those living in poverty to have power over their own lives, including their right to hold those responsible for violations of their human rights firmly to account.



## Our campaign will have three key demands

### Accountability

People living in poverty have a right to hold to account those responsible for the human rights violations that affect them. All human rights should be legally enforceable, including economic, social and cultural rights. All those responsible, including companies and governments at home and abroad, as well as the World Bank, should be legally accountable for the impact of their activities on human rights.

### Access to rights for all

Governments should promote equality and ensure non-discrimination in their poverty eradication programmes at home and abroad. Global development projects should secure greater protection for the human rights of people living in poverty, which should include redressing patterns of exclusion and increasing access to key resources and services including land, housing and health care.

### Respect for people's agency – their right to control their lives

People living in poverty should be respected and empowered as the key agents of the fight for their right to live with dignity. Governments, companies and others in power should respect their:

- ▶▶ right to know – for example, how to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS or the likely impact of resource extraction from their land;
- ▶▶ right to take part and to protest – to genuine participation in deciding how they will be affected by development and investment, and to be able to speak out and defend their rights without fear or intimidation.

There have been successes which show that change can be sustainable only by empowering those living in poverty. Our campaign will call for changes to laws, policies and practices so that people living in poverty, and those who work for and with them, can hold those in power to account for violations of their human rights. In this way, we believe, the human rights and human dignity of everyone will be upheld.

## Global strategic objectives

The global objectives of the campaign will be tailored to regional and national perspectives:

### 1. Those who violate human rights of people living in poverty must be accountable.

- ▶▶ By recognizing human rights obligations in international assistance and co-operation:
  - ▶ Governments and the World Bank change their policies to ensure that they respect, protect and fulfil human rights in international development and investment.
  - ▶ Governments and the World Bank take effective steps to monitor the human rights impact of their international development and investment.
- ▶▶ By making all human rights legally enforceable:
  - ▶ States ensure that economic, social and cultural rights are enforceable in national justice systems, and in regional human rights courts and commissions.
  - ▶ The UN Human Rights Council establishes an effective complaints mechanism to provide an international remedy for victims of violations of economic, social and cultural rights who are denied a remedy in their own country.
- ▶▶ By States and international organizations establishing stronger legal frameworks to hold companies, particularly extractive and pharmaceutical companies, to account for any human rights abuses.

### 2. All those living in poverty must have equal access to rights.

- ▶▶ By development and poverty eradication programmes respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights:
  - ▶ Governments and international agencies ensure that action plans to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and other poverty reduction strategies, tackle human rights violations at the root of poverty.
  - ▶ Governments and international agencies ensure respect for non-discrimination, the elimination of gender inequalities and the prioritization of the most vulnerable.



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- ▶ Governments prioritize the elimination of human rights violations which drive poverty among women.
- ▶▶ By governments acting to ensure legal protection for the rights to housing, land and other resources for the poor, including protection from forced eviction, the right of everyone to adequate housing, gender equality in housing rights and Indigenous peoples' land rights.
- ▶▶ By governments, international actors and pharmaceutical companies changing their policies and practice to ensure access to health services and essential medicines for people living in poverty.

### 3. People living in poverty must be allowed to exercise their agency as leaders in combating poverty.

- ▶▶ By governments, international actors and companies respecting the right of people living in poverty to information which would empower them to claim their rights, protect their health and participate in decision-making processes.
- ▶▶ By governments and other relevant actors respecting the right of people who are living in poverty to freedom of expression, to protest and protect their interests.
- ▶▶ By governments, international actors and companies recognizing and respecting the right of those living in poverty to participate in plans and decisions that relate to their rights and ability to escape poverty.

## Specific themes and projects

The campaign will focus on the impact of the denial of human dignity on people's health and home – two areas where deprivation has chronic and far-reaching effects on all human rights.

Ill-health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and is frequently the result of human rights violations. The campaign will focus in particular on maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS and human rights.

Pregnancy is not a disease, yet one woman dies every minute and many more face long-term debilitating ill-health as a result of conditions related to pregnancy and childbirth. The causes of these deaths include unsafe abortions, lack of comprehensive and accessible emergency health care and early marriage. Almost all of these deaths are preventable, and

the vast majority occur in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The consequences pass to future generations as children drop out of school to take on the role of parents, carers and breadwinners. People living in poverty do not have equal access to health information, sex education, essential health services and medicines. This denies them the right to control their reproductive lives and to protect themselves from potentially deadly diseases.

Millions of people worldwide live in intolerable slum conditions, without access to minimum essential levels of clean water, sanitation, health care, security or education. When people establish their own housing solutions they are often torn from their homes and left homeless. Since 2000, at least three million people have been forcibly evicted in Africa alone. In many places women are denied equal rights to their homes and land, and Indigenous peoples' land rights are ignored in favour of big business. This campaign will focus on forced evictions, the right to adequate housing for all, gender discrimination in rights to own housing and land, and Indigenous peoples' land rights.

AI will focus on a limited number of strong research and campaigning projects in key countries, which illustrate how people are forced into economic, physical and social insecurity by human rights violations. This will enable us to campaign for individual remedies for those abuses while building momentum for broader policy and legal changes at the national and international level, which would close the space for those abuses to recur.

Our work on certain key human rights violations which affect health and home will call for changes across the world in the approach to poverty eradication. Globally, civil society has long recognized that the eradication of poverty is not about charity, but about justice. Our aim is to help turn this into a reality which is firmly rooted in recognized human rights obligations, and is protected in law.

### Some of our projects around the world

For at least 15 years AI has highlighted human rights violations associated with the denial of Indigenous peoples' land rights in the Americas. AI is working in Peru to ensure that the authorities respect the right of Indigenous women to receive information about health care that would reduce the high levels of maternal mortality. We are also campaigning against forced evictions in Africa, from Angola to Zimbabwe, and demanding the restoration of rights lost through forced evictions, such as access to education or health care.

The campaign will bring together similar projects under a global agenda of advocacy and activism for change at the international level as well as nationally, regionally and locally.

## Why us?

**M**ainstream international human rights organizations have remained silent and inactive too long in the face of the gross violation of human dignity endured by the millions of people living in poverty.

Our strengths lie in our research and action to end human rights violations. Our approach is to document the lives of individuals to expose how human rights are indivisible, addressing grave abuses of civil, cultural, economic, political or social rights. We will bring this to the Campaign for Human Dignity. Our independence from any government, political ideology or economic interest gives us credibility, and enables us to speak out freely against the human rights violations that fuel poverty. Our role as advocates for human rights, not providers of humanitarian assistance, allows those living in poverty to speak freely to us about abuses of power which we can report and act upon.

With this campaign we also aim to increase our capacity for activism at the local, national and international level. Our 2.2 million members and supporters and extensive activist networks around the world allow us to embed global principles locally, while our democratic membership structure enhances the force of our message, as we are directly accountable to our grassroots activists around the world. We have 40 years of experience of directly working with survivors of human rights violations, and with this campaign we aim to diversify and work directly with those living in poverty, and their representatives.

AI has access to people and institutions that hold power and can help the voices of the poor and marginalized to be heard.

Solutions need to come from the people affected and ideally civil society should act as facilitators. In developing our Campaign for Human Dignity we aim to reflect the principles of agency, access and accountability, and will publicly campaign

for other actors to respect these principles. This means that, in the process of planning and delivering the campaign, we will endeavour to consult actively with organizations that work directly with people living in poverty as well as with social movements at the forefront of the fight against poverty.

In launching this campaign we recognize our responsibilities:

- ▶ to those living in poverty to reflect their views and their experiences accurately and to respect their right to freedom of expression;
- ▶ to those who act with us in this campaign to ensure that we are making a difference and progressing towards the objectives we set.

That is why we aim to work with, and not only for, those directly affected by human rights abuses in designing, delivering and evaluating this campaign.

## The importance of partnership

**W**ith this campaign AI will work with others, at the local, national and international level to ensure that human rights are included in the fight against poverty. More than 40 years of activism across the world means AI is well placed to galvanize the human rights community into greater action against poverty. We will also reach out to social justice, anti-poverty and development communities and complement their efforts, aiming to add a stronger focus on the need for legal accountability for those who fail to respect human rights obligations.

## Tell us what you think, take part, promote human dignity

**Y**ou can find out more about AI's work on poverty and human rights at:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/poverty-index-eng>

Contact the campaign at: [humandignity@amnesty.org](mailto:humandignity@amnesty.org)

## Who are we?

Amnesty International (AI) is a global movement of around 2.2 million people campaigning for human rights. We work for a world in which everyone enjoys all the human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards.

We research, campaign, advocate and agitate to end all abuses of human rights.

AI is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion; our work is largely financed by contributions from our membership and public donations. AI has activists in more than 80 countries, in all regions of the world.