

# The Amnesty International Dignity Campaign

---

## **Universal Declaration of Human Rights – selected articles:**

### *Article 17.*

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

### *Article 25.*

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

**Amnesty International launched a new campaign in May 2009. Nothing unusual there you might think; Amnesty are always launching new campaigns, for prisoners of conscience, against the death penalty, or in support of some other political or civil right. However, this campaign is different. For the first time Amnesty International is campaigning on an economic right; on the issue of poverty. The name of the campaign is Dignity and the following pages will tell you a little about what the campaign is about and why Amnesty is branching out into this new area of work.**

**There are 3 main aims of the Dignity Campaign. They are as follows:**

- **Empower those who live in poverty** to actively participate in claiming their rights
- **Ensure that human rights are accessible** to all people equally, and that people who are marginalised are given additional assistance to achieve their rights
- **Hold to account those who violate people's rights** including states, as well as companies or other institutions

The following is taken from the website [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

## CAMPAIGN AREAS

---

The world bank states that 'of the 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty around the world, 70 per cent are women.' The topic of women and poverty will therefore run through this entire campaign, although it will not stand alone as a campaign area.

The campaign will focus on three different areas:

- **Maternal mortality**
- **Forced Evictions**
- **Corporate accountability**

From the website – [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

## Maternal mortality

**Pregnancy and its conclusion should be a joyful time of celebrating new life. However, poverty in many parts of the world means that instead it can spell the end of a woman's life. The cover notes to the Demand Dignity DVD from Amnesty International note that, "in the village of Ccarhuacc, high in the Peruvian Andes, pregnancy can kill: poverty, discrimination and inadequate health care have led to high maternal death rates". (Liner notes Demand Dignity DVD)**

The following is from the Amnesty International UK website:

*Pregnancy is not a disease, yet it kills one woman every minute. Almost all of these deaths are preventable and 95% of them occur in developing countries.*

Amnesty are arguing that without reproductive healthcare and freedom, women cannot fully exercise their fundamental human rights, such as those relating to education and employment. Yet around the world, the right to healthcare, especially reproductive and sexual healthcare, is far from a reality for many women.

## POVERTY AND PREGNANCY

---

- For every woman who dies from pregnancy related causes, around thirty suffer injuries, infections and disabilities
- Pregnancy-related complications are the single largest cause of death among 15-19 year old girls and women in developing countries
- In both developed and developing countries minority, Indigenous, refugee and migrant women as well as those living in poverty are among those at disproportionate risk
- Unequal provision and quality of health services between urban and rural areas, lack of services for women who have experienced severe violence and discrimination, all determine which women die and suffer in pregnancy and childbirth

From the website – [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

Here we can see then that poverty is not only a deeply degrading fact of life for hundreds of millions around the world today, but it is also leading to the denial of other rights particularly those related to health. Below we see more ways in which Amnesty International is concerned with the impact of poverty upon people's right to a decent standard of health as stated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The following is from the Amnesty UK website:

### **Maternal mortality in Peru**

Every eight hours a woman dies in Peru as a result of pregnancy or complications during labour. Forty-five per cent of deaths in the country are of children under five.

The Seguro Integral de Salud (SIS), a health scheme introduced in 2002, should provide free maternal and infant health services for those who live in poverty. However, despite the scheme, many women are still not able to access adequate health care, with discrimination a major factor.

### **POVERTY AND POOR HEALTH**

Poor health is both a cause and consequence of poverty. The right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health - given the scientific level of society and individual's lifestyle choices - is also a human right.

This right includes the right to control one's body and health, the right to a healthy lifestyle and equality of access to health care.

### **INTERNATIONAL LAW**

---

Amnesty International note that, reproductive rights include the right to control one's reproductive functions, the right to access quality healthcare, and the right to access education in order to make choices free from coercion, discrimination and violence.

From the website – [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

### **Forced evictions**

**We have seen above that Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was concerned with the rights to an adequate standard of housing and to not be deprived of that housing in arbitrary fashion. At the Deep Sea Settlement in Nairobi, Kenya, people are faced with having to live in inadequate housing and being forcibly evicted from it and left completely homeless.**

**“Here at Deep Sea, life is extremely difficult” (Nyando, Deep Sea resident and human rights activist)**

Deep Sea is indeed a place where life is extremely difficult. With regards to the environment, there are sewers from the richer areas of Nairobi running through the settlement and they are often blocked. As a result of that the sewers often overflow and spread their ruinous filth and diseases everywhere. The settlement is barely fit for human life and gives rise to many problems. Many women deliver still born babies or give birth prematurely. Many people have contagious diseases and do not wish to call the doctor as then their neighbours will know they have disease such as diarrhoea or T.B. Many of the residents do not use a toilet, just using a bucket or a paper bag and this causes further diseases.

Domestic violence is caused by too little food, a lack of money and a lack of jobs. There is a school, but many of the children in the settlement are still neglected. They often have single mothers and single fathers, who can't go on to earn a living without leaving their children. There is a place for children to go, but often they are brought without food. Some children are abandoned, while others die in their homes. It is reported that life is extremely difficult for children and women and they need to be trained to know their rights.

For all the problems, at least Deep Sea provides some sort of home for its residents. The village started as far back as 1964, when the poorest residents of Nairobi began to settle there. Community Chairman, Philip notes that those who came to Deep Sea were, "those who were powerless .....they had no power at all" That lack of power also relates to the precarious nature of the settlement itself. Another resident of the deep sea Settlement has noted that, "the threat of eviction is a problem, because those that threaten to evict us from here are unknown to us and the threats weigh heavily because people come in the middle of the night and demolish our homes, while we are sleeping. And we have no clue as to what is happening." (from *Demand Dignity* Amnesty International DVD) Here then we see a two-pronged assault on the human rights of the residents of the Deep Sea Settlement:

- a) They are having to live in dangerous and difficult circumstances in direct contravention of Article 25 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- b) They are simultaneously under threat of being evicted from Deep Sea and having nowhere else to live in contravention of Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Amnesty International UK website notes the following: Adequate housing is more than just four walls and a roof over your head. Internationally, it is defined as having a degree of security and protection from forced eviction, harassment and unreasonable rent levels. It includes having access to services such as clean drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and emergency services.

There remains a disturbingly large gap between the standards set out in international law and the situation prevailing in certain parts of the world. Amnesty International will be working with people living in informal settlements, to help them win respect, protection and fulfilment of their rights.

## SLUMS

---

**Over 100 million people are homeless in the world while more than a billion live in intolerable slum conditions.**

Mass urban informal settlements or 'slums' are a graphic representation of urban poverty and inequality. As more and more people move from rural to urban areas

due to conflict, industrial development, lack of employment and general disinvestment in rural infrastructure, slums grow.

People living in slums and other informal settlements are frequently denied human rights such as secure tenure, access to services, equal protection of the law, gender equality and physical and mental integrity. They are often vulnerable to forced evictions, to domestic and other forms of violence, and extortion at the hands of the police, criminal gangs and armed groups. Unregulated privatisation of services often leaves key resources such as water out of their financial reach.

## **FORCED EVICTIONS**

---

Since 2000 at least three million people have been forcibly evicted in Africa alone. Forced eviction places the poorest and most marginal in an even more vulnerable situation - removing their rights to water, food, sanitation, livelihood and education.

The UN Commission on Human Rights calls the practice of force evictions "a gross violation of human rights". Everyone has the right to adequate and secure housing, protection from forced eviction, harassment or other threats.

## **WHAT OBLIGATIONS DO GOVERNMENTS HAVE TO ENSURE ADEQUATE HOUSING?**

---

Regardless of the state of development of any country, there are certain steps that governments who have signed up to international law must take immediately, although the resources available to determine how quickly they realise the full right to housing. If the right to housing means anything, it means that one should not have to be homeless. It also requires, at a minimum, that governments should avoid policies that predictably increase homelessness or reduce affordable housing opportunities that previously existed.

**There is an expectation that a government will give priority to certain things, including:**

- Developing a housing strategy, in consultation with those affected, which identifies what the population's needs are, the most cost-effective way of achieving them, and realistic timeframes.
- Coordinating the relevant ministries and agencies such as local authorities.
- Monitoring strategies and evaluating the outcomes.

**The international community is also legally obligated to ensure the provision of adequate housing through a number of measures, such as:**

- Refraining from measures that would force a state to infringe its housing rights obligations.
- Providing financial or other assistance to states affected by natural, ecological or other disasters, resulting in the destruction of homes.
- Ensuring the provision of shelter and/or housing to displaced people and international refugees fleeing persecution, civil war, armed conflict, droughts, famine and other events.
- Responding to violations of housing rights carried out by other countries.

From the website – [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

## **Corporate Accountability**

**The third area of concern for Amnesty International with regards to poverty is that of corporate accountability. There is a gap between the law relating to the power which major companies now wield and the power of poor people in areas badly affected by their activities to seek redress for human rights abuses caused by major companies.**

**Amnesty has begun its campaign by supporting the Lubicon Cree Indigenous people in Little Buffalo, Alberta, Canada. They are currently battling for survival as they fight against the oil and gas extraction on their land. This extraction has fuelled an economic boom in Western Canada but at the same time has also devastated the environment in the area where the Lubicon Cree indigenous people live. In so doing it has made it very difficult for them to follow their traditional way of life. Yet it is difficult for the Lubicon Cree to use the law to improve their situation; it is this kind of problem which the Dignity Campaign seeks to address in its work on Corporate Accountability.**

**This is a problem which is found in many parts of the world and is very much a human rights problem. This point was emphasised by Victoria Tauli-Corpus, an indigenous Filipino and Chair of the UN permanent forum on indigenous issues, when interviewed for *The Guardian's* edition of Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2009:**

**“An aggressive drive is taking place to extract the last remaining resources from indigenous territories. There is a crisis of human rights. There are more and more arrests, killings and abuses. This is happening in Russia, Canada, the Philippines, Cambodia, Mongolia, Nigeria, the Amazon, all over Latin America, Papua New Guinea and Africa. It's global. We are seeing a human rights emergency. A battle is taking place for natural resources everywhere. Much of the world's natural capital – oil, gas, timber, minerals – lies on or beneath lands occupied by indigenous people”. (*The Guardian Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2009*)**

The following is from the Amnesty UK website: - Increased economic globalisation has given companies access to new territories, but this growth of power has not been matched by the development of human rights law.

We lack effective accountability mechanisms to hold companies to account for their impact on human rights. As a result, people whose human rights are violated often have no access to justice.

Extractive and energy industries are among those most consistently involved in human rights abuses. In the race for energy and mineral resources, human rights abuses include mass forced evictions and violations related to environmental degradation.

We will campaign for the adoption of legally binding corporate accountability standards at an international level.

## COMPANIES AND INTERNATIONAL LAW: THE CORE COALITION

---

*51 of the world's hundred wealthiest bodies are corporations; only 49 are countries.* Institute for policy studies (2000 figure)

Amnesty International believes that we must apply international legally-binding standards to companies in order to hold them to account for their human rights impact worldwide. Ultimately, a global economy requires global governance to enforce companies' human rights responsibilities.

There have been attempts to apply legally-binding standards to business (the UN Norms). Although human rights organisations welcomed this, business and many governments lobbied against the Norms and they were not legally adopted. A new process led by the UN special representative John Ruggie, is currently re-examining the question of corporate responsibility for human rights.

In the meantime, we believe it is important for the UK Government to hold UK-based business to account for human rights violations committed overseas. Through our work in the Corporate Responsibility (CORE) coalition- an alliance of human rights, development and environmental campaign groups- we have called for changes in UK law that would make companies:

- **Transparent** - legally requiring companies to report on their social and environmental impacts
- **Responsible** - ensuring company directors are legally responsible for the social and environmental impacts of their operations, and not simply for profit making

**Accountable** - allowing people overseas who are harmed by the activities of a company to obtain justice and legal redress

From the website [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

**These then are the main features of the Dignity Campaign. But why are Amnesty International getting involved in the campaign against poverty when there are so many excellent NGOs already involved in this work? There are two main reasons:**

- 1) **In 1998 Amnesty International celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1948. It was decided then at the 2001 International Council meeting, where decisions are made about the future direction of Amnesty international as a worldwide movement, that the campaign to celebrate this anniversary should celebrate ALL the 30 articles of the UDHR, including the economic, social and cultural rights, which Amnesty International had previously left out of its work as it concentrated on the civil and political rights growing out of its original work on campaigning for prisoners of conscience. This in turn led to a recognition that Amnesty should campaign full-time for the 'full spectrum' of rights and the Dignity Campaign can be seen as part of move towards that.**
- 2) **The second reason is based around the hope that Amnesty's expertise and experience of campaigning for rights can provide 'added value' to the work of other NGOs concerned with the reduction of poverty around the world today, by campaigning with a rights-based approach, which will see us work to change laws to help people combat both poverty and the many other human rights abuses which stem from poverty.**

**It is therefore, with great pleasure and pride that I have seen Amnesty International in the NE and Yorkshire Region become involved with the work of Make Poverty History NE. I do indeed hope and believe that Amnesty International can add a new dimension**

**to the work of fighting against abject poverty in the world, in NE England, across the rest of the UK and worldwide.**

**Peter Sagar, Amnesty International UK NE and Yorkshire Regional Rep**