



FREEDOM NOW

Honorary Chair

The Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu

A Guide to Writing Prisoners of Conscience

Letter writing campaigns have become an important aspect of modern human rights advocacy. This is especially true in the case of “prisoners of conscience” (individuals who have been detained for peacefully exercising a fundamental human right, such as the right to freedom of religion or free expression). Current and former prisoners of conscience have emphasized the importance of these letters—not only because they bring desperately needed encouragement and solidarity—but also because the letters puts prison authorities on notice that the international community is watching. Such attention can help protect prisoners of conscience who are often at great risk for mistreatment by the regimes that have locked them away from the outside world.

Below are some suggested tips to keep in mind while writing to prisoners of conscience and language from an example letter. It is important to remember, however, that this letter is from YOU!

- **Keep it personal:** The personal connection is what makes letters of support so powerful; feel free to tell the prisoner why their story moves you. Handwritten letters, if possible, are the best way to make a personal connection.
- **Keep it non-political:** Often prisoners of conscience are detained for criticizing their government or its policies; however, it is best to avoid direct references to the government or the political situation in the country. Instead, focus on the important work the prisoner was doing before his or her arrest.
- **Keep it positive:** Prisoners of conscience frequently face difficult circumstances, which can include harsh prison conditions, solitary confinement, and even torture. It is essential to avoid dwelling on such conditions and instead convey our support, solidarity, and hope for the future.
- **Keep it simple:** Letters of support don’t need to be long or complicated—often a simple message of support or a short postcard is perfect. Just the act of writing sends a powerful message to the prisoner and the government holding him or her!

Example Letter:

Dear [Name],

I am writing to share with you my solidarity and support as you continue the struggle for human rights and democratic freedoms in your country.

Your story is a true inspiration. As a rights advocate myself, I can only imagine the faith required to maintain a commitment to ones principles in the face of such adversity. Despite your own repeated imprisonment, you have selflessly continued to advocate for the rights of others and the future of your country. As long as you remain in prison, please know that the international community will continue to advocate for your immediate and unconditional release.

Please accept my most sincere and best wishes as I keep you in my thoughts.

Sincerely,

Please send your letters to Freedom Now at:

[Prisoner of Conscience]
c/o Freedom Now
1776 K St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20006