



FREEDOM NOW

A Guide to Writing to Prisoners of Conscience

In countries around the world, human rights and freedoms are under threat. Individuals risk persecution and prosecution simply for speaking their minds, telling the truth, practicing their beliefs, or being who they are. Repressive governments, worried that critics and human rights defenders jeopardize their political power and control, may try to silence them by locking them in jail. Today, there are estimated to be more than one million political prisoners worldwide.

A prisoner of conscience is someone jailed on politically motivated grounds for peacefully exercising their rights or freedoms; for expressing their political, religious, or other beliefs; or for their identity. Authorities may bring fabricated or exaggerated charges against someone they seek to silence or may outright criminalize behavior that is otherwise protected under international law.. Although carried out under color of law, such arbitrary detentions are, in fact, unlawful. Detainees often are then denied due process and face long sentences under inhumane conditions, including ill-treatment, inadequate medical care, confinement, and torture. Authorities hope that by removing these individuals from public view, the prisoners will not only be silenced but forgotten.

You can play a powerful role by showing those authorities that their efforts are failing. When letters arrive for a prisoner of conscience, it puts the government and prison authorities on notice that the international community is watching. It can help sway them to release a prisoner of conscience or, at the very least, deter mistreatment. Letters are also a lifeline to the prisoners themselves—by expressing your support and solidarity, you reassure those who are wrongfully imprisoned that people around the world are still thinking of them and fighting for justice. Current and former prisoners of conscience have emphasized the importance of these letters for bringing desperately needed hope, comfort, and encouragement to them and their families.

Public letter-writing campaigns have thus become an important piece of the collective advocacy toolkit. Below are some suggestions to keep in mind when writing to prisoners of conscience; a sample message; and instructions to deliver your letter.

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Freedom Now is a non-partisan, non-governmental organization combatting government repression and defending political prisoners worldwide using direct legal support, targeted advocacy, and capacity-building assistance.

Letter-writing tips

- **Make it personal:** A personal connection makes a letter especially powerful. Tell the prisoner why their story resonates with or moves you. You can adapt the sample text in our digital submission tool and/or write your letter by hand to best personalize it.
- **Avoid political content:** Although many prisoners of conscience are detained for criticizing their government or its policies, 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 their arrest .
- **Stay positive:** Avoid dwelling on the difficult circumstances prisoners face. Focus instead on conveying your support, solidarity, and hope for the future.
- **Keep it simple:** Letters don't need to be long or complicated—a simple message of support is perfect. Just the act of writing sends a powerful message to the prisoner and the government holding them.
- **Check the rules:** If writing by hand or sending a package, review Freedom Now's instructions to ensure the contents comply with the prison's rules. Generally, we recommend sending a short letter on simple stationery or a postcard. Expect that prison authorities will open and read your mail before delivering it to a prisoner.

Sample letter

Dear [Name],

I am writing in solidarity to express my support for the ongoing struggle for human rights and democratic freedoms in your country.

I am inspired by the invaluable contribution you have made to this movement. I admire your relentless commitment to your principles in the face of so much adversity. Your story underscores the need to defend access to rights and justice for all. Indeed, your work is as important as ever. 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,

Instructions for sending letters

To send a letter electronically, go to <https://www.freedom-now.org/> and complete the form on the dedicated webpage for the relevant prisoner of conscience. Freedom Now will translate (if necessary), print, and mail the letter on your behalf.

Hand-written letters or packages (if allowed) can be mailed to Freedom Now for forwarding:

[Name of prisoner of conscience]

c/o Freedom Now

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