

HOPE-BASED COMMUNICATIONS

A checklist

Our audience research and the new communications strategy argue that we need to inspire people to stand up for human rights, to change minds and to win debates.

Every story has hope.

These are five simple steps to help you find it in any piece of communication.

**AMNESTY
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1. ONE PART PROBLEM, TWO PART SOLUTION

Audience insight: Hopelessness and a sense of futility are barriers to our messages getting through. Focus groups show that people accept common sense calls for government action, but blaming leaders induces fatalism unless combined with explicit messages explaining what governments should be doing and how it will help make change happen. Worse, people may accept there is a crisis but prefer the opposition's course of action to our own. Messages about "implementing solutions" test better than "solving problems".

Action

Make the case for your recommendations using anecdotes, metaphors or words that put pictures in people's heads. Sell the outcome we want first, then the process for getting it.

People will only truly understand what they can visualize, so use images, stories and metaphors that call up a picture of our solution (justice) as well as the problem (injustice). Use facts and figures that make the case for your solution and reinforce that imagery.

Check for: What do we want?

Why is your call to action the right thing to do?

What would the solution look like in practice?

What will the situation look like once the solution has been implemented?

Is there a metaphor or big picture phrase that describes what the government would be doing by implementing our call to action?

Say things like

"Amnesty International is calling on the government to catch up with other countries in the region by putting in place the solution that worked for them."

"By implementing this solution, the government would be removing barriers to people living a life of dignity and meeting its own stated objective of creating a better life for its citizens."

"More than 100 countries have abolished the death penalty. Their justice systems are now more fair: innocent people do not get executed."

"Human rights laws can reprogramme the justice system so that everyone gets treated fairly by the police and courts."

2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE?

Audience insight: We need to make our solutions feel tangible, relevant and doable, otherwise people will think of the problem we expose as the natural way of things. Talking about problems will make people think of their own, so ask them to act on their values and identity instead. Invite people who do the right thing to contribute to making things better.

Action

Instead of the threat of things getting worse, outline the opportunity to make things better. Give people a sense of momentum, a wider trend towards positive change. Show that our approach is simply the right thing to do and opponents are behind the times.

Make government inaction the injustice, rather than letting the abuses feel inevitable and natural.

Make the problem fixable and human: replace passive verbs with active ones to show the people to blame, and how their decisions, policies and actions made the problem, so they can also fix it.

Check for: What do we want?

Where will change come from? Is it clear who has to fix the problem, why they should do it and how? Have you made clear what you want to happen next?

Why is this the right time to focus on an issue - to pay attention and get involved today? Have you given people reason to believe that things can get better?

Is it clear how this is a human rights issue? Are you talking about "human rights" as an object, or as action people take to defend them?

Say things like

"With the country about to xyz, now is the time to...."

"People built this system. People can change it."

"Employers are exploiting workers by not paying their wages, taking advantage of a broken system and a government that will not protect the right to be paid for your work."

Instead of: "Workers are being exploited and not having their wages paid on time."

"People who believe that all human beings should be free to speak their minds peacefully can make a difference by standing up with these human rights defenders."

Instead of: "Imagine this happened to you." "Your rights are also under threat."

3. SAY WHAT WE STAND FOR

Audience insight: With the wrong frames, people may see us as radical, angry or unrealistic. If we debate on our opponents' terms, allowing the underlying narrative to be about security or the economy, we reinforce those issues in audiences' mind, encouraging governments to put them first. People are more likely to support us if they hear a message framed by the values and priorities we stand for, particularly if we emphasize that we are independent, effective and global.

Action

Frame the issue not by what we are against but what we are for. Set the terms of the debate by building your messages on basic values that no opponent can reject or dismiss as asking for too much. We want the story to be about *our* core values (fairness, freedom, solidarity, that every human has rights, or simply doing what is right), not your opponents' (e.g. politics, security, family values, the economy).

Make it clear why this is a human rights issue. Remind people how our human rights solution fits with their sense of how the world should be.

Check for: What do we want?

Rather than what is bad or missing, can you instead talk about what would be good and describe the improvement we seek?

Have you told people what is really at stake in the bigger picture?

What is the underlying narrative that people will take away from your story and your messages?

What shared value/belief are you mobilizing people around?

Say things like

"A society where people are allowed to protest is free, simply a better place to live."
Instead of: *"Protest is not a crime."*

"With access to education, everyone has a fair start in life." Instead of: *"Without education, people have no chance."*

"We live in a world where people move."
Instead of: *"Safe and legal routes will create security and stability."*

"What this is about is what kind of society we want to live in." *"This is not about right or left, it is a question of right or wrong."* *"This trial is a litmus test of the government's promise to respect free speech."*

4. HEROES, NOT VICTIMS

Audience insight: People make sense of the world through stories, beliefs and experiences. They will make your facts fit a story in their minds according to their beliefs. If you share the story around your facts, you can make them think about the world differently. People are more likely to take on a cause if we ask them to support a distinct individual – to whom they can relate – already fighting for it. Persuadable audiences react to someone like them changing their mind.

Action

Instead of a story about victims who suffer abuses, share a story about a government failing to implement a solution and the people challenging them.

Give our audiences heroes they can stand in solidarity with, rather than victims they need to save. Talk about their humanity, courage and motivations.

Think of who can confirm and deliver our message on our behalf: telling the story from our supporters' perspective can change the narrative from doom to hope.

Check for: What do we want?

Who is the most effective messenger for your audience?

Who is the face of your story? Have you made your protagonists into rounded three-dimensional characters? What are their hopes for the future, what job do they want to do, what makes them happy, what do their family and friends say etc?

What is Amnesty's part in the story? (a supporter? an activist?) Who else can step into this story to change things?

Say things like

"Against all the odds, this person has overcome incredible adversity but keeps persevering. Hers is a story of never giving up, and we should stand with her in her fight for justice."

"Taibeh and her schoolfriends are campaigning even though they have their final exams in three months. When she grows up, she wants to be a doctor. She wants to stay in Norway because she believes it is a country where she can be free."

"A lot of people feel torn on this issue, but when people hear the stories of others who have suffered because of it, they begin to see things differently."

5. WHAT EMOTION DO YOU WANT TO TRIGGER?

Audience insight: Every human being reacts with a mix of reason and emotion. When our communications are dominated by anger, sadness, disgust, fear and suffering, chemical reactions in the brain trigger conservative instincts in our audiences. For example, when we tell people they live in a dangerous world, we may inadvertently trigger negative stereotypes or encourage them to favour hardline policies. If we want to trigger hope, anticipation, affirmation, joy, excitement, enthusiasm, empathy and determination, we need to make people feel safe and secure.

Action

Light a candle, don't curse the darkness. Change comes from a mix of anger, hope and a belief that things can get better. Exposing an abuse provides for anger. We have to provide safe space and reason for hope and belief.

Can we show our audience other people they relate to changing their minds or taking action, and showing how it makes them feel? E.g. the joy of a supporter when someone they have taken action for is freed.

Check for: What do we want?

What is the cause for hope in the situation?

If there is any moment of happiness likely in this story, how can we capitalize on it to motivate more people to act?

What individual audience need are we addressing?
What does the target need in order to take action/join/change their ways?

Say things like

"People will not stand by and let this happen: they are already speaking out and demanding their governments do something about it."

"The government did not want its abuses exposed. Now that the facts are out in the open, together we can pressure for change."

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