

ADVOCACY FOR THE COMMUNITY:
GETTING YOUR VOICE HEARD

Advocacy Workshop for the Congolese Community

Saturday 13 February 2010

MATERIALS PACK

Practical guidelines for effective lobbying

The principles outlined below give a general overview of good practice in lobbying. Obviously, the details will depend on your own cultural and political context, and all the suggestions made here will need to be adapted accordingly.

- If you have not previously met the person whom you are lobbying, do some research in advance of the meeting:
 - What is the scope of his or her authority?
 - What action can he or she take?
 - Is there anything in his or her background that is relevant to your objective, or does he or she have any particular interests that may be relevant?
 - Has he or she ever spoken publicly about this issue?
 - What is his or her initial response likely to be: supportive, hostile, or neutral?
 - What do you think he or she already knows about your organisation?
 - Have you had any previous contact, through letters or meetings with officials in his or her team?
 - What is it realistic for you to ask him or her to do?
 - Make sure that you communicate the one or two most important messages that you want to convey. Be clear about the objective of the meeting and what action you want as a result.
- Know your subject: make sure that you are fully briefed with up-to-date information.
- If you go as a group, decide who is going to say what. Assign roles: e.g. note taker, introducer, main spokesperson.
- Check in advance that you all understand and agree on the main arguments.
- Be direct and clear, but not confrontational: listen actively and show interest in and understanding of others' point of view.
- Show how and why the decision maker needs to act differently: remember that it is not sufficient simply to win your argument on the issues.
- Plan for different kinds of response: you may have to negotiate compromises.
- If an opportunity arises, mention your key allies and their contribution, in a way that will strengthen their legitimacy to reach this decision maker; allies may be able to achieve a further meeting with this person sooner than you will.
- If appropriate, check what you have agreed before finishing the discussion.
- Leave behind detailed background material (research reports or information on your organisation, for example): they may provide the basis for follow-up with the decision maker's supporting officials, who may have a strong influence on policy formation.
- If possible, get agreement in principle for a follow-up meeting with the decision maker: prepare a clear rationale for this in advance.
- After the meeting, send a letter of thanks to the person for arranging the meeting; summarise what you discussed, and mention any promises that he or she made.
- Keep a summary of the discussion for your own future use.

Constituency Lobbying Pack

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Constituency Lobbying

Why Lobby?

Lobbying is good for human rights

Lobbying is about influencing government policy. Amnesty International lobbies to improve human rights around the world. Lobbying by our staff and members has played a part in:

- (1) Removing the death penalty from the UK statute and adding the UK to the list of abolitionist countries (1998)
- (2) Securing legislation to control arms exports from the UK (2001), development of the EU Code of Conduct on arms exports (1998) and UK support for an international arms trade treaty (2005) - helping to prevent arms from finishing up in the hands of human rights abusers.
- (3) Establishing the International Criminal Court (1998), securing UK support for the ICC through the UK's ratification of the Rome Statute (2001) and ensuring that the UN Security Council used its power, as guaranteed under the Rome Statute, to refer the situation in Darfur, Sudan to the ICC – the first time such a referral had been made (2005).

Lobbying is good for the DRC

It raises MP's awareness of the DRC and informs them about ongoing concerns. It leads to DRC issues having a higher profile in Westminster and influences decisions made in Whitehall.

MPs are there to represent their constituencies. You have a right of access to your MP and they have a duty to listen to what you think! MPs will give more attention to a letter from a constituent than they do to correspondence from organisations – even those they support.

Remember even if your MP is not very high profile or on a relevant committee, they might be in a few years time, and then they could be very useful to Amnesty if you have built up a good relationship with them.

Lobbying is good for MPs

They need to be sensitive to the concerns of the electorate and they need your vote in the next election and most want a reputation as a good constituency MP. Lobbying is also a source of information for MPs as they cannot be an expert on every problem. A meeting with you should be informative for them – you know more about the DRC than they do. Even if your MP does not have an existing interest in the issue, it's important to educate them. Some MPs may particularly want to raise their profile in the local community – a photo and/or article in the local press about your meeting with them could help.

What your MP can do for human rights

Inside Westminster your MP can:

- Influence the position of their party or political group
- Ask a written or oral parliamentary question
- Initiate a short debate in the House of Commons
- Speak in a debate
- Sign an Early day Motion (EDM) showing support for a particular issue or campaign
- Table an amendment to a bill
- Vote for or against an amendment to a bill
- Propose a private member's or ten minute rule bill
- Join the parliamentary human rights group
- Write to a minister. An MP will get a response from a minister (which could be used for publicity at local or national level) whilst an ordinary member of the public only gets a letter from a civil servant. The more letters that a minister receives from MPs, the more their attention will be drawn to your concern.

Outside Westminster your MP can:

- Raise an issue with a representative of the relevant country either on a visit to that country or when a parliamentarian from the country visits the UK
- Campaign with you on behalf of an individual by writing to the government concerned or leading/participating in a delegation to the relevant embassy
- Participate in your actions
- Speak at a meeting/conference on human rights
- Participate in local events (eg a fundraising event or stunt) in the constituency
- Help with publicity – most MPs will be keen to get an article in the local press showing that they care about human rights.

Constituency Lobbying

Lobbying in your local constituency is effective and can help get more extensive coverage of your issues in parliament as well as at a local level.

You do have to be a member of the relevant constituency and on the appropriate electoral role.

Key Tasks for a Constituency Lobbying:

- Meeting your MP face to face – aim for twice a year, don't pester them and put them off your issue
- Researching information about your MP and keeping this information up to date
- Feeding back on meetings with their MPs with your network – sharing information and knowledge is important
- Send briefings to your MP

Finding out about your MP

What you should know about your MP

The more you know about your MP the better able you will be to lobby them effectively. You can go online and find information about them, <http://www.theyworkforyou.com> or you could go to the library and look them up in Dods [or Roth's] Parliamentary Companion that gives a brief profile of MPs. If you find out that they are interested in international development issues then you could be on to a winner. Don't be put off if they only list golf and shopping as their interests! Vacher's Parliamentary Guide is another source of useful information for finding out which committees your MP is involved with.

You can find out a great deal of information about MPs and the UK parliament by using the Internet. Please see the page overleaf for some useful websites.

Name: If you can't find it on the Internet, you can always get this by phoning the House of Commons information desk on 020 7219 4272

Scottish and Welsh Constituents can find out who their MSP or AM is by phoning the following numbers: Scottish Parliament –0845 278 999 or the National Assembly for Wales: 02920 825 111

Party: Try to find out the official party position on the issue you want to raise with your MP. You may find this information on the party's website (see overleaf), or you could try contacting their headquarters directly. Alternatively, you could check to see if the issue is mentioned in the party's manifesto, or you could read relevant statements made by ministers or opposition spokespeople.

Position: Are they a minister or shadow spokesperson? Are they members of a select committee? Which backbench committee are they on? Are they a member of an all party group such as the Parliamentary Human Rights Group? Are they members of any international groups? Have they spoken about your issue in parliament?

Actions: Have they spoken in parliament on a human rights issue, or signed an early day motion? Please see overleaf for websites where you will find this information.

General Background: Does your MP have any specific links with a foreign country? These could be business or previous visits. What was your MP's job before entering parliament? Are there any professional, religious, trade union or other links to your MP?

Internet sites

The Houses of Parliament
<http://www.parliament.uk>

This site covers both Houses and is well indexed. There are lists of MPs and their constituencies, and a link to their biographies on Dods On Line. Perhaps the most useful areas are Hansard and the Parliamentary Select Committees pages.

The Foreign Affairs Select Committee
<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/fachome.html>

Full details are provided about future hearings and verbatim records are available of recent past hearings. All reports are given in full.

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office
<http://www.fco.gov.uk>

You can personalise this site by registering your interests and you will be notified by email when they are listed on the site. There is a useful search function which will let you look up a particular country, organisation, person or issue.

Early Day Motions
<http://edm.ais.co.uk>

This site allows you to search the EDMs which your MP has sponsored as well others that they have signed.

The Public Whip
<http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/index.php>

This site holds information on MP's voting records in the House of Commons. You can find out how your MP has voted on recent controversial divisions, or search voting records by subject area.

They Work for You
<http://www.theyworkforyou.com>

This site is linked to Hansard and allows you to read recent questions and statements made by your MP. You can find out about your MP's recent appearances in parliament, their performance data, a register of their interests and their expenses. There is also links to MP's personal websites, and biographies from the Guardian and the BBC.

EPolitix.com
<http://www.epolitix.com/EN>

This is a key political website which features recent political news, interviews with parliamentarians, and updates on recent legislation.

Politics.co.uk
<http://www.politics.co.uk>

The site covers the latest parliamentary news, which has been separated into categories including domestic policy, foreign policy, party politics and the economy.
UK Political Parties

Labour Party <http://www.labour.org.uk>

Conservative Party	http://www.conservative-party.org.uk
Liberal Democrat Party	http://www.libdems.org.uk
The Green Party	http://www.greenparty.org.uk
Plaid Cymru	http://www.plaidcymru.org
Scottish Nationalist Party	http://www.snp.org
Scottish Green Party	http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk
Scottish Socialist Party	http://www.scottishsocialistparty.org
Democratic Unionist Party	http://www.dup.org.uk
Ulster Unionist Party	http://www.uup.org
Sinn Fein	http://www.sinnfein.ie
Social Democrat and Labour Party	http://sdlp.ie

How to Lobby

The main aim of Constituency Lobbying is to build up a good relationship with your MP through regular contact – this means writing letters and meeting your MP.

Initial contact

You could write a letter, fax or email to your local MP requesting a meeting and attaching information on the issues you want to discuss. All letters should be sent to their Constituency offices, but you can also contact them at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.

Key points:

- Identify yourself as a constituent
- Keep the letter brief but do enclose any relevant information/reports
- Be clear about what you are asking your MP to do
- Request a reply

Preparing to meet your MP

- Be realistic about how much you can cover in one meeting.
- List about three points that you want to get across
- Research the topic thoroughly, making sure that you fully understand the issues and have clear facts to support your argument
- Be clear about what you want your MP to do as a result of the meeting, such as writing to a minister or asking a parliamentary question
- Using the information that you know about the MP and their party, predict some possible responses you are likely to get. If you think that your MP will not agree with your position then rehearse your arguments.

The meeting itself

This could take place at the House of Commons, but it is more likely in the constituency. It could be during the MP's surgery, but will probably be an additional meeting as surgeries are usually used for dealing with housing or welfare matters.

- Establish how long you have got at the outset and pace yourself accordingly
- Do not let the meeting get side-tracked from the points you have listed that you want to cover
- Be sure you establish what you want your MP to do and confirm this with them.

Not all MPs will be supportive

There may be times when your MP is not supportive of your campaign. If you prepare well in advance you will most times be able to predict the likely response of your MP. It is also worth noting that sometimes your MPs will not be willing to take the action you ask. If this is the case don't lose heart, remain polite and ask them if you can keep them informed of your campaign. Remember, they may not be able to help you this time, but in the future they may be – DON'T burn bridges.

Follow Up

The follow up is a vital part of the lobbying process. Update your information and records in this folder

- Add in any additional information you found out about your MP
- Fill out a record/feedback sheet and take a copy – one is for your records and one should be sent to the activism team. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT as it allows us to monitor the lobbying work being carried out around the UK

Decide what follow up action is required – if in doubt, contact the activism team for advice

Always write and thank your MP, include the main points agreed and any action that has been promised on either side. Suggest a date for a further meeting later in the year.

YOUR INFORMATION RECORDS

Information on your MP

Constituency: _____

CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Address	Tel/Fax/email/website
MP		
MP Westminster Address	House of Commons London SW1A 0AA	0207 219 3000 (general) 0207 219 (direct) http://www.parliament.uk
Constituency Office		
MPs researcher/secretary		
MPs Surgery Details		
Party		
Special Interests		
Position: e.g. committees, minister, spokesperson etc..		
Previous work for Amnesty/on Human Rights Issues		
General Background		
Other		

Meeting with your MP

RECORD/ FEEDBACK SHEET

Name of MP/MEP	
Date of Meeting	
Issues discussed	
Action taken or agreed	
Any further comments	

Your name:

Constituency:

Meeting with your MP

RECORD/ FEEDBACK SHEET

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Meeting with your MP

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Any further comments	

INFORMATION ON PARLIAMENT

How Parliament works

The UK Parliament is one of the oldest representative assemblies in the world. Parliament in the UK is based on a two-chamber system. The House of Lords (the upper house) and the House of Commons (the lower house) sit separately and are constituted on entirely different principles. The legislative process involves both houses.

Remember Parliament is not Government. Parliament is made up of all of the political parties and there are currently 646 MP's sitting in parliament.

The main functions of Parliament are to:

- examine, amend and adopt legislation
- provide, by voting for taxation, the means of carrying out the work of government
- scrutinise policy and administration, including proposals for expenditure
- debate the major issues of the day.

Parliament has a maximum duration of five years. At any time up to the end of this period, a general election can be held for a new government.

Legislation

New laws often begin their life as a proposal in a discussion document called a green paper. This is followed by a white paper, which outlines the proposals in further detail. Both green and white papers are consultative documents which are open to public consultation.

Organisations are often invited to comment on these proposals.

For example in 2000, Amnesty was asked to comment on the white paper looking at the arms trade.

If the government decides that legislation is needed then it is announced as a bill in the Queens Speech. Occasionally the government issues a draft bill for consultation prior to issuing the bill itself.

For example, AI was asked to comment on a draft bill that would allow the UK to ratify the treaty to establish the International Criminal Court.

Every bill has to go through both houses of parliament before it becomes a new law or Act.

The first reading announces the new bill in parliament. Bills can begin in either house, but the most controversial bills begin in the Commons.

The second reading is a major debate on the main principles of the bill in which all MPs and peers can participate.

In the Commons, bills are then referred to a standing committee made up of between 18 and 40 MPs depending on the size of the bill. In the Lords the committee is made up of all the peers.

During the committee stage, the bill is scrutinised line by line, clause by clause. MPs and peers can table amendments to the bill. The bill may spend several weeks in committee, although shorter bills can pass through more quickly and the government may guillotine (i.e. only allow a specific amount of time for a debate) the passage of a bill to speed up its progress.

The bill then goes back to the chamber of the House of Commons. All the MPs (or peers) can participate in the report stage – by tabling more amendments and looking at the changes made by the committee. Finally there is the third reading where the entire bill is debated. The bill then goes into the other house and the process is repeated.

When tabled, amendments can be voted on. Votes are often won against the government in the Lords. However, the bill has to go back to the Commons where the Lord's vote can be overturned. At the end of this process, the bill receives Royal Assent and becomes an Act.

This process applies to both government bills (known as public bills) and to private member's bills, introduced by an individual MP or peer. Such bills are balloted for at the beginning of each parliamentary session. In practice only the first six have any chance of becoming law. Only one private members bill can be considered in standing committee at any one time. It is unlikely to succeed without government support.

Other bills, 10 minute rule bills and presentation bills, have no chance of becoming law, but are a good way of getting publicity for a cause.

Other debates

As well as debates on legislation there are other opportunities to speak on human rights during debates in the chamber.

Foreign policy debates

Sometimes there are opportunities for backbenchers or peers to initiate debates. For example, Lord Avebury initiated a debate on human rights in China in which many of our concerns were raised. Amnesty International's research was credited on 18 occasions during the debate.

Adjournment debates

Backbench MPs can initiate short debates (between half an hour and an hour and a half) on any subject for which a minister is responsible, as long as the MP is not asking for legislation. A minister has to be present and has about 15 minutes to reply. Previous debates have focused on issues such as the international trafficking of women and human rights in Colombia.

Opposition day debates

Opposition parties have about 20 days per session to choose a subject for debate. In December 2004, for example, many of our concerns on the human rights crisis in Darfur, Sudan were raised in a debate initiated by the Conservatives.

Queens Speech

This is when the government's proposals for the next session are put before parliament. It usually includes a day's debate on foreign affairs.

Parliamentary Questions

MPs ask about 50,000 questions a year. Addressed to the relevant secretary of state, they can be either oral or written. The replies are written by civil servants, but they have to be approved by ministers.

Private notice questions

These deal with emergency matters and are granted to MPs at the speaker's discretion. They are tabled and answered on the same day.

Business questions

These are the first chance for the public to get information about what is likely to be debated in the next two weeks. It also provides an opportunity for MPs to raise issues by asking for them to be debated.

Early Day Motions (EDMs)

These are printed statements, often calling on the government to do something, which MPs can be asked to sign. They are not debated, but are a useful mechanism for getting an MP to demonstrate support for the issue concerned. They are tabled by one MP with the support of 5 more – and it's often important that these top 6 names reflect cross-party support. EDMs are numbered and printed in the order book on Thursday each week until the end of the session, as long as new MPs have signed them.

EDMs are not signed by ministers, their parliamentary private secretaries, Whips or opposition frontbench spokespersons.

Committees

Departmental select committees shadow government departments. They have between 11 and 17 members from all parties in roughly the same proportion as there are in total in the House of Commons. Important committees for AI are those dealing with foreign affairs, international development, and to a lesser extent trade and industry, and defence. A joint committee called the Quadripartite Committee, made up of representatives from all four has been set up to look at strategic export controls. Another important committee, particularly for asylum, is the home affairs committee.

Select committees

These have investigative powers and decide what issues to cover. They can receive written submissions and call witnesses (including government ministers and representatives from non-governmental organisations) They produce reports and recommendations to government

EU Committees

Exist both in the Lords and the House of Commons to scrutinise EU proposals. The Joint Committee on Human Rights considers and reports on matters relating to human rights in the UK and is made up of members of the Commons and the Lords.

Backbench Committees

The important ones for AI are the ones that shadow government departments. Backbench MPs choose to go on the committees that they are most interested in.

All Party Groups

These are open to all MPs, peers and MEPs and must include members from government and main opposition parties. They include the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, the Refugee Group, the Abolition of the Death Penalty Group, and country groups on many countries or groups of countries. The focus of a group is decided by its members and they vary considerably in how active they are.

International Groups

MPs can be members of parliamentary assemblies relating to:

- The Commonwealth
- The Council of Europe
- The North Atlantic Assembly
- The Organisation for Security & Cooperation in Europe
- The Western European Union
- The Interparliamentary Union