THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

RESOURCE PACKET FOR STAFF & MEMBERS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
BACKGROUND

The Issue: Everyone has the Right to Protest

Amnesty International USA and Police Accountability

PARTICIPATING IN PROTEST

Talking About the Right to Protest

Preparing for Protest

Dealing with Teargas and Pepper Spray

Know Your Human Rights During Protest
THE ISSUE: EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO PROTEST
IN STANDING ROCK, military vehicles and police in riot gear lined up to face people burning sage and playing drums, and as the group chanted, “Mni Wiconi! Water is life!” the police moved forward. In Ferguson, police launched tear gas canisters at crowds of protesters, blasted sound cannons, and red rubber bullets. In Baltimore, helicopters circled overhead while dozens of militarized police poured out of trucks and marched through the streets.

Amnesty International documented aggressive policing of protests in each of these places, and communities from Baton Rouge to Minneapolis to Charlotte to New York and more faced militarized policing as they raised their voices in protest. Amplifying this climate of fear, we have also seen the spread and reach of mass surveillance targeting activists and religious minorities. All of this has happened under the watch of the Obama Administration.

How will a Trump Administration respond to activists and human rights defenders speaking out? Now, more than ever, we need to maintain diligence to stay safe and secure as we exercise our rights in our struggles for dignity, justice, equity, and truth.

This resource guide is for activists everywhere. Everyone has a role in creating a world in which everyone’s human rights are respected and protected. Whether you plan to bring your voice into the streets or have a different role, this guide is a beginning to educating and supporting each other to raise our voices against hate, to defend and protect human rights.
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA
AND POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY
AS ONE OF THE WORLD’S LARGEST GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS, Amnesty International has a long history of monitoring and investigating police conduct throughout the world, including in the U.S. Amnesty has conducted research missions in the U.S. on prison abuses, immigration, violence against Native American and Alaskan women, and more. Amnesty members and staff have directly engaged in organizing and activism on a full range of issues.

The primary purpose of Amnesty’s work is to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth and dignity are at stake. We investigate and expose abuses, educate and mobilize the public, and engage in transformative action to create a safer and more just world. When the U.S. government demands that governments in other countries improve their human rights records, we must hold it accountable by asking it to be transparent about its own human rights abuses with regard to policing.
TALKING ABOUT THE RIGHT TO PROTEST
AS YOU PREPARE TO RAISE YOUR VOICE, here are some talking points to help you communicate why protest matters:

- Our right to protest peacefully should be bolstered by law enforcement, not inhibited through intimidation.
- The responsibility for keeping protests peaceful is shared - armored vehicles, tear gas and smoke bombs used large-scale against protesters in order to quell acts of violence by a minority only serves to escalate and exacerbate an already incredibly tense environment.
- Law enforcement officers have a right to defend themselves and a duty to protect the safety of the public, but this role must be carried out in a way that ensures full respect for the right to life, liberty and security of all persons, including those suspected of crime.
- Even when confronting violence, law enforcement must work within the law and in conformity with international standards governing the use of force.
PREPARING FOR PROTEST: STAYING SAFE
WHAT TO DO

+ Plan ahead: For essential needs, care and supplies. Know what to expect. Know how to get assistance. Plan for how to re-contact your buddies if separated
+ Be calm and focused: when things get most intense, react to danger or warning signs sooner, not later
+ Watch for signs of physical and mental problems in yourself and others. Cool down others who exhibit panic behavior
+ Document: film or write down police actions, brutality, and injuries
WHAT NOT TO DO

+ Don’t put vaseline, mineral oil, oil-based sunscreen or moisturizers on skin as they can trap chemicals
+ Don’t wear contact lenses, which can trap irritating chemicals underneath
+ Don’t wear things which can easily be grabbed (i.e. jewelry, ties, loose hair)
+ Don’t go alone, if you can help it - go with an affinity group or some friends who know you well
+ Don’t forget to eat food and drink lots of water
WHAT TO BRING

+ Water in a plastic bottle with squirt top, to drink and to wash off your skin or eyes
+ Energy snacks
+ Identification and/or emergency contact information
+ Enough money for pay-phone, food, transportation
+ Watch, paper, pen for accurate documentation of events
+ Inhaler, epipen, insulin & several days of prescription medication
+ Menstrual pads. Avoid using tampons - if you’re arrested you may not have a chance to change
+ Basic First Aid Kit
+ Wet Wipes and tissues
WHAT TO WEAR

+ Shatter resistant Swimming Googles and a N95 Facemask
+ Comfortable, protective shoes that you can run in
+ Clothing covering all your skin to protect from sun and pepper spray exposure
+ Shatter-resistant eye protection (i.e. sunglasses, swim goggles, or gas mask)
+ Bandana to cover nose and mouth soaked in water, lemon juice or vinegar, it can aid in breathing during chemical exposure
+ Fresh clothes in plastic bag (in case yours get contaminated by chemical weapons)
+ A hat to protect you from the sun and from chemical weapons
DEALING WITH TEARGAS AND PEPPER SPRAY
BOTH TEAR GAS AND PEPPER SPRAY ARE SKIN IRRITANTS, causing burning pain and excess drainage from eyes, nose, mouth and breathing passages. Pepper spray is more popular with authorities as an agent of control because of its immediate pain-causing qualities. It is harder to remove from the skin and has the capacity to cause first degree burns. If you are exposed to either tear gas or pepper spray, you may experience:

- Stinging, burning in your eyes, nose, mouth and skin
- Excessive tearing, causing your vision to blur
- Runny nose
- Increased salivation
- Coughing and difficulty breathing
- Disorientation, confusion and sometimes panic
- Some people report feeling intense anger. This can be useful if you are prepared and able to focus it towards recovery and returning to the action.

The good news is that the effects are temporary. Discomfort from tear gas usually disappears after 5-30 minutes, while the worst pepper spray discomfort may take 20 minutes to 2 hours to subside. The effects of both diminish sooner with treatment. Because pepper spray penetrates to the nerve endings, its effects may last for hours after removal from the skin.
KNOW YOUR HUMAN RIGHTS DURING A PROTEST
• **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY:** Everyone has the right to carry their opinion to the streets. People have the right to organize peaceful protests and demonstrate free from intimidation, unnecessary or excessive force, and the threat of prosecution and detention.

• **PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY:** Law enforcement must facilitate and not restrict a peaceful public assembly. Where a minority tries to turn a peaceful assembly into a violent one, law enforcement should protect the peaceful protestors and not use the violent acts of a few as pretext to restrict or impede the exercise of fundamental rights of a majority.

• **FREEDOM FROM EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE:** In the policing of non-violent protests, police must avoid the use of force. If it is unavoidable (for example to defend themselves or the public from an imminent risk of serious injury or death) they must use the minimum amount of force necessary. The type of equipment used to disperse crowds such as rubber bullets, tear gas, stun grenades can result in serious injury and even death and can only be used when necessary, proportional and lawful.

• **RIGHT TO MEDICAL ASSISTANCE:** If you are injured you have a right to medical assistance without delay.

• **FREEDOM FROM ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION:** If you are arrested you have a right to be told of the reason for your arrest, you also have the right promptly after your arrest to have access to a lawyer and to your family. No person under any form of detention may be subject to torture, or to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

• **RIGHT TO COMPLAIN:** If your rights have been violated you have a right to file a complaint and to be provided information on how to do so. All violations of human rights by the police or other law enforcement personnel must be investigated fully, promptly and independently.