

Meetings matter

Visiting a politician is one of the most influential things you can do whilst advocating for human rights. It carries much more weight than signing a petition, sending an e-mail, making a phone call or writing a letter. To make your visit as successful as possible, here are some pointers.

Before the visit

Bring others with you (but not too many): While it is good to have more than one person, keep the delegation small. Too many can seem intimidating. Unless you are very well rehearsed, there is a danger that you will trip over one another. As a rule of thumb there should be no more than three or four in the delegation. As many delegates as possible should be from the politician's electorate. If your meeting is about the human rights situation in a particular country, aim to have at least one person in the delegation who is actually from that country – it gives great credibility to your message and you are more likely to get a meeting.

Make an appointment: Tell the politician's office how many will be coming, who they are and who they represent. Find out how long you are likely to have.

Plan your talk: Plan and outline your talk and give it a tentative timeframe. Be aware that the politician may also want to talk a lot and may even try to side-track things. Allow at least the last third of your time for talking about what you want the politician to do. This is the part they will pay most attention to and often they will ask what they can do for you. Be very clear about what you want them to do. You could also ask them how they think they could help. See our **PDF 'How to lobby politicians'**.

Some ideas to make the meeting more organised are: Have different people specialise in different areas; designate one person as a note-taker to record what is agreed and anything the politician says that is important;



have one leader to coordinate things, make the introductions, explain what each person will talk about and lead into each of these areas.

Politicians are most interested in meeting people with first hand experience of the issue, so allow time for those people to speak.

A possible structure for a half-hour meeting could go something like this: Introductions (5 mins); description of what your organisation does (5 mins); background about your topic (10 mins); what you want the politician to do (10 mins).

Take a concise leaflet: You should leave a leaflet with the politician when you leave. The leaflet should contain a quick summary of the issue and a list of what you want the politician to do and when you want it done by. Bear in mind the politician may not necessarily agree with your requests, and work the leaflet accordingly. Ensure it isn't too long. Politicians will rarely have the time to wade through it otherwise. One double sided A4 piece of paper is usually ideal.

Rehearse: You'll feel much more confident if you rehearse. Memorise the outline of the talk. Make sure you can recall the facts you need, or at least the most important ones, and find the others in a quick reference list. Be disciplined.

During the visit

Be neat and presentable: Politicians will usually react badly to people who look messy and unkempt. Being neat and presentable also demonstrates you are taking the meeting and the issue seriously.

Be early: Make sure everyone knows where the politician's office is and ask them to meet there 15 minutes early. Better still, you could meet even earlier nearby and run through things one more time.



Preamble: Thank the politician for the opportunity to air your concerns. Make the introductions.

Don't get sidetracked: Sidetracking can come from within your own delegation, accidentally, or from the politician, perhaps deliberately. Don't let it happen. Remember your outline and objectives and politely but firmly bring things back on track.

Be polite and patient: Politicians can be incredibly frustrating at times. They might be ignorant, insensitive, prejudiced, or even rude. Be polite and patient at all times, no matter what the provocation. They can also be well informed, responsive and committed to your issue – just hope they are in power!

Try to be nice: Show you care about them. Find out their views on your country of interest or refugees in general, regardless of whether it matches your views or not. Try to be nice.

Thank them for the visit: Regardless of the outcome, thank them again for the opportunity to discuss your concerns.

After the visit

Debrief: Talk it over with you delegation. Discuss what worked, what didn't and how you could do it better next time.

Follow up: Quickly organise and send any information you promised to the politician. Make sure they honour their commitments to you. If you don't hear anything within a reasonable time, phone or write.

Stay in touch: Ideally you will build an ongoing relationship with relevant politicians, so that when you need to contact them in the future they will remember you and will be readily accessible. Aim to keep them updated



on your issue of concern. If the politician or their staff are interested, offer to send them your newsletter (if relevant) or regular information to keep them updated about your topic/country. That way, when there is a crisis they will already have background knowledge.

Keep records: Keep records of all your meetings. You should record the date of the meeting, who was present, the staff contact person, outcomes of the meeting and any other relevant notes. This is important for several reasons. It will help you remember the name of the person (usually the staffer) to contact when you need to talk to the politician and enable you to remind them of the actions they took last time. Also, it ensures advocacy continuity within your organisation: if you leave, the next person will know which politicians have been helpful and what happened. There is nothing more frustrating than duplicating work that has already been done in the past, and it looks unprofessional if you get to a meeting and don't appear to know that your organisation has already contacted this politician in the past.

Communicate with the Humanitarian Crisis Hub: Let us know the outcome of your meeting, and what worked and what didn't.

Source: www.friendsoftheabc.org, Humanitarian Crisis Hub.