



How to write a letter

Sending letters helps

Sending letters – by mail, fax or email – is one of the most effective ways for individuals to communicate their concerns about humanitarian crisis and to request support from those in a position to influence the situation. Letters and faxes are best; emails can sometimes be re-directed. A steady stream of letters does have an effect on governments. There are many examples of policies being changed and political leaders speaking out as a result of letters from the community.

A few simple rules for writing letters

Include your name and address: It is important to identify yourself as a constituent when writing to your local politicians. Generally, politicians are likely to pay most attention to people who live in their electoral district.

Keep it brief: Be brief. Sometimes a simple, one-line letter is adequate. Don't write more than one page, as long letters are less likely to be read.

Keep it clear: Start with a clear statement outlining the purpose of your letter. Then choose three points that are most likely to gain support for your position. This is more effective than attempting to address a lot of points in one letter.

Think positive: Always write on the basis that the government or organisation concerned is open to reason and discussion.

Be polite: Your aim is to address a situation, not to relieve your own feelings. Governments do not respond to abusive letters. Similarly, show respect for the government or organisation you are writing to. This will give you more scope to point out how they can improve the situation.



Personalise the letter: When possible, include a personal story and/or information on how the issue affects you, your family, or people around you. This can help the addressee understand your position and can be persuasive as they form a position on an issue. It also helps demonstrate the letter is genuine.

Use your own words, not someone else's: An original letter sent by one single person is more effective than a form letter sent by dozens of people. Even if your writing skills are not the best, a letter written in your own words will carry much more weight.

Never use political jargon: You should never give the impression that you are ideologically or politically motivated. You will be more effective if you stress that your concern is for the human rights of the people in conflict situations.

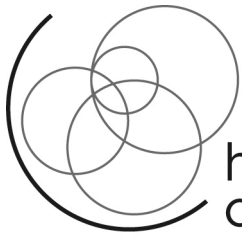
Outline possible action: Emphasise how the addressee can intervene in the situation. Let them know how they can make a difference or help your organisation take action.

Some sample letters

Dear Minister

I am writing to you about the refugee crisis in ..., where I immigrated from six years ago. I understand that neighbouring countries are threatening to close camps and return refugees to their homeland. If this information is correct, this would violate international refugee law, which gives refugees the right not to be returned to the country where they have a well-founded fear of persecution. I therefore request you look into the situation and, if necessary, apply diplomatic pressure to ensure the rights of those in the camps.

Yours respectfully,



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ON WAR AND CONFLICT

Dear Sir or Madam,

We are writing to express our concern about the treatment of minority groups in our home country of As recent media reports demonstrate, many have been forcibly removed from their land in the north. Since your company has a significant presence in the area, it would be appreciated if you could bring this economic influence to bear on the government of X. Forceful relocation violates international law, so it is important we all work together to prevent it.

Yours faithfully,

Letters of appreciation

Not all of your letters need make requests on behalf of victims of violence. It is important to write to a government when you hear some good news. For example, when an Australian minister speaks out on behalf of those suffering in conflict zones or an overseas government takes genuine steps to curtail violence. It demonstrates that the community is watching and taking note of their actions.

Dear Minister,

Some time ago I wrote to you about the plight of refugees in ... Since then, I was happy to hear that you have spoken out on their behalf in Parliament. I do appreciate this act of compassion and humanity on your part.

Yours sincerely,

Please keep us informed

If you receive a reply to one of your letters, please let the Humanitarian Crisis Hub know. It is good to hear about your success, and other members of the Humanitarian Crisis Hub could benefit from your experience.