

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TOOLKIT

**A GUIDE TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE
FOR AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
INTERNAL**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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First published in 2023 by Amnesty International

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AI Index: ACT 10/6363/2023

Cover photo: A demonstrator is dragged by police while protesting against France's controversial pension reform, Lille, 2020.
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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit focuses on civil disobedience. It takes into consideration the [policy](#) on Amnesty International's engagement on civil disobedience,¹ which provides guidance on when and how to engage in acts of civil disobedience in a way that maintains the organization's duty of care to those acting on its calls for civil disobedience and mitigates reputational, financial, legal and other risks.

This toolkit is aimed at Amnesty entities (sections, structures and national offices) who are contemplating the use of civil disobedience. It sets out key principles to be upheld by Amnesty when engaging in civil disobedience and the steps to use civil disobedience effectively, including planning, risk assessment, decision-making, implementation and evaluation. While this toolkit focuses on civil disobedience, it can also be applied to some cases of higher-risk Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA).

The principles outlined in this toolkit are set out in the [policy](#) on Amnesty International's engagement in civil disobedience. They should be rigorously and systematically applied to any civil disobedience tactic from the planning stage to post-implementation, particularly when they fall within the higher-risk

end of the spectrum. This also includes situations where civil disobedience tactics are carried out reactively or in response to current affairs. There are likely to be occasions when Amnesty entities need to develop additional guidance and practices whilst using this toolkit. This will ensure that safety and integrity is not compromised whilst responding to the local context.


This toolkit should be read and applied consistently in the context of all current Amnesty International policies.² In the appendices, you can find Amnesty resources and policies, as well as external resources and tools.

You can find a link to the database of Amnesty International's current experience in civil disobedience [here](#).

¹ [Policy on Amnesty International's Engagement in Civil Disobedience](#) (POL 30/5591/2022), June 2022.

² Please see [Appendix A](#) for an overview of relevant Amnesty International policies. Please note that this appendix is not necessarily exhaustive.



 ↑ *Youth Strike 4 Climate in London, United Kingdom. School children from all over London come out on strike to support the Youth Strike 4 Climate movement, 2019.*
© Greenpeace



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S EVOLVING ENGAGEMENT IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Civil disobedience has been historically used as a tactic to raise awareness, to increase pressure, and to promote change. Activists around the world have used different methods of civil disobedience through direct and non-violent means, often including intentional violations of law. International human rights standards recognise that, regardless of the infringement of a country's law, acts of civil disobedience may constitute a form of assembly and, when carried out in a non-violent manner, fall under the scope of the rights to freedom of conscience, expression and peaceful assembly.³

Human rights movements have increasingly relied on civil disobedience, and it is anticipated that this will continue due to current major issues such as the climate crisis, threats to the rights of migrants and refugees, and the increasing attacks on human rights driven by the politics of demonization. While we have historically supported others who have engaged in acts of civil disobedience in order to defend their rights, we have not had a policy in place to provide guidance on when Amnesty itself engages in it.

In recent years, Amnesty entities have developed their own thinking in this area and

have relied on acts of civil disobedience in very specific circumstances where the space for civil society was shrinking or where traditional forms of activism were deemed ineffective. Civil disobedience is one additional tool at our disposal to campaign for change.

As agreed by Amnesty's Global Assembly, Amnesty International only engages in acts of civil disobedience when these are **public, non-violent** acts that involve the **intentional breach of a domestic law** undertaken with the aim of bringing about **human rights change**.⁴ Amnesty is committed not to use or advocate violence, hatred or discrimination in its campaign tactics, including civil disobedience. Therefore, whenever Amnesty engages in acts of civil disobedience, these must always be in compliance with the principles of non-violence, anti-hatred and non-discrimination.

In 2018, the Global Group on Activism (GGA) and the Global Activism team produced a [toolkit on Non-Violent Direct Action](#) (NVDA).⁵ The toolkit provided guidelines for the use of Non-Violent Direct Action by Amnesty International entities, focusing on the higher-risk NVDA.

In June 2022, Amnesty International's Global Assembly approved a [policy](#) on Amnesty International's engagement in civil disobedience (POL 30/5591/2022).⁶ The policy took into account consultations with the movement held in 2020 and 2021 and written comments provided by the movement, as well as further discussions held during the Global Assembly meeting of 2021.

The civil disobedience policy sets a minimum standard for the whole movement. However, it will not be safe and possible to engage in civil disobedience acts in all contexts and national entities may develop additional requirements suited to respond to their own context and clarify how decision-making on civil disobedience within their entity will be carried out.



3 See: United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee (HRC), [General Comment 37: Right of peaceful assembly](#) (Art. 21), 27 July 2020, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 16.

4 The highlighted elements are expanded in the [Policy on Amnesty International's Engagement in Civil Disobedience](#) (POL 30/5591/2022).

5 [Toolkit for Non-Violent Direct Action](#) (NVDA) (ACT 10/8112/2018), March 2018.

6 [Policy on Amnesty International's Engagement in Civil Disobedience](#) (POL 30/5591/2022).


DEFINITIONS

Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA): Actions that do not make use of physical force against an individual, do not cause others to fear the immediate use of violence, nor advocate violence or discrimination. NVDA is an umbrella term that includes civil disobedience as well as activities that do not infringe domestic law. It covers a spectrum of activities, from letter writing and collecting petition signatures, to rallies, demonstrations, and media stunts, and extending to higher risk activities such as banner drops, sit-ins and acts of civil disobedience.

Civil Disobedience: Acts of civil disobedience involve the premeditated breaking of a domestic law for reasons of conscience or because it is perceived to be the most effective way to raise awareness, express social or political dissent or to bring about change. For example, Rosa Parks' organized resistance when being told to move to the back of the bus during the nascent stages of the Civil Rights Movement as a way to oppose racial segregation.

Mass civil disobedience: Civil disobedience can sometimes involve large groups of people organizing for a common cause. Examples may include mass blockades of buildings or facilities, or mass refusal to comply with laws deemed to be in breach of human rights law and standards. When Amnesty is planning to engage in civil disobedience, it may be considered mass civil disobedience when it reaches a scale where an Amnesty entity is unable to provide direct training and gain informed consent in writing from all participants. This includes civil disobedience initiated by Amnesty or by other organizations that Amnesty is partnering with in the context of a specific campaign.



 ↑ Rosa Parks seated toward the front of the bus, Montgomery, Alabama, USA, 1956.
© Underwood Archives



EXAMPLE OF AMNESTY TAIWAN'S JOINING IN MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Amnesty Taiwan participated in the biggest movement of civil disobedience in the past decades of Taiwan's history, called the Sunflower movement. This movement is situated in the context of the sensitive relationship between Taiwan and China and began in 2014 when the legislative chamber attempted to pass a trade agreement with China without due process. There was worry that this might endanger the right to freedom of expression and the right to liberty.

On 18 March 2014, people came together and broke into the legislative chamber's building in Taipei City (and continued the occupation of this building throughout the protests). The following day, people gathered demanding due process, and soon after the rest of the country mobilized. As things progressed, with little response from the government, citizens began to occupy the square peacefully, and the damage to property was minor. On 25 March, the protesters were faced with a brutal police repression



that left 150 people injured and 61 people arrested.

This provoked half a million people to join the protest on 30 March, mobilizing people from all walks of life (including

members of civil society, artists, teachers). Amnesty Taiwan's children's group also joined the movement in the legislative chamber to show support to the protesters who continued occupying the building since the beginning of the protest.

↑ Activists protest against the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement by occupying the legislative chamber in Taiwan, 2014.
© Yi Pan



INTERSECTION BETWEEN NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Civil disobedience can involve breaking a law that is in contravention of international law, or breaking a law that is consistent with international law. This an important factor in state responses to civil disobedience.



BREAKING A LAW THAT IS IN CONTRAVENTION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

Some acts of civil disobedience engage the premeditated violation of a law which purposefully prohibits the exercise of human rights, restricts expression of particular beliefs, or that is similarly in conflict with international human rights law and standards. These include, for example, regulations that impose a blanket ban on protests or a law that criminalizes holding a demonstration without the authorities' prior authorization.

BREAKING A LAW THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

Other acts of civil disobedience may involve breaking a domestic law for reasons of conscience or because it is perceived to be the most effective way to protest or express dissent, to get the attention of the general public and contribute to the public debate, or to stop or prevent human rights abuses. Examples of laws that are often broken in acts of civil disobedience for this purpose include laws on trespass, obstructing roads, or defacing property. All too often, when faced with this type of civil disobedience, States have responded with charging those involved with serious criminal offences that are not justified by their actions such as terrorism-related offences, treason, or rebellion.




EXAMPLES OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TACTICS

Whilst similar civil disobedience tactics are used around the world, it is important to remember that what constitutes civil disobedience depends heavily on local context and laws. An act of civil disobedience in one country might not be civil disobedience in another. Here are some examples of tactics that can be found in different contexts, categorized under the types of law-breaking mentioned above:

Examples of breaking a law that is in contravention of international human rights law:

- Carrying out street protests during States of Emergency or in contexts where the right to freedom of peaceful assembly is unduly restricted
- Filming/recording government and/or law enforcement where it is prohibited
- Public displays of affection by queer or same sex couples where it is prohibited
- Dressing in a way that is prohibited
- Speaking a minority language or cultural practices that are prohibited
- Refusing being conscripted / drafted into the army for war
- Not attending compulsory education
- Not asking for permission before protesting where governments impose an authorization regime



 ↑ *The statue of Edward Colston, a slave trader of the late 17th century, is pushed into the river Avon in Bristol, England, 2020.*
© Giulia Spadafora/NurPhoto via Getty Images

Examples of breaking a law that is consistent with international human rights law:

- Occupying government buildings and physical sit-ins
- Occupying private land or buildings belonging to private sector and corporations or blocking entrances
- Blocking roads and traffic
- Not paying for services (bus fares, taxes)
- Graffiti painting on public walls
- Vandalism and eco-vandalism
- Tearing down a statue

Some tactics can fall under either category, depending on the context:

- Occupying Indigenous land and important environmental ecosystems to prevent its sale and development
- Refusing arrest and passive resistance to law enforcement during street protests

Specific contexts and communities will have their own tactics and strategies that have cultural and historical significance to them.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Civil disobedience is a tool at Amnesty's disposal to campaign for human rights change, which should be used in a strategic way, in conjunction with other approaches and tactics, to apply pressure on decision-makers.

Acts of civil disobedience must be based on a thorough assessment of the risks to participants and the reputational, financial, legal, and other risks involved for Amnesty at the national and international level. It is essential that the anticipated benefits of the act outweigh its risks, and that Amnesty fulfils its moral and legal duty to those who are involved in the action, both by preparing adequately for any potential safety, legal or other risks, and by providing support before, during and after these actions, as outlined to those involved prior to the action.

When organizing, facilitating, or endorsing an act of civil disobedience, Amnesty entities must ensure that the following key principles are upheld, and should consider and discuss them during the risk assessment prepared in advance of the act. They can be used as a checklist when deciding to engage in acts of civil disobedience. The full text of these principles can be found in Section 3 of the civil disobedience [policy](#) (POL 30/5591/2022).

1. COMMITMENT TO NON-VIOLENCE AND AMNESTY'S CORE VALUES⁷

- 📣 Do not use or advocate violence, hatred, or discrimination.
- 📣 Be consistent with international human rights law and standards.
- 📣 Do not objectify or stereotype particular groups.
- 📣 Refrain from actions that are likely to have negative impacts on the rights of others (for example, blocking transport routes where this could cause significant harm to the livelihoods of marginalized groups or taking action that may undermine the cultural rights of others, such as by carrying out actions in cultural or religious sites without permission).
- 📣 Refrain from organizing or participating in acts of civil disobedience which plan to intentionally cause damage to property, unless the damage is considered to be moderate, reasonable and justified by the circumstances.

⁷ For further guidance on applying Amnesty International values, see [Living guidelines for ethical and respectful communications](#) (ORG 10/0572/2019), 20 January 2019.

⁸ As per Amnesty's policy, damage to property is considered moderate when it is temporary, reversible or easy to replace. However, it must be noted that these notions vary according to context and region, and it should therefore be considered as part of the risk assessment.





EXAMPLE FROM SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, there is a long tradition of civil disobedience in the form of protesting, dating back to the apartheid era. In many cases, when communities lobby and try to dialogue with authorities, they are unsuccessful, and no change is brought about. This leads some groups to use tactics such as damaging property or buildings, blocking roads and occupying buildings so government officials and the media pay attention to the issues they are facing. There is a sense among civil society that government, for the most part, does not respond or take demands seriously until there is property damage.

In 2015, young activists began to lead protests to advocate for more accessibility and free higher education for young people from diverse backgrounds. Throughout the years of these protests, Amnesty South Africa used the national Constitution as a guide to continuously assess if engaging or supporting in civil disobedience was strategic for the national entity, as the Constitution did not provide for free tertiary education but rather basic education. However, when the protests



became violent or there was damage to property, Amnesty South Africa did not engage in the civil disobedience. Instead, it opted to provide support to the protesters through training on monitoring and reporting on human rights violations during protests. This allowed Amnesty South Africa to act within the principles of Amnesty International and support activists.

  Students at University of the Witwatersrand protest in South Africa, 2021.
© Gallo Images / Contributor



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2. STRATEGIC, NECESSARY, AND CALCULATED RISK

- 📣 View engaging in an act of civil disobedience as an additional tool at Amnesty's disposal to campaign for human rights change.
- 📣 Use civil disobedience strategically in conjunction with other approaches and tactics.
- 📣 The anticipated benefits of the action must outweigh its risks.
- 📣 The act of civil disobedience should be necessary and proportionate in the specific circumstance, whilst taking into account the rights of others (for example it should not affect public health, safety, or livelihoods).
- 📣 Make decisions in consultation with all relevant stakeholders that may be affected by the reactions to the act of civil disobedience, and with lawyers in the relevant country or territory specialized in this area.

3. BASED ON AMNESTY'S ASSESSMENT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

- 📣 Decisions to engage in acts of civil disobedience must be rooted in our research and documentation of human rights violations that the act seeks to address.
- 📣 This assessment should include a power analysis to choose the targets, means, messaging, and overall strategy, of each act of civil disobedience. This is particularly important when acts of civil disobedience target corporations, given the additional risks that this might bring to participants and the organization.
- 📣 Acts of civil disobedience targeting corporate actors should only go ahead when Amnesty has established or can rely on reliable evidence that such corporations are causing, contributing, or are directly linked through a business relationship, to a human rights abuse, or are at risk of doing so.



TO BREAK THE LAW, OR NOT TO BREAK THE LAW ...?


It is important to ask ourselves if we can create the human rights impact without breaking the law, especially if it is high-risk. There are many creative examples where Amnesty entities, and other organizations, have found the sweet spot where they almost break the law. Using creative tactics, they can highlight how laws are unjust and need to change.

One example of this was during the World Cup in Russia in 2018, where activists protested the criminalization of the distribution of materials (including the rainbow flag) that allegedly promoted homosexuality to minors. The activists subtly protested these discriminatory laws against LGBTIQ+ people by each activist wearing a different colour football shirt. When the activists stood in a line, they created a rainbow flag together, although none of them individually was waving the rainbow LGBTIQ+ flag. This rainbow flag was “hidden” in plain sight.⁹

Similarly, the tactic of “creative disruption” can be used to almost break the law. In Uganda in 2014, young activists released two pigs painted



yellow (the colour of the party who was currently governing) in parliament. This act was intended to protest the fact that government was not planning to address the 84% youth unemployment in the national budget.¹⁰

 ↑ Activists find a way around the prohibition on displaying the Pride flag, in the form of a secret flag made from football shirts, on the streets of Moscow during Russia's hosting of the 2018 World Cup, Russia, 2018.
© The Hidden Flag

9 ABC News. “World Cup activists stage ‘hidden’ rainbow flag protest around Moscow to champion gay rights”, 11 July 2018.
10 Beautiful Trouble, “Yellow Pigs in Parliament”.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

4. DUTY OF CARE, DUE DILIGENCE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

- 📣 Fulfil Amnesty's duty of care to all participants in acts of civil disobedience that Amnesty organizes, facilitates, or endorses, including in joint efforts with other organizations which encourage Amnesty activists to participate.
- 📣 Take all appropriate measures to mitigate against the risks entailed by acts of civil disobedience and put in place the required mechanisms to respond to such circumstances.
- 📣 Give participants clear guidelines on the possible consequences and how to respond to them, including an action plan for what to do when facing problems and the support available to them.
- 📣 Pay particular attention to the increased risks that individuals may face due to their multiple identities (for example race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, immigration status), as not every individual faces the same risks in engaging in an act of civil disobedience.
- 📣 When civil disobedience takes place online, pay particular attention to the specific risks of such actions, including digital security and the reprisals that States may take against this type of action.

5. DUE DILIGENCE ON PARTNERS AND RIGHTS HOLDERS

- 📣 Consider any risks that may arise from engaging in civil disobedience in partnership with other organizations and take into account partners' own safeguards and previous history of engagement in civil disobedience.
- 📣 When the act of civil disobedience is organized on behalf of rights holders, consider what the partnership means for and with rights holders. In particular, consider the motivation behind engaging in the act of civil disobedience and the relationship to the rights holders who we wish to benefit with the action.
- 📣 When planning an act of civil disobedience on behalf of rights holders, guarantee their involvement and participation from the early stages of planning. Amnesty often has a privilege resulting from our brand and many in the movement benefit from racial/class privilege. This can contribute to the success of the action and to mitigate against risks that may be higher for the rights holders, but at the same time be aware of the possibility that our privilege may cause harm to or overpower the rights holders we intend to support.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

6 PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT¹¹

- 📣 Obtain the prior and informed consent of all participants engaging in an act of civil disobedience. The format of the consent may vary depending on the urgency of the matter and/or the level of risk attached to the proposed act of civil disobedience. The consent obtained should generally be recorded in writing and kept safely (in conformity with privacy legislation and best practice) by the entity organizing the act. The consent form should also record an emergency contact and relevant medical information for the participant.
- 📣 Where staff may be participating in the act of civil disobedience, pay particular attention to power dynamics and ensure that consent remains voluntary and without any explicit or implicit pressure from peers or managers.
- 📣 If you are planning to allow the participation of people below the age of 18, the Amnesty entity must have in place a child safeguarding policy that specifically addresses children's participation in civil disobedience, mitigates against the specific risks of their participation, and contemplates a process to obtain their consent in line with their evolving capacities.

7 ADEQUATE AND APPROPRIATE TRAINING FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

- 📣 Make sure that all those responding to a call for civil disobedience have access to adequate and appropriate training, including observers and others deployed for different roles. This should be part of the process to obtain informed consent. People without proper training may be prevented from participating in the act of civil disobedience organized by Amnesty International.



¹¹ See more on prior and informed consent under [Step 3: Preparing to Implement Civil Disobedience Tactics](#) below.


GUIDING PRINCIPLES

8 AMNESTY TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS ACTIONS

Amnesty International must own the consequences of an act of civil disobedience and should not deny nor retract from these in the aftermath of an action.

- ▶ When organizing, participating in, or facilitating an act of civil disobedience, prepare in advance for the level of support you may be able to offer to participants (including financial and legal support) and communicate this clearly to them.
- ▶ At a minimum, having in place a network of pro-bono lawyers and civil society organizations who can assist with the legal support before, during and after the act is advisable. If and where possible, it is very useful to have a wider support network that includes organizations or collectives that provide psychosocial support before, during, and after acts of civil disobedience, especially in cases where force or violence has been used against activists.
- ▶ When making a proposal for an act of civil disobedience, include explicitly in the risk assessment whether your entity will or will not provide legal and/or financial support, and clearly communicate this to all participants.



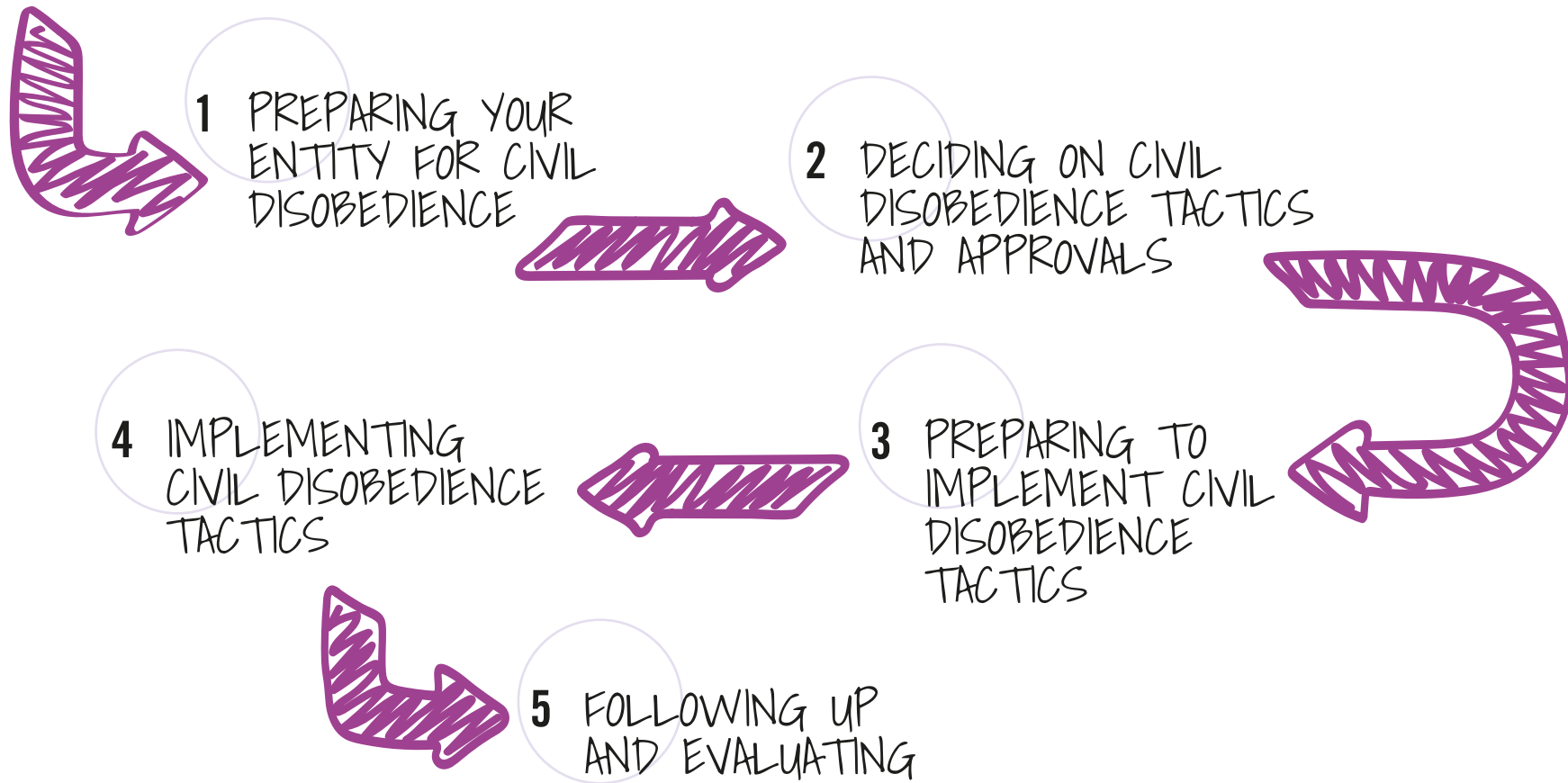
 ↑ Amnesty Mexico staff and activists protest in front of “La Glorieta de las Mujeres que Luchan” (The Roundabout of the Women who Fight), a roundabout in Mexico City taken by feminist movements to protest the rise of gender violence in Mexico, 2021.

© Christopher Isai Cruz Ordóñez



5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The following is a starting point for thinking through approaches to civil disobedience and should be applicable to reactive responses to local crisis, as well as to proactive strategy development.



STEP 1

5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PREPARING YOUR ENTITY FOR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Preparing your national entity for civil disobedience can take some time. Taking this time is important because of the increased risks that certain types of tactics carry. The following are some suggested considerations. Various considerations will apply to your entity, depending on its size and context.

POLICY

- ➔ Ensure that you are inclusive in your process and involve people with responsibilities for campaigning, communications, activism, as well as activists and rights holders, in a meaningful way. This includes providing the space for activists and rights holders to make decisions regarding whether to engage in civil disobedience, the tactics, and the level of risk of the actions.
- ➔ Ensure that all decision-makers fully understand all relevant Amnesty policies related to the issues at stake and follow existing policies and legal procedures (see Appendix A). This includes socializing the policy with activists and rights holders who will form part of the decision-making process.
- ➔ Ensure that relevant staff participate in policy briefings and other induction processes to familiarize themselves with policies and processes and raise questions.

DIVERSITY

- ➔ When making decisions about acts of civil disobedience, ensure that such acts will advance diversity goals in your context.
- ➔ Analyse how participating in civil disobedience might affect activists differently, considering gender, race, ability, and age diversity, among other characteristics. Also, think of strategies on how to further support and protect activists with these identities during acts of civil disobedience.

LOCAL RELEVANCE

Each national entity faces a unique context, including local and national politics, as well as the landscape of civil society organizations and partners. Local relevance takes on particular importance when it comes to civil disobedience, because civil disobedience is often led by people who are directly impacted by human rights abuses and violations. Make sure that you fully understand the history and repercussions of civil disobedience in your country before engaging in acts of civil disobedience.

- ➔ Assess your local social, cultural, and political context by using a situational analysis tool.¹² Consider how security forces react to protests, including whether there is a history of unnecessary or excessive use of force, government attitudes towards social change movements, and historical experience of civil disobedience tactics.
- ➔ Analyse your activists and their appetite for risk.
- ➔ Map all relevant laws that could have an impact on your civil disobedience tactics. Seek legal advice if necessary.
- ➔ Engage with partners, rights holders and community members that have been leading local actions or campaigns on the issue when planning acts of civil disobedience.
- ➔ Consult potential partners to see how open they are to civil disobedience.



¹² See an example in the [Tools Collection](#) in Appendix C.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITIES AND RIGHTS HOLDERS LEADING CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Civil disobedience has been a pivotal part of many social justice movements throughout history. Earlier, we mentioned **ROSA PARKS** as a key example of how civil disobedience created change during the civil rights movement in the United States. Civil disobedience is something that has organically grown out of grassroots movements led by rights holders and human rights defenders. There are many examples of non-violent civil disobedience being used as a form of resistance under historical colonial oppression and the current systems of oppression of today.

In Indonesia, in 2016, the nine **“WOMEN OF KENDENG”** (Indigenous women land defenders) cemented their feet outside of the Presidential palace in protest of their land being used by a cement company operating near their community. They protested the impact that the factory would have on their access to water, as well as the way it could disturb the community’s access to and connection with their land. This community has a long history of resisting colonialism through acts of civil disobedience, such as refusing to build roads or pay taxes.¹³



Another important example is the large social movement **“MOVIMENTO DOS TRABALHADORES RURAIS SEM TERRA” (MST)** that started in Brazil in the 1980s. This grassroots movement uses civil disobedience as a key strategy by occupying land to advocate for agrarian reform and against the historical social inequalities of land distribution that are a legacy of the Portuguese colonization and slavery. As the movement occupied

territories, families moved into the land and built communities. Today, the MST estimates that there are 450,000 families who have settled in those territories.¹⁴

As a large organization, Amnesty must always remember the hard work these activists have already carried out and their expertise in civil disobedience, as well as the risks and sacrifices they have taken to defend their rights. Whilst

preparing to engage in civil disobedience as an organization, we should engage with communities and grassroots movements to learn and create partnerships together.

© ← Women cement their feet in front of Indonesia’s state palace, 2016.
© Future Publishing



¹³ Hendri Yulis, “The Kartinis of Kendeng: using motherhood as a form of resistance”, 20 April 2016.
¹⁴ MST, “Quem Somos”.

STEP 2 *DECIDING ON TACTICS AND APPROVALS*

Civil disobedience should be viewed as an active intervention in political, social, economic, or other power structures or metanarratives that shifts power relationships in the moment and inserts Amnesty or rights holders as active participants, rather than as side-lined commentators. Civil disobedience works by active intervention in a system to disrupt and influence the narrative and the source of power to create an environment that can achieve human rights change. Effective civil disobedience strategies and tactics disrupt and challenge these sources of power, increase the power of rights holders, and lead to a path for change. The possibilities of civil disobedience to open a window for change range from shifting the attitude of the campaign target, including by creating greater awareness among the population, to weakening the target so much that they accept change, negotiate, or make concessions as part of a wider campaign.

In order to assess if civil disobedience is the right tactic used at the right moment, it is important to consider the wider context in which the campaign will take place. For this, we should ensure the active and meaningful participation of all those involved.



ACTIVE AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

- Map stakeholders,¹⁵ including individual community leaders, community-led organizations, social movements, activist collectives, youth networks, faith-based and other civil society groups, political organizations, government, and others, which have members that are directly impacted by the issue at stake, in order to make sure that your choices are not only informed by the local landscape, but strengthen grassroots activism and initiatives of local human rights defenders, and not overburden or eclipse their efforts.
- Enable active and meaningful participation in campaign planning and decision-making from the beginning. For tips and guidelines on active participation, see “[Enabling the Active Participation of Rights Holders, Partners, and Activists in Campaigning and Activism](#)” (ACT 10/9941/2019).¹⁶
- When an opportunity or need for civil disobedience emerges, it is important to consult with communities and rights holders that are directly impacted by the issue at stake. Whenever possible, follow the lead of communities that have been leading on this work and consider any risks the action may pose to them. Build and cultivate relationships, and, when necessary, wait for an invitation to intervene with civil disobedience tactics.
- Make sure that your act of civil disobedience has clear and specific added value to the work that you and partners have already been doing, or that partners or potential partners have been leading. Make sure your analysis includes assessment of how partnering with Amnesty will affect your partners.



¹⁵ See examples of relevant tools the [Tools Collection](#) in Appendix C.

¹⁶ [Enabling the Active Participation of Rights Holders, Partners, and Activists in Campaigning and Activism](#) (ACT 10/9941/2019), 2019.

STEP 2 DECIDING ON TACTICS AND APPROVALS

- ➔ Implement “cultural competency training”¹⁷ so that those involved in acts of civil disobedience have the ability to effectively interact with people from cultures different from one’s own, through knowledge and appreciation of cultural differences and skills to reflect on how something might be understood differently or have a different impact depending on the cultural context.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

- ➔ Ensure any decision to engage in acts of civil disobedience is part of a broader campaign strategy.
- ➔ Have clear criteria for when it would be appropriate to use civil disobedience instead of more traditional Amnesty tactics:
 - ✓ Overlay of potential key points within a campaign strategy that might lead to escalation.
 - ✓ Risk assessment and stakeholder analysis of the use of civil disobedience and of potential tactics.
- ➔ Research if these tactics have been used before by Amnesty or other organizations in the country to see how they worked
- ➔ Research successful civil disobedience tactics utilized in your region and by other movements.
- ➔ Before designing or choosing civil disobedience tactics, staff and activists should assess who is directly impacted by the issues in the local landscape, how civil disobedience may positively and negatively affect that landscape, and how Amnesty action will affect those same communities.
- ➔ Evaluate the risks to those engaging in an act of civil disobedience, including the possible legal implications, the possible associated

financial costs, as well as personal and practical implications of the action on participants (arrest, detention, criminal records, access to food, health care, water and sanitation, as well the future impact on an individual’s ability to secure employment or to travel to certain countries, or to access immigration status, housing, education, or other state benefits).

- ➔ As you consider if civil disobedience is the right strategy, also take into account the differentiated ways in which the action may impact on various groups, and how pre-existing patterns of discrimination may affect or benefit them.
- ➔ Use an appropriate tool to assess potential tactics and decide which tactic you will use (for example Impact v Effort Matrix, Risk Register and Risk/Benefit Matrix assessment).¹⁸
- ➔ Assess whether and how civil disobedience tactics will impact change in policy, accountability, culture, and most importantly, change in people’s lives. Establish a framework for monitoring and evaluating so that you can learn and hone your skills and capacity for civil disobedience. (See Appendix C for examples of tools that you can use to assess the impact and risk of your tactics.)



¹⁷ See Amnesty Australia’s example: [amnesty.org.au/skill-up/cultural-competency/](https://www.amnesty.org.au/skill-up/cultural-competency/)

¹⁸ See further information on these tools in the [Tools Collection](#) in Appendix C.

OUTSIDE THE BOX TACTICS FROM THE GLOBAL CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT


Within the climate justice movement, there are external organizations that are thinking outside the box when it comes to civil disobedience. **EXTINCTION REBELLION** is a global movement that has been making headlines through their efforts to raise awareness about the climate emergency. They undertake actions to push governments to prevent surpassing the irreversible “tipping points” of climate change. One of the most notable recent actions was in 2022 when, in partnership with Scientist Rebellion, they blocked the entrance of private jets in airports around the world during COP27.¹⁹ They have also used disruptive tactics such as blocking roads, passive resistance to arrest, glued themselves to roads, blocking the entrance to buildings, and many more.

Similarly, the **FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE** movement, a climate movement made up mostly of children and young people, equally engages in outside the box tactics. The movement kicked off in 2018 with children and young people refusing to attend compulsory education on Fridays in protest of their futures not



being protected from climate change, despite threats of sanctions from schools and other authorities. Some activists from this movement protested in front of parliaments in their respective countries. There are many youth-led grassroots networks of activists who are also using civil disobedience as a key strategy to protest the government’s lack of action to prevent climate change.

The sense of urgency and desperation felt due to the climate crisis has inspired young activists to organize actions that are increasingly risky and have more impact in the news and media outlets, to reach out bigger audiences. In 2022, we have seen “eco-vandalism” being used as a tactic to shock societies and keep raising awareness, for example by throwing paint at famous artworks.²⁰

 ↑ Climate change activists protest in New York, 2019.
© REUTERS

19 Damian Gayle, “Climate activists target private jet airports and demand ban at Cop27”, The Guardian, 11 November 2022.
20 Julia Jacobo, “Climate activists throw paint on Gustav Klimt’s ‘Tod und Leben’ at Vienna museum” November 2022.



STEP 2 *DECIDING ON TACTICS AND APPROVALS*

PLANNING AND APPROVAL PROCESS

When planning acts of civil disobedience, Amnesty entities should follow the process described below before activists engage in such acts. The process is designed to allow Amnesty to comply with our duty of care and ensure that risks can be mitigated and adequately handled.

Acts of civil disobedience will have differing levels of risk for the organization, the individuals engaging in the act, and to others, depending on the local context and the type of activity prepared. The level of risk for a specific activity will be determined by a variety of factors, including the local/regional context, the legal framework, the targeted audience, and the thematic area.

It is key for Amnesty to fully understand the risks and associated risk level before engaging in any kind of civil disobedience, and to have a clear plan for mitigating such risks.

Any act of civil disobedience in which Amnesty entities engage should be predicated on the considerations set out in the diagram below.

APPROVALS

Before engaging in acts of civil disobedience, ensure that your entity has a shared understanding of the approval process, including who has final decision-making authority to authorize a response. By clarifying an approval process before making other decisions, you can ensure that approvals can be obtained and decisions made quickly and efficiently.

- Appoint one staff person, likely the Director or other senior staff, to be the final decision maker regarding civil disobedience tactics.
- Ensure that senior policy staff members are involved in all decision-making about civil disobedience.
- Ensure that senior activism, campaigning and communications staff and activist leaders (where relevant) are involved in decisions about the action.
- Know who to ask in your national entity about policy when context changes and new decisions need to be made.
- Document your agreed decision-making process and communicate it to relevant stakeholders.

See Appendix B for an example of a decision-making process and an extract of the model decision making authority in the [policy](#) on Amnesty's engagement in civil disobedience (POL 30/5591/2022).



5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

STEP 2 DECIDING ON TACTICS AND APPROVALS



Civil disobedience should not be carried out in isolation and should appear to be a feasible means of achieving the expected human rights impact. Alternative tactics should be made available for those activists who choose not to participate in civil disobedience.

1. IDENTIFY THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE
An Amnesty entity identifies a law or conduct of a government, corporation, or other non-state actor, that is contrary to international law and standards or that may have an expected impact which will be detrimental to human rights.

2. CONSIDER THE IMPACT
The entity believes that an act of civil disobedience can have an important impact to reverse such law or conduct, it is considered to be undertaken for a defined purpose which is aligned with Amnesty's human rights mission, and it takes into account how the act may affect the rights of others.

3. CONSIDER BENEFITS
The entity considers the strategic benefits of the activity as part of a broader campaign, as a useful method to achieve the desired human rights impact, alongside other tools available to the organization, such as advocacy, mobilization, and strategic litigation.

4. CONSIDER RISKS
Once the entity has decided that an act of civil disobedience is strategic, the coordinator of the activity should prepare a written risk and impact assessment, which should include an analysis of the security, health and safety, legal, financial, and reputational risks, as well as ways of mitigating such risks, ways to handle situations if such risks arise, and what human rights impact is likely from the act of civil disobedience.

5. CONSULT AND SEEK APPROVAL

Acts of civil disobedience against corporate actors may bring heightened risks and require detailed discussion with the IS Business & Human Rights Team and the IS Legal Team. It should be acknowledged that a corporate actor could bring legal proceedings against Amnesty and participants in certain circumstances (see, for example, the use of the US RICO Act by Energy Transfer LP).

For acts of civil disobedience targeting corporations, the team in the IS or a national entity which has been engaging with that corporation to assess its possible involvement in a human rights abuse (if different to the team or individual who is coordinating the activity), should be consulted and involved in the process in advance of drafting the risk assessment.

If the act of civil disobedience includes targeting a government of a country which is different from that where the action will take place, relevant teams (including at national entity and IS level) should be consulted and involved in the process.

Depending on the level of risk of the proposed activity, the coordinator of the activity should seek prior approval according to the sign off process detailed in Appendix B. The risk and impact assessment should make clear if the anticipated benefits of the action outweigh its risks.

A Civil Disobedience Task Force will be convened for each high-risk proposal and will be tasked with the review of proposals for high-risk activities. More information on the role of the Task Force can be found in the policy on Amnesty's engagement in civil disobedience (POL 30/5591/2022).

See Appendix A of the civil disobedience policy for guidance (POL 30/5591/2022). See also the Risk Assessment Form in Appendix A.

Mass civil disobedience is a higher risk activity due to the lack of direct training and issues around informed consent. Approval must be at the highest level of decision-making authority for the entity and following advice from the Civil Disobedience Task Force, in line with the process set in Appendix B.

STEP 3

5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PREPARING TO IMPLEMENT TACTICS

Once the tactic/activity has been approved, the coordinator of the activity, together with the relevant teams, can begin preparations to ensure that all actions are carried out with the highest levels of safety and security and that strategies to mitigate against legal, financial, and other risks are implemented.

Some of the elements to consider are detailed below.

RISK ANALYSIS

National entities should always follow standard guidelines for risk analysis when considering civil disobedience.

- Risk analysis should include risks related to the safety and security of the people involved in the action and others who might also be affected by it, as well as loss of capacity and financial resources to respond to such risks.
- Consider credibility and reputational risks to the organization, both locally and beyond your own country since Amnesty actions in one country can reverberate far away.
- Assess the way in which the authorities might respond to future Amnesty requests, and if this tactic will affect the way in which the organization can interact with the government.
- Include the potential financial implications of each risk, including the financial burden of mitigating those risks.
- Seek legal advice about the laws that may be broken and the risks for the individuals participating in the act in each jurisdiction.
- Include strategies for mitigating each risk.

You can find a risk assessment form in [Appendix A](#).



DOES CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE ALWAYS HAVE TO BE HIGH-RISK?

No, civil disobedience does not always need to be high-risk to be powerful and create change.

In 2018, Amnesty Belgium protested Russia's treatment of human rights defenders in the context of the football World Cup by kicking 100 footballs into the Russian embassy's garden. This act was done to bring visibility to human rights defenders who have been killed, jailed, or attacked by the government. This example shows how entities can use

 [↑](#) Amnesty activists dressed in football outfits kick 100 balls over the fence of the Russian Embassy in Brussels, 2018.
© CAMZZI

civil disobedience acts that are low-risk in their context to create powerful messages and advocate for change. Check out the video [here](#).

Determining whether to carry out low- or high-risk acts of civil disobedience depends on the local context, the level of restrictions in any determined jurisdiction, and the tolerance of the authorities to such types of disruption.



STEP 3

5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PREPARING TO IMPLEMENT TACTICS

PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT²¹

Prior and informed consent means that a person is aware of and understands the full extent, as well as the potential risks, of a planned act of civil disobedience, before committing to participate and engaging in the act. Consent must be given voluntarily by a person who is competent to do so (they must have the ability to consent freely), otherwise they should not be allowed to participate.

Prior to obtaining participants' consent, you must clearly inform all participants about the risks attached to the action, when applicable, as well as measures put in place to mitigate against them, including:

- ➔ possible legal implications
- ➔ possible associated financial costs
- ➔ personal and practical implications of the action on participants (arrest, detention, criminal record, access to food, health care, water and sanitation, as well as the future impact on an individual's ability to secure employment or to travel to certain countries, and on an individual's access to immigration status, housing, education, or other state benefits).

Every participant must also have clarity about the legal, financial, and psychological support that the Amnesty entity would provide, if at all, if they are faced with any form of reprisal.

Make sure you obtain and record prior and informed consent by all participants in the act of civil disobedience.

Processes to obtain prior and informed consent must consider the differentiated needs of various groups and how their lived experiences are affected by discrimination, to ensure consent is genuine. For example, information should be provided on how we will accommodate the needs and ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, or how patterns of gender-based violence may affect women and LGBTI peoples' involvement.



²¹ For further guidance on general informed consent requirements, see Amnesty's [Informed Consent Policy](#) (DOC 10/1479/2020), March 2020. This policy refers to informed consent by those who we interview, photograph, audio or video record, on how we may use any information they provide. It is designed primarily for research interviews, but many of the principles are applicable more generally, including to civil disobedience.

STEP 3

5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PREPARING TO IMPLEMENT TACTICS

PARTICIPATION OF STAFF IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Many staff will be in a position to contribute significant skills and experience to civil disobedience actions and play a key role in coordination and training, but the participation of staff in acts of civil disobedience entails specific ethical and practical considerations. Excluding staff may cause significant morale problems for those who want to participate, and cause friction between staff and activists. At the same time, risks to staff and the organization may be higher due to specific legal frameworks that may attach liability to the employer.

Amnesty's [policy](#) allows for the involvement of staff in acts of civil disobedience, but it is important that each entity assesses how specific legal frameworks may increase risks to the participants, and to the organization.

Where staff may be participating in the act of civil disobedience, particular attention should be paid to analyse the power dynamics and ensure that consent remains voluntary and without any explicit or implicit pressure from

peers or managers. Staff participation should be on the same basis as activist participation, on a strictly voluntary basis and with prior and informed consent. No pressure should be applied to any staff member to participate in civil disobedience, and alternative roles for those who choose not to participate should be made available to them.

In some domestic contexts, the participation of a staff member in an act of civil disobedience may carry criminal liability for the organization and/or its representatives, and therefore the specific risks of allowing staff to participate in an act of civil disobedience should be considered as part of the risk assessment.



STEP 3

5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PREPARING TO IMPLEMENT TACTICS

PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT FOR ACTS OF MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Mass civil disobedience is a higher risk activity due to the lack of direct training and limits around informed consent. Any decision to call for Amnesty activists to engage in mass civil disobedience must therefore only be taken after a rigorous strategy and risk assessment has been completed, and with specific measures to ensure informed consent from participants. Approval must be at the highest level of decision-making authority for the entity and following advice from the Civil Disobedience Task Force, in line with the process set in Appendix B of the [policy](#) on Amnesty's engagement in civil disobedience (POL 30/5591/2022) (see the model decision-making authority table in [Appendix B](#) below).

In the case of mass civil disobedience, it may be impractical and unrealistic to require written consent from each participant. Entities who are calling on Amnesty activists to engage in mass civil disobedience should assess the specific risks and challenges and take specific measures to ensure participants are fully aware of the implications of joining the act. To satisfy our duty of care in these situations, when an Amnesty entity is planning to engage in an act of mass civil disobedience, communications sent by an Amnesty entity inviting Amnesty activists to participate should clearly provide:

- Information about the specific risks to participants, including legal and financial repercussions
- Explicit information of the type of support the Amnesty entity would be able to provide, if at all.
- A statement that Amnesty cannot be held liable for any financial or legal costs associated with individual participation in the act of mass civil disobedience and any decision to participate is taken on this basis.

Should there be any concerns about this, the Amnesty entity should encourage participants to communicate these concerns to it before taking part in the act.

DIGITAL SECURITY

- Ensure all your digital communications, email, text messages, and phone conversations, are encrypted and secure. Opposition groups, including governments, may be monitoring your communication. See Appendix C for resources on digital security. Please contact the Digital Surveillance Team if you need advice: DisruptingSurveillanceTeam@amnesty.org



STEP 3

5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PREPARING TO IMPLEMENT TACTICS

COMMUNICATIONS, BRANDING, AND REPRESENTATION

Acts of civil disobedience can potentially impact the credibility of the organization within and across national entities and the International Secretariat. In addition to fully understanding policy implications of decisions, it is important to follow clear guidelines about public communication before, during, and after actions.

- Acts of civil disobedience often catch media attention. In fact, most acts of civil disobedience should contain an objective to explicitly garner media attention. Even when media attention is not the goal, rapid-response intervention is likely to be seen and reported widely in the press and across social media channels. Therefore, a strong communication strategy that clearly communicates the objectives of the campaign and provides clear messages to reach our target is vital to overall plans for civil disobedience.

LOGISTICAL

- You will need a fast and secure way of communicating with each other about risks and how things are unfolding throughout the act of civil disobedience, including if participants are arrested or if there are any outbursts of violence. It is therefore crucial that every participant has access to secure means of communication, to be able to get further directions from your action coordinator. Signal, Telegram and WhatsApp are encrypted from end to end and have group chat functionality.

- Identify and instruct lawyers (paid or pro-bono) who can provide emergency on-site legal support and assist any individual facing reprisals during and after the act of civil disobedience. (Ideally a lawyer should be part of the action team to be involved in scenario planning.)
- Identify strategic locations and practice actions before implementation.
- Create a detailed rundown of the minute-by-minute implementation of your action.

TEAM AND ROLES

The Action Team should be made up of staff and/or activists trained in principles of non-violence, safety and security, de-escalation, media and communications. They should work together prior to the action, in order to build trust and rapport.

Guaranteeing the safety and well-being of participants in an act of civil disobedience requires taking care of multiple other circumstances, and therefore each Amnesty entity planning an act of civil disobedience should, depending on the specificities of each act, give due consideration to the necessary roles to be fulfilled prior to and during the act. These include, when appropriate:

- **Action lead:** has final approval for all communications and logistical decisions as the act unfolds, and in the case of any potential conflict, with the authorities or with the public. Person responsible for logistics.
- **Media spokesperson:** one clear spokesperson to whom all media inquiries are referred.



STEP 3

5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PREPARING TO IMPLEMENT TACTICS

- ➔ **Safety and security/First aid coordinator:** trains all members of the team, reviews safety protocols, and coordinates first aid provision.
- ➔ **Well-being coordinators:** responsible for ensuring regular debriefs and check-ins with activists, as well as coordinating arrangements for food, time off, and common spaces for bonding and rest for the participants in case of prolonged actions.
- ➔ **Public liaison officers:** responsible for explaining the reasons for the action to people on the street (including people affected by the act of civil disobedience) and to minimize and de-escalate the risk of violence.
- ➔ **Legal observers:** (who do not actively take part in the action) responsible for:
 - ✓ monitoring arrests;
 - ✓ deterring police violence or other unlawful behaviour and briefing activists on their rights under national law;
 - ✓ collecting information about participants that may be arrested, including, if possible, the reasons of the arrest, how the arrest was conducted (for example assessing whether force was used unlawfully), which police station the person is taken to, and the alleged crime or the law under which the person is being arrested;
 - ✓ If possible, collecting witness statements from other people about the arrest.
 - ✓ Liaising with the lawyer representing the participants and/or the Amnesty entity.

- ➔ **People present at police stations** where participants have been taken: responsible for providing emotional support to those released from custody, as well as food, water and transport home if needed
- ➔ **Court liaisons:** responsible for accompanying activists during hearings and documenting the proceedings.
- ➔ **Human rights observers.**

Risks associated with each of these roles should also be considered as part of the risk assessment, and to put in place appropriate mitigating measures.

Provide all participants with a list of phone numbers and contacts for each role. Focal points at the IS and national entity level, as appropriate, should be on call while the activity is being conducted, and have clear guidance available as to who to contact in case of reprisals.



STEP 3

5 STEPS FOR ENGAGING IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

PREPARING TO IMPLEMENT TACTICS

TRAINING

Action team members should undergo, at a minimum, training in safety, security, and legal training, as well as training on relevant Amnesty policies, and first aid.

- ➔ **Safety and security training** should include basic information about the country's legal system, how to interact with the police and the general public, skills to deal with angry or violent people and how to de-escalate tensions, what to do in case of arrest, and digital security.
- ➔ **Legal training** should cover the rights of activists in case of police searches and arrest and explain the implications of arrest and convictions. It should also include training on human rights law applicable to protests and civil disobedience, including with regards to the use of force by police.
- ➔ A core action team should be trained in **principles of non-violence** and should work together to devise an action whenever possible. Specific training should be done for anyone who has a specific role in the action.
- ➔ Training should also include how activists can be discriminated against depending on their differing intersectional identities (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, age, and many other characteristics). This will enable participants in different roles to understand the risks faced by oppressed groups participating in the act or of those who may be affected by it (for example, to consider the risks of discriminatory treatment by police forces and how this would be addressed).

- ➔ **Cultural Competency Training**²² should include how to effectively interact with people from cultures different from one's own, so participants understand how things may have a different impact depending on the cultural context.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- ➔ Develop a clear, approved budget for your action and appoint a budget manager.
- ➔ Create a process for approving expenses in real time, as actions are developed and implemented, and make sure that all understand who has authority to authorize expenses and spend money.
- ➔ Make sure that any approval of a civil disobedience act is time-bound, when necessary, and activation of staff are time-bound. Be sure to seek approval for extensions of deployment, as needed.



²² See Amnesty Australia's example [here](#).

STEP 4 *IMPLEMENTING TACTICS*

AT LEAST ONE MONTH BEFORE YOUR ACTION

- 1. Convene the Action Team.
- 2. Review and agree upon an on-the-ground decision making protocol.
- 3. Action Team should conduct a review of the risk analysis and visits the action location.
- 4. Train the activists who will be involved in the action and collate the consent to the action.
- 5. Check up with the network of pro-bono lawyers and civil society organizations that will assist with legal support, to ensure they are up to date with the latest plans
- 6. Reach out to the Focal Points at the IS and national entity level to make sure they are fully aware of the details of the act and are on call for when the act begins.
- 7. If the act is considered high-risk, make sure to convene the Civil Disobedience Task Force with as much time in advance as possible, to review the planning and risk assessment

THE WEEK BEFORE YOUR ACTION

- 1. Action Team runs through the plan for the civil disobedience act, the roles of each of the participants, possible contingencies, and scenarios, and creates an exit plan.
- 2. Action Team reviews and agrees to a communications plan for the team and participants for during the action (Signal, Text, others).
- 3. Action Team reviews and agrees to Safety and Security Protocol, including check-ins and information on where they can receive medical or psychological support when needed.
- 4. Action Team does a check on gear, equipment, and materials.

DURING YOUR ACTION

- 1. Ensure there is regular communication with the team, especially with the decision-maker on the ground. Everyone in the team should have access to new information that arises.
- 2. Continuously monitor implementation of the plan and respond to contingencies or changes in the situation quickly.
- 3. Make sure everyone is free and able to stop their participation in the act of civil disobedience if they decide to do so. There should be no pressure on any activist to continue with the act if they decide to stop for whatever reason, even after the action has begun.
- 4. If it is a long-term action running over multiple days or weeks, consider structuring debriefs during the action with common spaces for bonding and rest, and make sure all participants have access to food, water and any medication they may need throughout the action.
- 5. Check that all your team members are still with you and are able to follow the exit plan if needed.



AN EXAMPLE OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING DURING MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN TAIWAN

During mass civil disobedience, there are so many diverse groups, activists and individuals participating that it is important to have systems in place to be able to assess the needs of everyone. This means that communication and decision-making processes are unique, especially when the act of mass civil disobedience is spontaneous and organically organized. In the case of the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan in 2014, there was a difference between the activist groups who were occupying the legislative chamber, and those who were outside of the building. Some of the local organizers used a tool called “**democratic deliberation**”. This tool consists of organizing discussions with participants to explore decision-making and build consensus as the act of civil disobedience is taking place. This tool is particularly interesting for building participation in more spontaneous and larger scale acts of civil disobedience.



📷 ← Activists gather outside of the legislative chamber in Taiwan during its occupation, 2014
© Yi Pan



STEP 5 FOLLOWING UP AND EVALUATING

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING AN ACTION

- Debrief activists and staff involved immediately after the civil disobedience act.
- Provide support for activists and staff, especially if they have experienced or witnessed violence or human rights abuses.
- If activists and staff have been arrested, ensure that you are following up any commitments your entity has made to their legal support.
- Provide ongoing support to activists and staff if they have suffered long term physical or mental harm due to participation in the act of civil disobedience.
- Implement communications plans to amplify the impact of the action.
- Reassess your campaign strategy. Has the action moved the debate? Do you need to change your approach and tactic?
- Own the consequences of the act of civil disobedience and do not deny nor retract from these in the aftermath of an action.
- Celebrate your success or loss. Provide a social space for participants to spend time together.

EVALUATING AND LEARNING

- Every time you engage in an act of civil disobedience, ensure that you fully and honestly evaluate the planning, implementation, and impact, to learn and improve.
- Include all participants in the evaluation, including partner groups that were involved in the action.
- Document what you learn and share with your entity's staff, activists, and partners, as well as with the Global Group on Activism and the Global Activism Team (activism@amnesty.org). Sharing learnings with the movement through the civil disobedience database helps inform Amnesty's work on civil disobedience.
- Amend your civil disobedience processes to reflect what you learnt.
- If a Civil Disobedience Task Force was set up, prepare a short report describing the impact obtained and if any participants faced reprisals, including if anyone was arrested or if there is a risk of further financial or reputational risks. The report should be sent to the Civil Disobedience Task Force, which will maintain a record of all high-risk acts of civil disobedience organized or facilitated by Amnesty.

If you need more help or guidance, reach out to the Global Activism team at the IS or the Global Group on Activism at activism@amnesty.org.



EXAMPLE OF PROVIDING LEGAL SUPPORT FROM AMNESTY KENYA

In Amnesty Kenya, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, public health guidelines prohibited public gatherings of more than 15 people. After the brutal murder of George Floyd in 2020, Amnesty Kenya demanded justice for the killing of multiple people by the police during Covid-19 in the United States. They organized 15 flash mobs in front of public murals and US embassies. It was illegal for people to gather even for a protest, as COVID-19 restrictions were in place during that time. Two activists were briefly arrested, and Amnesty Kenya staff ensured they had the support needed to secure their release.



↑ Flash mob outside teenager Yasin Moyo's home, 2020.
© Amnesty International Kenya



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

KEY POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

The policies listed below can be accessed via the [Human Rights Policy Database](#). For guidance on how to use it, see 'A Quick Guide to Using the Human Rights Policy Database', which is available to download on the Database homepage.

- ➔ [Policy on Amnesty International's Engagement in Civil Disobedience](#), June 2022 (POL 30/5591/2022), including Appendix A: Guidance for Risk Assessment, and Appendix B: Model Decision-Making Authority
- ➔ [Civil Disobedience Risk Assessment Form](#)
- ➔ [Policy Note on State Responses to Civil Disobedience](#), July 2022 (POL 30/3533/2022)
- ➔ [Civil Disobedience During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#), July 2021 (ACT 10/3592/2021)
- ➔ [Amnesty International's Informed Consent Policy](#), March 2020 (DOC 10/1479/2020)
- ➔ [Living Guidelines for Ethical and Respectful Communications](#), 2019 (ORG 10/0572/2019)

- ➔ [A Common Sense Guide to Integrating Gender in Project Planning](#), 2017
- ➔ [An Intersectional Feminist Approach to Human Rights Research and Campaigning](#), 2023
- ➔ [Enabling the Active Participation of Rights Holders, Partners, and Activists in Campaigning and Activism](#), 2019 (ACT 10/9941/2019)
- ➔ [Safeguarding policy and accompanying Safeguarding Policy Implementation Guide and Tools](#), 2022
- ➔ [Staying Resilient While Trying To Save The World \(Volume 2\): A Well-Being Workbook For Youth Activists](#), 2020 (ACT 10/3231/2020)
- ➔ [Security toolkit for young defenders](#), 2018 (ACT 10/1223/2018)

OTHER RELEVANT POLICIES

- ➔ [Human Rights Defenders](#), August 2016 (POL 30/2434/2016)
- ➔ [Prisoners of Conscience and Violence](#), February 2012 (POL 30/2433/2012)
- ➔ [Freedom of Peaceful Assembly](#), July 2012 (POL 30/2440/2012)
- ➔ [AI's Policies on Hate Crime, Hate Speech and Freedom of Expression: Policy Note](#), 2016
- ➔ [Police Use of Force and Firearms](#), April 2012; revised November 2014 (POL 30/2441/2012)
- ➔ [Amnesty International's Policy on Encryption](#), March 2016 (POL 30/3271/2016) (this policy has been made public)



APPENDIX B: DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND AUTHORITY

EXAMPLE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

You can find below an example of a decision-making process, which can be adapted to each entity:

1. The Campaign Coordinator / project team deems the tactic is necessary.
2. A project team is formed, made up of staff and/or volunteers responsible for campaigning, activism, media, and digital coordination.
3. Objectives are set and project team brainstorms possible tactics. The project team pick the most viable options and develop as concepts.
4. Project team present the concepts to the final decision-makers. Final decision-makers say yes or no to continue with the project and select a single concept. Checks for organizational clashes are done.
5. Project team works up the final full idea, including site visit, full and detail risk analysis, and risk mitigation strategy.
6. Final presentation to senior management at least a week before, for the final decision. This presentation should include: a) the campaign plan/strategy; b) logistics; c) media and digital plan; and d) risk assessment and mitigation plan.



↑ Activists, students and civil society representatives raise awareness about Mahsa Amini and the women of Iran who are protesting in defence of their human rights, 2022.
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APPENDIX B: DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND AUTHORITY²³

ACTIVITY RISK LEVEL

GREEN

Low risk

Very minimal risk present.
National risk profile only.

AMBER

Medium risk

Considerable potential risk present.
Regional/ global risk profile likely.

RED

High risk

Significant actual and potential risk present.
Regional / global risk profile very likely.
Civil disobedience targeting a corporation.
Mass civil disobedience.

PROCESS AND SIGN OFF

Plan, risk assessment and implementation at local group level.
Consider whether local legal advice should be sought.
Approval by Senior Management/Board of the relevant AI entity.
If led by an IS team, approval by Regional/Programme Director, with notification in advance to the Coalition Leadership Team.

Plan, risk assessment at staff level with local legal advice.
Implementation monitored by national managers in conjunction with local staff and group.
A representative from a different national entity (or the IS if there is no national entity), if that country is likely to be impacted by the action, should be informed/consulted in advance.

Detailed planning, risk assessment at senior staff/board level with local legal advice.
Implementation tightly controlled and monitored with legal and other support to be available to both individuals and the organisation immediately.
Review by Civil Disobedience Task Force
Approval by Secretary General or delegated IS Senior Director and by National Entity Director and/or Board of the relevant entity.
Approval by International Board in case of significant legal and/ or financial exposure to Amnesty International Limited or to Amnesty International globally.

TYPES OF INFRINGEMENTS, ASSOCIATED PENALTIES AND OTHER RISKS*

Minimal infringements of local law. Civil or administrative law only.
Unlikely to be prosecuted.
Minimal risks of violence or other safety concerns

Some more serious infringements, but no major infringements of local law. Civil, administrative or criminal law.
Risk of civil or criminal proceedings. Criminal charges possible, but custodial sentence unlikely.
Some risk of violence by law enforcement or non-state actors, or other safety concerns

Major infringements of local law. Mainly criminal law.
High risk of criminal proceedings. Custodial sentence likely.
Medium to high risk of violence by police or non-state actors, or other safety concerns



* Note that activities falling into each level are contextual and as a result may move between levels.

²³ This is an extract of the model decision-making authority in the [policy](#) on Amnesty's engagement in civil disobedience (POL 30/5591/2022).

APPENDIX C: RESOURCES

You can find below numerous resources on civil disobedience that may help you in your work. Please note that key resources on civil disobedience are uploaded to the **Train & Trust** site on a regular basis under module ‘AI 409 – How to Engage in Non Violent Direct Action (NVDA)’.

GUIDES, MANUALS & WEBSITES

Beautiful Trouble Toolbox - Civil Disobedience

Beautiful Trouble, an international network of artist-activist-trainers that help grassroots movements become more creative and effective, has created an online toolbox that enables activists to explore campaigning theories, principles, methodologies, tactics, and stories in several languages. Civil disobedience is highlighted as a tactic and the toolbox includes several other examples of acts of civil disobedience in the tactics page. Other relevant sections include ‘Theory: strategic nonviolence’ and ‘Principle: Take risks, but take care’.

Protest Safety Guide

A guide to help activists get prepared before, during and after a protest. It includes sections on how to prepare before a protest or action, how to be ready during a protest or action, ways to provide care after a protest or action, know your human rights at a protest or action, and dealing with teargas and pepper spray. Developed by Kalaya’an Mendoza for Across Frontlines.

Safety Before, During, and After an Action (USA)

Instagram friendly Protest Safety Guide, which consists of 14 posts highlighting key points from the above guide. Each post includes a number of posts on the relevant topic. Developed by Kalaya’an Mendoza for Nonviolent Peaceforce.

Holistic Security: A Strategy Manual for Human Rights Defenders

A manual designed to guide a process of establishing or improving security strategies for individuals, collectives, or organizations. The manual includes reflective exercises and tips to help facilitate them. Developed by Tactical Technology Collective in collaboration with the Center for Victims of Torture and Front Line Defenders.

Holistic Security: Trainers’ Manual

A companion to the Tactical Technology Collective’s Holistic Security - A Strategy Manual for Human Rights Defenders (above). It reflects new knowledge and best practices identified through Tactical Tech’s facilitation of dialogues and engagements between experts and facilitators in overall protection, digital security, and psycho-social well-being for human rights defenders between 2013 and 2015.

New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders

The purpose of this manual is to provide Human Rights Defenders with additional knowledge and tools that may be useful for improving their understanding of security and protection. The manual aims to support training on security and protection and help defenders to undertake their own risk assessments. The manual is available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Indonesian and Swahili.



APPENDIX C: RESOURCES

CounterAct resources

CounterAct, an Australian organization that provides training, educational resources and capacity building to support communities and activists, has several useful resources, including on media work and digital security.

Nonviolent Peaceforce quick resources

Nonviolent Peaceforce works to protect civilians in violent conflicts through unarmed strategies, build peace side-by-side with local communities, and advocate for the wider adoption of these approaches. Their resources website includes a few tools and links to other organizations and resources.

DIGITAL SECURITY

Security in a Box

Security in a Box is a project of Front Line Defenders. It primarily aims to help a global community of human rights defenders whose work puts them at risk. It has been recognized worldwide as a foundational resource for helping people at risk protect their digital security and privacy.

Data Detox Kit

Produced by Tactical Tech. It contains suggestions and concrete steps to help people harness all aspects of their online lives, make more informed choices and change their digital habits in ways that suit them – from digital privacy to security and well-being.

A simple approach to protecting your information, Part 1

Open Briefing provides holistic security support and resources to empower people and communities to agitate and advocate without fear of attacks and reprisals. Part 1 of their series on information security sets out a simple approach to help archive, back up or destroy a lot of the information that may be causing you concerns.

A simple approach to protecting your information, Part 2

The first part of Open Briefing's series on information security (above) posed the question: What is your most valuable and sensitive information? This second part sets out the next step to consider: Where is this information?

The Defender's Protocol

The Defender's Protocol was created by Open Briefing. It is a handbook to help human rights defenders advance their physical safety, digital security, and wellbeing and resilience.

Tactics to secure your smartphone before joining a protest

A set of tactics developed by Amnesty International to help activists secure their phones before protests to avoid unlawful surveillance.

Protecting protester privacy against police surveillance

'A Guide to On/Offline Protestor Privacy' developed by Open Source Researchers of Color (OSROC) to help people protect themselves against invasive surveillance. The guide describes effective ways of protecting one's privacy while defending the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.



APPENDIX C: RESOURCES

'HOW-TO' SHORT DOCUMENTS

Preparing for Action

Seeds for Change's short document on how to prepare for action, covering roles during actions, support systems, personal safety, and techniques to make actions safe and effective

Safety during Protest

Infographic developed by Amnesty International USA outlining the basics on how to come prepared to protests and how to stay safe while protesting.

What to Wear to an Action

2-pager with advice on proper clothing and gear to maintain activist safety during protests in hot and cold weather, developed by Kalaya'an Mendoza.

Direct Action De-Escalation

Verbal De-Escalation Techniques for Defusing or Talking Down an Explosive Situation. This 2-page document, developed by Eva Skolnik-Acker, outlines three steps in verbal de-escalation, for when a potentially violent situation threatens to erupt on the spot and no weapon is present.

Taking care of yourself while caring for others

Infographic developed by Nonviolent Peaceforce and Kalaya'an Mendoza that has great tips on after-care for protests and looks at activists' holistic wellbeing after carrying out direct action or civil disobedience. It focuses on trauma responses.

TOOLS

Tools Collection

This document includes a compilation of simple tools that can be used in different stages of planning your act of civil disobedience:

- ➔ Simple Risk Register;
- ➔ Impact v Effort Matrix;
- ➔ Risk v Benefit Matrix;
- ➔ Situational analysis tool: PESTLE;
- ➔ Power analysis tool: Stakeholder analysis, MobLab's *Who Will You Work With?* tool.



NOTES



CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TOOLKIT

**A GUIDE TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE
FOR AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
INTERNAL**

AI Index: ACT 10/6363/2023

Original language: English

[amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org)

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