

WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



HE LOST HIS LIFE  
WHERE HE SHOULD  
HAVE BEEN SAFE

**Safety and Dignity in Education**

© Unecebo Mboteni – South Africa



## WRITE FOR RIGHTS

# WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

**When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.**

Nearly 25 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon to support individuals at risk of human rights violations. What started as a small event has since evolved into the world's largest human rights campaign: Write for Rights.

In 2001, 2,326 letters were written to people around the world. By 2024, that number had soared to more than 4.6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions taken in more than 200 countries and territories. Across the globe, people have proven that geography is no barrier to solidarity, and that words have the power to inspire hope and spark change. In 2024 alone, almost 1 million people were engaged through human rights education activities like this one.

Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 115 people over the years, by freeing activists from detention, securing justice for those whose rights have been abused and protecting people who advocate for change.

This year's campaign once again supports individuals at risk around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can demand justice for them. Through Write for Rights, they will receive thousands of personalized messages of solidarity from across the globe, reminding them that they, and their struggles, are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities, we can pressure those in power to help build a more just and equal world.

Year after year, individuals featured in the campaign tell us how deeply these actions matter. Many describe the strength they draw from knowing that so many people care and support them. Often, your letters lead to real change: charges are dropped, people are released from detention, and authorities introduce new laws or policies to protect human rights.

*“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there.”*

Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

## BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of settings: online or offline, in classrooms, community groups, families or activist networks. As a facilitator, adapt the activity to your group's context. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size and age range of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity, delivering it in-person or online, and any limitations. When participants want to take action in support of an individual at risk, discuss how to do so safely.

The activities are based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyse and question issues relating to the individuals' and groups' stories. This helps participants to:

**BUILD** key competencies and skills

**FORM** their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

**TAKE OWNERSHIP** of their learning, and shape discussions around their interests, abilities and concerns

**ENGAGE** emotionally and develop values and personal commitment.



Petitions and postcards in support of Manahel Al-Otaibi during Write for Rights 2024.

© Amnesty International Thailand

Read about the people we're fighting for: [amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/](https://amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [amnesty.org/en/countries/](https://amnesty.org/en/countries/)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag **#W4R25**

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

Amnesty International offers free online human rights education courses: [academy.amnesty.org/learn](https://academy.amnesty.org/learn) and quizzes: <https://share.google/XbBVTSryhr9UNR4rq>

# YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

## RESETLED IN SAFETY

In 2023, as a result of his human rights work, Rohingya activist Maung Sawyeddollah faced serious security risks at the refugee camp where he lived in Bangladesh. In August 2024, he was granted an exit visa from Bangladesh and a student visa to attend university in the USA, which is likely thanks to the huge publicity created by Write for Rights 2023.

**“ Through the campaign, I found myself receiving an outpouring of motivation, support, encouragement and solidarity from individuals and groups across the globe. The global community’s response was heartening, as people from diverse backgrounds united in the fight for justice and human rights ”**

Maung Sawyeddollah



© Munir Uz Zaman/AFP via Getty Images

## SPARED FROM EXECUTION

Rocky Myers, a Black man with an intellectual disability, spent three decades on death row in Alabama, USA, for murder. Rocky was convicted following testimonies blighted by inconsistencies. He was sentenced to death against the jury’s wishes, a practice abolished in Alabama in 2017. Rocky featured in Write for Rights 2023, leading to a huge global campaign calling on the Governor of Alabama to grant him clemency and commute his death sentence. In February 2025, this was granted. Rocky’s fight for justice is not over as he remains under life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, but the threat of execution has ended.



© Private

**“ Not only did this campaign bring awareness to his case, but it was done in such a way that honoured Rocky as a person, father and grandfather. I know the outpouring of support meant the world to Rocky, and to know that so many people felt called to action is truly inspiring ”**

Miriam Bankston, member of  
Rocky Myers’s legal team

## FREED FROM PRISON

In September 2020, Dorgelesse Nguessan was arrested and later sentenced to five years in prison for taking part in peaceful demonstrations in Cameroon. Her story featured in Write for Rights 2022 and, in January 2025, Dorgelesse was released and reunited with her family.

**“ You reached out to us at the point when we most needed it. My son was sick, my mother was sick. My being in prison had had such an impact on my mum, she was weakened by it. This campaign gave her strength. It encouraged all of us. I don’t know how to thank Amnesty enough ”**

Dorgelesse Nguessan



© Private

# ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

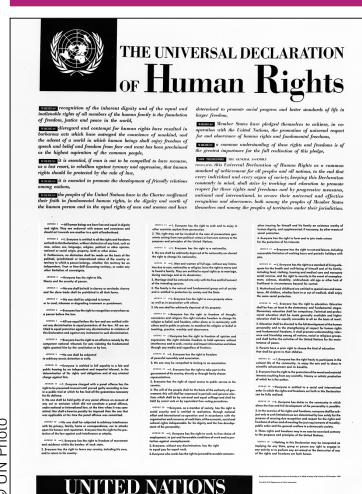
Human rights are the freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly, treating others fairly and having the ability to make choices about your own life. Human rights are universal – they belong to everyone, everywhere.

They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – each right is equally important and they are interconnected.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a powerful framework for national, regional and international legislation

designed to improve lives across the world. Human rights are laws for governments. Human rights are not optional privileges or luxuries to be granted only when convenient. They create binding obligations for governments and public officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all people, both within their borders and beyond.



© UN Photo

## THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

As its name suggests, the UDHR is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that it will abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual

human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up on the basis of its principles. These laws and agreements provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to demand that governments end the abuses experienced by the individuals featured in our Write for Rights campaign.



Amnesty activists in Togo during Write for Rights 2024.

# UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p><b>Article 1</b> Freedom and equality in dignity and rights  <b>Article 2</b> Non-discrimination  <b>Article 3</b> Right to life, liberty and security of person  <b>Article 4</b> Freedom from slavery  <b>Article 5</b> Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p><b>Article 6</b> All are protected by the law  <b>Article 7</b> All are equal before the law  <b>Article 8</b> A remedy when rights have been violated  <b>Article 9</b> No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile  <b>Article 10</b> Right to a fair trial  <b>Article 11</b> Innocent until proven guilty  <b>Article 14</b> Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p><b>Article 12</b> Privacy and the right to home and family life  <b>Article 13</b> Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders  <b>Article 16</b> Right to marry and start a family  <b>Article 24</b> Right to rest and leisure  <b>Article 26</b> Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p><b>Article 15</b> Right to a nationality  <b>Article 17</b> Right to own property and possessions  <b>Article 22</b> Right to social security  <b>Article 23</b> Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union  <b>Article 25</b> Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p><b>Article 18</b> Freedom of belief (including religious belief)  <b>Article 19</b> Freedom of expression and the right to spread information  <b>Article 20</b> Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way  <b>Article 21</b> Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p><b>Article 27</b> Right to share in your community's cultural life  <b>Article 28</b> Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized  <b>Article 29</b> Responsibility to respect the rights of others  <b>Article 30</b> No taking away any of these rights!</p>

## ACTIVITY

# SAFETY AND DIGNITY IN EDUCATION

### KEY CONCEPTS

- Right to education
- A child's right to protection
- Right to life, survival and development
- Right to non-discrimination
- Government responsibility

### ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn how the right to education is connected to many other rights, including protection, equality, dignity and the right to life. They will explore what makes a school rights-respecting and learn about Unecebo Mboteni, a three-year-old boy who tragically died after falling into an unsafe toilet at his pre-school in South Africa. Participants will take action to demand justice and accountability for Unecebo's death.

**AGE:** 12+

### TIME NEEDED

60 minutes plus additional time for the Take Action section.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the concept of children's rights and child protection in education
- **describe** the consequences of a violation of the right to protection in schools in relation to other rights
- **understand** that governments are responsible for making schools safe
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with Unecebo Mboteni's family

### MATERIALS

- **Handout:** Inspector's observation sheet (pages 12-13)
- **Unecebo's story** (page 15)
- **Background information:** Unsafe schools (page 14)
- Paper, pens, art supplies and envelopes (if sending letters)
- Optional: video of Unecebo from [amnesty.org/en/w4r-videos](https://amnesty.org/en/w4r-videos)
- Optional: Template letters from [amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/](https://amnesty.org/en/get-involved/write-for-rights/)

### PREPARATION

- Print copies of the handout for each participant/group.
- Read the background information and Unecebo's story.
- Depending on the size, level of knowledge and learning needs of your group, you may wish to adjust how much time is given to each part of the activity, or adapt specific instructions. Plan your timing carefully.

### MORE INFORMATION

Amnesty's report *Broken and Unequal: The State of Education in South Africa* examines access to quality education for children in South Africa: <https://amnesty.org.za/research/broken-and-unequal-the-state-of-education-in-south-africa/>

### PRECAUTIONS

This activity discusses the death of a young child in an unsafe school environment, which may be emotionally difficult. Facilitators should carefully consider its age-appropriateness for children and young people, and adjust activities accordingly. Clearly inform participants in advance that this topic will be discussed. Use language that emphasizes care and justice, not graphic detail. Present Unecebo's story with dignity and care, emphasizing hope and action through solidarity. Avoid putting blame for unsafe conditions on parents, communities or cultures. If such ideas come up, gently guide the discussion back to the systemic failures and government responsibilities that create these situations. Some participants may have personal or family experiences with unsafe schools, poverty or loss. Build in a short mindful pause or breathing exercise after Unecebo's story to help reset the group's emotions. Acknowledge that the discussion might bring up strong feelings. Give participants the choice not to take an active part in discussions. Encourage younger participants to speak privately to a trusted adult if they feel upset afterwards.

## 1. THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



Begin with a short brainstorm for participants. Read out the following:

*"Every child has the right to go to school and get an education. This doesn't just mean attending lessons. It includes going to a school where they are safe, cared for and treated fairly. What do you think schools need to provide so that children can learn and grow safely and happily?"*

Write responses on a flipchart or board. Prompt gently if needed: "What makes a school safe? What helps children feel happy and able to learn? How can a school make sure children stay healthy?"

If this is the first time that participants are introduced to the UDHR, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what it is first, using the information starting on page 4.

Explain that the right to education is about more than just attending school, or what we learn there. It connects to other rights that children have in school. When one of these rights is not respected, it can make learning hard or even dangerous. For example:

- **If a child does not feel safe, it can be hard to focus on learning.**
- **If the school does not have clean water or toilets, it can harm children's health and stop them going to school altogether.**
- **If a teacher only pays attention to children who speak the main language, other children can feel left out and struggle to keep up.**

Linking directly to participants' earlier responses to the brainstorm activity of what makes a good and safe school, briefly introduce six key human rights related to the right to education. As you mention each right, connect it to their earlier ideas:

<b>1. Right to be protected from violence</b> Schools must be safe and free from abuse or harm	<b>2. Right to clean water and sanitation</b> Health and hygiene are essential for attending and thriving in school
<b>3. Right to express your views and be heard</b> Children have a say in decisions that affect their education	<b>4. Right to play and rest</b> Balanced development in schools includes breaks and recreation
<b>5. Right to non-discrimination</b> Education must be equal and inclusive for all children	<b>6. Right to learn in your own language and culture</b> Education must respect a child's identity and background

*Three-year-old Unecebo died of drowning at his pre-school in South Africa in April 2024.*

If time allows, ask the group to reflect on the following questions:

- **Are these rights respected equally in schools?**
- **Which of these rights do you think are most often not respected?**
- **Who is responsible for making sure these rights are respected?**



## 2. SCHOOL INSPECTION SIMULATION

⌚ 20 MINUTES

Read the following out loud:

*“Children’s rights in school are the responsibility of the government. The government has a legal duty to make sure education is safe, fair and respectful of rights for all children. This means more than just building schools or hiring good teachers. Governments must also actively check that schools meet standards for important elements like safety, health, quality and inclusion.”*

*“One way they do this is through school inspections. Inspectors are trained officials who visit schools to check whether they are good places for children to learn and grow. They look at things like whether the school building is safe, whether teachers have what they need, and whether children’s rights are being respected. A school that isn’t safe isn’t a good school.”*

Continue by explaining:

*“In this next activity, you will pretend to be school inspectors. Your job is to visit an imaginary preschool called Sunny Days. Imagine you are taking a tour and conducting a visual inspection of the building, where children from age two to five are learning and playing.”*

Split participants into small groups or pairs, and hand each group a copy of the inspector’s observation sheet from pages 12-13, which includes five categories: Staying safe & being protected; Clean & healthy; Being treated well; Learning & inclusion and Play & rest.

Continue the instructions:

*“As you conduct your inspection, remember that each category that you are reporting on represents a human right. You are not just checking if something is in place, you are also checking if it is good enough to keep children safe, healthy and respected. Look for things that show whether or not children’s rights are being upheld.”*

*Little Champions Day Care Centre  
in Eastern Cape province,  
South Africa.*

Ask participants to draw from their own ideas and experiences in education, and describe or list two to three observations for each of these categories:

- **What things might you find in the school that shows this right is being fulfilled?**
- **What observations would raise concerns?**

After 10 minutes, bring participants back together and ask each group to share one or two key observations from their ‘inspection’, by asking: “What would you report as needing urgent attention for improvement? Why?”



### 3. UNECEBO'S STORY: WHEN SCHOOL ISN'T SAFE

25 MINUTES

Explain that you are now going to look at what can happen when schools aren't safe, through the real life story of a young boy called Unecebo. Unecebo's pre-school wasn't safe, because of its use of dangerous pit toilets. As a result, Unecebo lost not just his education but his life. In guiding participants through this part of the activity, emphasize dignity, justice and the importance of safe schools for all children.

Begin by telling participants:

*"We have looked at different rights that are connected to education. There is another right that is absolutely crucial: **the right to life, survival and development**, which every child has. It means governments must do everything they can to protect children from harm. At home, in their community and in school, children should always be safe. When schools are unsafe, children's lives are put at risk. That's what happened to Unecebo."*

Read Unecebo Mboteni's story out loud (page 15) and show his picture. If participants are not familiar with pit toilets, use this definition to explain:

*"A pit toilet is a kind of toilet where all the waste goes into a deep hole in the ground. Some pit toilets have a seat, but others are an open hole in the ground over which you squat or crouch. If they are not properly covered or protected, someone (especially a small child) could fall in."*

Give a moment for quiet reflection. Ask a few volunteers how they feel after hearing Unecebo's story.

Acknowledge that hearing this story might make us feel sad or upset, but that we are discussing it because children everywhere deserve safe schools, no matter who they are or where they live.

- **Do you think children should have to use pit toilets at school? Why or why not?**
- **Do you think the use of pit toilets respects children's rights? Why or why not?**
- **Whose job was it to ensure Unecebo's school was safe? Why didn't they act?**
- **What should governments do to make sure this never happens again?**

*Unsafe pit toilets at Little Champions Day Care Centre in Eastern Cape province, South Africa.*

Answers to the last question may include ideas around regular inspections; repair or replacement of unsafe buildings; taking complaints seriously; responding adequately to dangers; improved and equal funding; stronger oversight and ensuring equal protection and safety for all children. Use the background information (page 14) to guide the discussion.



**OPTIONAL:** Deepen the discussion. If there is time, use some of the following questions to invite participants to think critically about equality, inclusion and systemic injustice.

- **Why do you think some schools still have dangerous pit toilets while others have safe flush toilets?**
- **Who is more likely to be heard and taken seriously when safety is an issue? Why?**
- **When government funds for education are divided, which schools will likely get the best facilities?**
- **Within the same country, some children have safe schools and others don't. What does this say about the right to be treated fairly and equally? What does it say about how the government values children's lives?**

In answering these questions, encourage participants to think about location (urban/rural), wealth, race or ethnicity, public pressure and government priorities. Point out that this is how power and privilege works in practice: some communities are seen and listened to, while others are ignored.

Below left: *Little Champions Day Care Centre*, where Unecebo died.

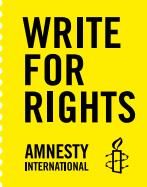
Below: *Unecebo Mboteni*.

© Private



Conclude by stating that Unecebo's story is very sad, and a tragic example of what happens when the rights to education, equality, safe sanitation and life are violated. It was not an accident, but a failure to protect all these rights. Some children go to schools with safe, clean toilets. Others don't. This isn't because children are different, it's because the South African government has not treated all schools, communities and children the same. Just as parents are responsible for keeping their children safe at home, governments are responsible for keeping all children safe in public places, including schools, wherever they live. The government's failure to make schools safe didn't just harm Unecebo's education, it cost him his life.





## 4. TAKE ACTION

15 MINUTES

Tell participants about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign and explain that Amnesty is encouraging people to demand justice for Unecebo and his family, so that no other child's life is put in danger at school. You can give examples from previous years' campaigns (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch this one-minute story from Moses Akatugba who was freed from death row thanks to Write for Rights: [https://youtu.be/8cU6EPY5r\\_c](https://youtu.be/8cU6EPY5r_c)

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

Show participants the video of Unecebo which can be found here: [amnesty.org/en/w4r-videos](https://amnesty.org/en/w4r-videos) (available in English).

### WRITE A LETTER

**Encourage participants to write to South Africa's Minister of Basic Education using the contact information on the right.**

- Tell the minister something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell her what shocks you about the story of Unecebo Mboteni.
- Tell her why it is important that all schools have appropriate and safe toilets.
- **Demand that she works with the South African Police Service to carry out an effective, prompt and thorough investigation into Unecebo Mboteni's death, and that those responsible are held accountable.**

**Minister of Basic Education**  
Ministry of Basic Education  
Private Bag X9034  
Cape Town, 8000  
South Africa

*Salutation:* Dear Minister

*Email:* [Dlanga.S@dbe.gov.za](mailto:Dlanga.S@dbe.gov.za) / [Vangqa.L@dbe.gov.za](mailto:Vangqa.L@dbe.gov.za)  
*Facebook:* [www.facebook.com/SiviweGwarubeMP](https://www.facebook.com/SiviweGwarubeMP)  
*X:* [@Siviwe\\_G](https://twitter.com/@Siviwe_G)  
*Instagram:* [@siv\\_gwarube](https://www.instagram.com/siv_gwarube)  
*Hashtags:* #JusticeForUnecebo #W4R25

### SHOW SOLIDARITY

**Show Unecebo's family that they are not alone in their fight for justice.**

Send your messages of friendship and hope, to encourage them to keep up their fight for justice for Unecebo. Be creative! Post pictures of your letters or video messages to your social media. Then, mail your letters to the address on the right.

Some tips:

- Tell them a little bit about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Draw little toy cars, which Unecebo enjoyed playing with.
- Unecebo's parents speak English and IsiXhosa. Here is an example message to include:
- **Dear Andiswa and Loyiso, we stand with you in your fight for justice for little Unecebo** (English)
- **Andiswa no Loyiso, sima nani ekulweleni ubulungisa benkwenkwana u Unecebo** (IsiXhosa)

**Unecebo's family**  
c/o Amnesty International South Africa  
97 Oxford Road  
Saxonwold  
Johannesburg 2196  
South Africa

*Email:* [campaigns@amnesty.org.za](mailto:campaigns@amnesty.org.za)  
*Hashtags:* #JusticeForUnecebo #W4R25

## HANDOUT

# INSPECTOR'S OBSERVATION SHEET

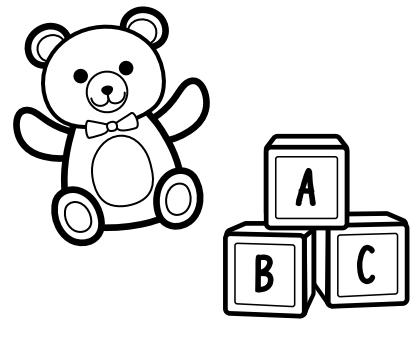
### NAME OF PRE-SCHOOL: SUNNY DAYS

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

As an inspector, your job is to observe and report:

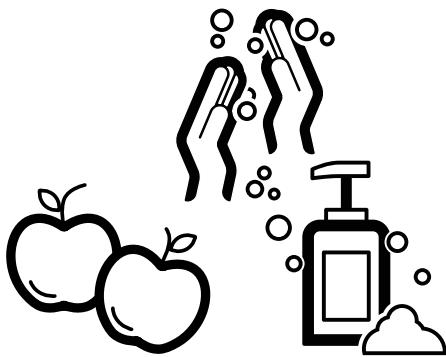
- **What shows that this place is good for children?**
- **What worries you or needs fixing?**

Write or draw your ideas for each category. The first category is already filled out, as an example.

<p><b>CATEGORY 1: PLAY &amp; REST</b> Do children have time and safe spaces to play and rest? Do they get time to enjoy these parts of their day?</p> 	<p>😊 There is a quiet nap room with little beds and soft blankets</p> <p>😊 There is a playground with balls, blocks and a sandpit</p> <p>😢 There is no shady area outside, so children might get too hot playing outside in the sun</p>
<p><b>CATEGORY 2: STAYING SAFE &amp; BEING PROTECTED</b> What is in place to make sure the building, different areas and playground are safe and secure? Are there things here that could put children at risk of danger or harm?</p> 	<p>😊</p> <p>😊</p> <p>😢</p>

**CATEGORY 3: CLEAN & HEALTHY**

What does the school do to keep children healthy? Are toilets, dining areas and kitchens clean and safe?



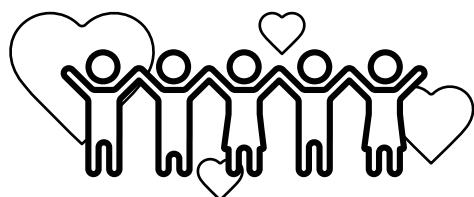
😊

😊

😢

**CATEGORY 4: BEING TREATED WELL**

Are children treated kindly and fairly by teachers and other children? Do all children feel welcome here? How does the school promote dignity and respect?



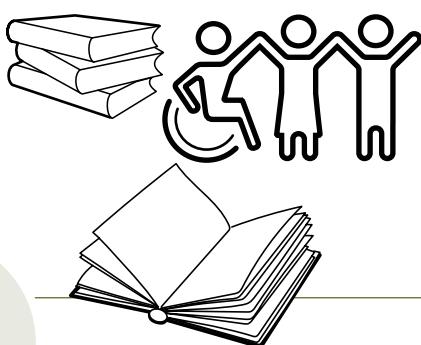
😊

😊

😢

**CATEGORY 5: LEARNING & INCLUSION**

Is every child able to join in and learn? Are there enough good materials for learning? Is there anything that might leave some children feeling left out?



😊

😊

😢

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

# UNSAFE SCHOOLS ARE A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Every child has the right to education, as protected under international law including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the South African Constitution. But this right means more than just access to a classroom. Education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. It must also be safe. When school infrastructure is unsafe or children face risks such as violence or poor hygiene, it becomes impossible to fulfil the right to education.

Unecebo Mboteni's story is a tragic example of what happens when governments fail to meet this duty. His death was avoidable. Even more sadly, this was not an isolated incident. It occurred in a country where schools have long suffered from unsafe infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and a lack of access to clean water and sanitation.

## STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION

Unecebo's story reflects deep inequalities in the education system. Many schools in South Africa, especially in wealthier or urban areas, have modern facilities and well-maintained toilets. But other schools and pre-schools rely on unsafe pit toilets or do not have functioning toilets at all. These neglected schools predominantly serve Black children in historically marginalized communities. Such unsafe conditions reflect systemic failure that can lead to violations of children's rights to life, health, dignity and education.

All children have the same rights, regardless of where they live, their family's income, or their race, ethnicity, language or any other status. Yet Unecebo's story shows how poverty, race and geography intersect to create dangerous inequalities in education. In South Africa and many other countries, schools in historically under-resourced communities remain neglected, with poor infrastructure and weak government oversight. This unequal treatment violates the principle of equality under the law and leaves some children far less protected than others. When governments fail to close these gaps, it perpetuates discrimination and denies children their right to safe, dignified education.

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Under international and domestic law, the government is the main duty bearer responsible for ensuring that education is safe, inclusive and equitable. This includes passing laws, allocating sufficient funding, setting national standards and regularly monitoring schools. It is not enough for a government to say education is "free" or "available", it must also guarantee that schools are safe and inclusive for all children, regardless of where they live or how much money their families have.

Government negligence is a key concern in Unecebo's death. The South African government had previously promised to eliminate pit toilets in schools, but progress has been slow and inconsistent. Unecebo's death was preventable. His life was lost due to unsafe facilities at his pre-school and the lack of a timely government response. The government failed to protect his right to life.

Unecebo as a baby.  
© Private



# UNECEBO MBOTENI

South Africa

Unecebo Mboteni was a lively three-year-old boy who enjoyed making friends and playing with his toy cars. You could always tell when he was in the room.

On 18 April 2024, Unecebo fell into a pit toilet at his pre-school in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. He died the next day.

Two other children have also died after falling into pit toilets in the Eastern Cape since 2018. However, the tragic loss of these young lives hasn't been enough to ensure the eradication of all pit toilets in schools, including day care centres. Sadly, a child's experience of education in South Africa still depends on where they are born, their wealth, and the colour of their skin. As Unecebo's father said, "My son died in a death trap set up for poor people."

One year on and the family has had no word from the pre-school or Department of Basic Education about whether the pit toilet that Unecebo fell into has been removed, let alone any progress on the investigation into his death. Instead of answers about how this tragic incident happened, Unecebo's family have been met with silence.

Unecebo lost his life in a place where he should have been safe.

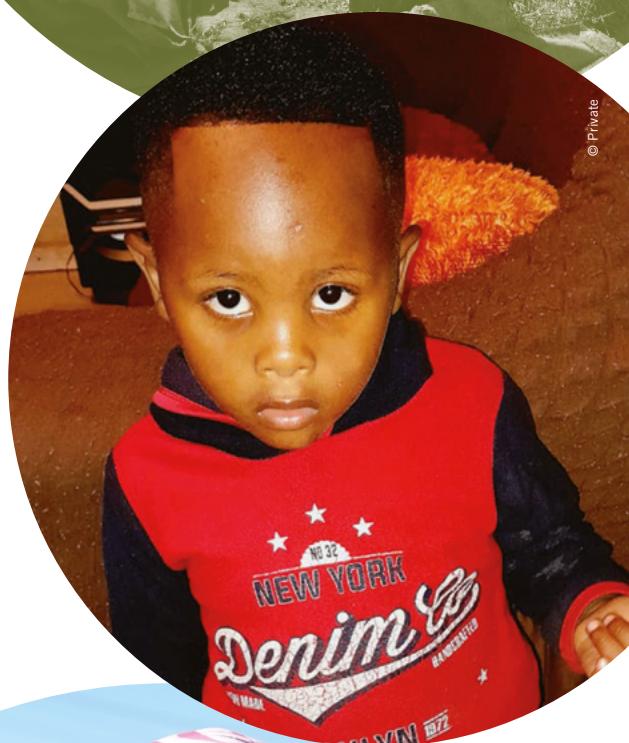
His family deserve answers.

**Demand justice for  
Unecebo Mboteni.**

Top: The pit toilet where Unecebo died is still used by learners at the pre-school.

Middle: Unecebo Mboteni

Bottom: Andiswa, the mother of Unecebo Mboteni



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## ABOUT

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people that mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held accountable for their actions. We investigate and expose abuses wherever they occur. By amplifying the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and act in solidarity with activists on the frontlines. We also support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty and advancing climate justice and equality, to combating discrimination and defending the rights of refugees and migrants. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws and free people who have been jailed solely for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity is under threat.

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS TO ONE PERSON,  
IT MATTERS TO US ALL.**

### © Amnesty International 2025

Except where otherwise noted, content in this document is licensed under a Creative Commons (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivatives, International 4.0) licence.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>

For more information please visit the permissions page on our website: [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

Where material is attributed to a copyright owner other than Amnesty International this material is not subject to the Creative Commons licence.

First published in 2025  
by Amnesty International Ltd  
Peter Benenson House,  
1 Easton Street  
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2025  
Index: **POL 32/9527/2025**  
Original language: **English**

All images © Amnesty International  
unless otherwise stated.

Cover photo: © Private  
Back cover photo: © Marieke Wijntjes

[amnesty.org](http://amnesty.org)

Layout design: Off Colour Design  
Editorial support: Sophia Fleury

**WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS**  
AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty supporters and members take part in Write for Rights 2024 in the Netherlands.