

THE IMPORTANCE OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IN CHECK-MATING THE SUSTENANCE OF STUDENTS-LECTURERS FIDUCIARY RELATIONSHIP

Benjamin Okereafor

benjamins_82@yahoo.com

08038817718

Department of Social Sciences

Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana.

Abstract.

Amnesty International to most scholars has become sine qua non to the attainment of peace, justice and orderliness, especially in societies that have grown dubious and grievous in the abuse of their citizens and foreign nationals fundamental human rights. Due to autocratic, nepotistic, and 'l etat, c'est moi' (the state is i), style of leadership, which is becoming rampant especially in 'Third World' poverty-stricken undemocratic Nations like Nigeria. Citizens especially the vulnerable students often fall victim of abuse without recourse to justice and such makes them prisoners of conscience. The penchant to gag press freedom and to restrict, and punish the free expressions of their fellow countrymen with reckless abandon in the 21st century has become something sinister to worry about. This research adopted the analytical and narrative historical method, while using mainly secondary data to understudy the essence of Amnesty International in challenging these constitutional breaches on the United Nations recognized fundamental human rights of citizens by those entrusted with leadership in a social contract but who rather chose to abuse such trust for mere personal aggrandizement.

Introduction

Growing up I heard a lot about Amnesty International, without comprehending exactly what it is that they do, since it is neither designed as a regional organization nor an International organization that have sovereign states as its members with particular statute or selected objectives in a charter, convention, or constitution which guides or shapes their modus operandi and their areas of jurisdiction and cooperation amongst one another.

Amnesty International over time became a familiar name, just like the United Nations, on regular basis, you hear of their activities on the Television, Newspapers and on Social media.

The term Amnesty alone, guides one towards having an idea of what this organization is all about, with a clear knowledge of the literary meaning of Amnesty – as an official pardon for people who have been, or are being persecuted for various innocent alleged offences – or a decision by a particular government that allows political prisoners to go free, then, it gives us a clue towards grasping the original intent and foundation behind the creation of Amnesty International.

Amnesty International comes handy to mind when Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria are mentioned because great percentage higher institutions in Nigeria act independently in handling cases that affect lecturers and students. Often times, in an attempt at protecting the image of a particular institution by the governing council, there is always the tendency of human rights breach and lack of fair hearing from one party against the other depending on whose interest is at stake and threatened at the time. For example where students are involved in abuses that might drag the name of the whole institution to the mud, there is the high propensity that such cases may never get fair hearing especially when such victimized student does not have a 'long leg' or 'an Abraham' as a godfather in such institution, the same case applies to other staff without the relevant

connections that will protect their interest, such victims end up becoming “Prisoners of Conscience” on cases they ordinarily ought not be punished for.

Well, according to Nobel, (1977) Amnesty International was founded in 1961, by Peter Benenson, a British lawyer, it was originally his intention to launch an appeal in Britain with the aim of obtaining an amnesty for “Prisoners of conscience” all over the world, the committee working for this cause soon found that a detailed documentation of this category of prisoners would be needed, and gradually they realized that the work would have to be carried out on a more permanent basis; the number of prisoners of conscience was enormous and they were to be found in every part of the world. Let us note the phrase “prisoners of conscience” The term which will later be the hall mark and catchy phrase that will interpret in various formats the actions and become the soul behind the existence of the movement. The fight against injustice and the contributions of Amnesty in the sustenance of International peace and order remains anchored on the principle of obtaining and securing amnesty for the people world over considered to be ‘prisoners of conscience’.

Amnesty international gradually metamorphosed into a world-embraced movement working for the protection of human rights. It is independent of all governments and neutral in its relation to political groups, ideologies and religious dividing lines.

Amnesty International works for the release of women, and men who have been arrested for convictions, the color of their skin, their ethnic origin or their faith, provided that they have not, themselves, used force or exhorted others to resort to violence, does not matter.

It is this category of prisoners that Amnesty International refers to as “Prisoners of conscience”. The movement as it were, proclaimed 1977 “prisoners of conscience” year, and collected signatures for an appeal addressed to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

According to Less Prix Nobel, (1977) “Amnesty, International was formally a British Organization, but in 1963, an International Secretariat was established, Sean Mac Bride who was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize became chairman of the organization in 1963, In addition to its work for the prisoners of conscience. “The forgotten Prisoners” – Amnesty International has also carried on campaigns against torture, and ill-treatment and capital punishment, as a matter of fact, the organizations statute of 1974 has campaigns against torture, ill-treatment and capital punishment as its major tasks towards contributing to the sustenance of peace and orderliness the world over, just like various other organizations and world Institutions have reasons for their existence, and areas of concentration and focus, Amnesty International as this work hopes to unravel pays attention on issues relating to justice, human rights, world peace and orderliness across the globe.

Virtually, all the continents world over and the countries within it, have felt the impact of Amnesty international directly or indirectly and this research will guide us through the various channels, events and incidences where the organization weighed its heavy influence and helped to restore dignity to human right abuses where it was urgently needed and necessary.

However, it is worthy to note that, Amnesty International is a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) based on world-wide voluntary membership and it consists of national branches (Sections and Structures) International networks, affiliated groups and International members. According to Amnesty.org, “Amnesty International is simply a global movement of more than seven million people who take injustice personally, and they are on a serious campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all. They also argue that, over the years human rights, have moved from the fringes to centre stage in world affairs, **Amnesty has grown from seeking the release of political prisoners to upholding the whole spectrum of human rights,**

Amnesty works to protect and empower people – from abolishing the death penalty to protecting sexual and reproductive rights and from combating discrimination to defending refugees and migrants rights, Amnesty speaks out for anyone and everyone whose freedom and dignity is under threat.

Structures of Amnesty International

As stated ab initio, Amnesty International is an Organization based on worldwide voluntary membership. It is a nongovernmental organization, and does not have same structural hierarchy like the United Nations or even regional organizations like ECOWAS, or EU, because it rather consists of national branches (sections and structures), international networks, affiliated groups and international members. According to Borsuk (2009), Statutory Authority for the conduct of the affairs of Amnesty International is vested in:

(1) International council whose primary functions are –

- To focus on strategy.
- To set Amnesty International's Vision, Mission and Core Values.
- To determine Amnesty International's integrated strategic plan including its financial strategy.
- To establish systems and bodies of governance and delegation for the movement, to elect members to those bodies, and to hold those bodies and their members accountable.
- To evaluate the movement's performance against its agreed strategies and plans.
- To hold national sections, structures and other bodies accountable.

2. An International Executive Committee, which according to Amnesty.org, is elected by the international council to provide leadership and stewardship for the entire global community, and its major duties are;

- To take international decisions.
- To ensure that there is sound financial policy and that the financial policy is consistently implemented across the international organization.
- To ensure the implementation of the integrated strategic plan.
- To make any necessary adjustments to the integrated strategic plan and other decisions of the international council.
- To ensure compliance with the statute.
- To ensure human resource development.
- To hold national sections, structures and other bodies of Amnesty International accountable for their functions conferred on it by the statute.

On the other hand, Kiprop (2019) laid down in more simple terms, the organizational structures by stating that, the main headquarters of Amnesty International is located in London, but that the company has other branches in different countries in all continents around the world, it claims that some of the regional branches outside England already include, Brussels (Belgium), Moscow (Russia) and Geneva (Switzerland) in Europe.

There is Hong Kong (China) Bangkok (Thailand) and Jakarta (Indonesia) in the Asian continent, while on the African continent, there are regional offices located in Johannesburg (South Africa) Dakar (Senegal) and Nairobi (Kenya).

In the middle east region, they are found in Tunis (Tunisia), Beirut (Lebanon), and East Jerusalem (Israel) in North America, they are found in New York (USA), Mexico city (Mexico) and Washington DC (USA). The sole office in South America is found in Lima (Peru). According to Kiprop Volunteers mainly run a huge section of the Amnesty International from around the world,

but at the same time the organization makes use of professional and paid experts like lawyers of great repute who have been known to win most cases, the staff is organized into groups each dealing with specific regions of the world, and there is a board of directors that oversees the activities of each group as well as coordinating events.

Objectives of Amnesty International

This organization founded in 1961 by Peter Benenson, a labor lawyer from England was motivated by an act to fight for two Portuguese students arrested and jailed for seven years for expressing their opinions on liberty. On that premise did spring up Amnesty International, an Organization now involved in the fields of media attention, legal advocacy lobbying, direct appeals campaigns and research. Amnesty International is completely against capital punishment currently because they believe it is an irreversible denial of human rights.

According to Kiprop, Amnesty International mainly focuses on governments since they are the ones that oppress many people within their nations, other targets of the organization include, private entities, and non-governmental organizations that overstep their mandate in human rights violations, Kiprop observed that, there are six main objectives that form the foundation of Amnesty International. *First, are the rights of children, women, and minority groups within a community, Second, is the complete abolition of torture. Third, is the abolition of the death penalty, in all countries, Forth, focuses on the right of the refugees, Fifth, pillar of Amnesty International deals with the rights of prisoners of conscience, and sixth, one is about the protection of human dignity.* Misera further, argued that, “Amnesty International has grown into a global human right organization, it has around 7 million members and subscribers in over 160 countries, and territories, there are over 4,200 local Amnesty International groups worldwide and several thousand more Schools, Universities, Professional and Youth Groups in more than 80 countries, its presence can be seen in the more than 50 countries, Amnesty International members work on the cases of victims of human rights violations, as well as numerous other actions, some dealing with thematic concerns (torture, women’s rights, the rights of refugees), others with a range of violation within a particular country, Misera claims that, Amnesty International has over 300 full time staff and has an annual budget of about 18 million pounds, it further stated that the statute of Amnesty International now states that the organization aims to promote all the rights set out in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Right (as approved by the General Assembly in 1948). It seeks fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners, the abolition of torture, other forms of cruel treatment, and the death penalty; and an end to “disappearance” and extra-judicial executions. According to Misera, the (ICM) International Council Meeting is considered to be the highest policy making forum within the Amnesty International.

Modus Operandi of Amnesty International

Amnesty International, as reiterated, is a global movement of more than 7 million people who take injustice personally, they campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all, they are funded by members, and Amnesty International is Independent of any political ideology, economic interests or religion Amnesty International Organizes campaigns against armed conflict; armed groups, arms trade, Asylum, Business and Human Rights, censorship and freedom of expression, child labor, child soldiers and more of related crimes against humanity.

Amnesty International makes efforts to draw strong attention to human rights abuses and campaign for compliance with International laws and standards. The organization was even awarded the 1977, Nobel peace prize for its “defense of human dignity against torture and the United Nations prize in the field of Human rights in 1978.

By simply signing a petition or sending a message on one of the many human right issues around the world one can actually become an activist, aid in raising funds and volunteer as a youth leader. The majority of Amnesty International to maintain full independence from any and all government, political ideologies, economic interests or religious creeds, groups or organizations whatsoever, hence, Amnesty International accepts no monies from any government; it is entirely funded by its supporters – informed and active citizens.

Amnesty International and the United Nations Synergy on Protecting Human Rights

The need for this particular topic is to juxtapose the two organizations roles on issues relating to Human rights, since the United Nations has a charter that protects the fundamental human rights of every man in every nations constitutions; the idea is to compare the verisimilitude of this two human right fighters and contrast their different approaches to it, according to Thaker, (1994) The United Nations organization is a general – purpose Intergovernmental organization (IGO), while Amnesty International is a single-purpose Non-governmental organization (NGO). The International Moral code on human rights is embodied in the United Nations Charter, Human Right is an outgrowth of western Liberalism, the United Nations is a meeting ground for all the world's civilizations, human rights puts the welfare of individuals first, the United Nations puts the interest of member – states first, Amnesty International is of, by, and for individuals, the United Nations is, of, and for government; on this premise, one can readily agree that, the United Nations as the world's pre-eminent IGO, and Amnesty International as the world's most prominent human right NGO, play complementary roles, Thaker further argued that, specifically, the United Nations is more authoritative in a standard-setting and norm-generating role, but weak in monitoring and enforcement of state behavior, on the other hand , Amnesty International because of western origins, narrowness of interests, and representational and accountability deficiencies, is not able to function as an authoritative expositor of universal human rights values, but its freedom from governments enables it to be an effective watchdog against human rights violations, he further opines that the intergovernmental nature of the United Nations makes it an authoritative archive of formal reports from member states on human rights progress in the countries: The non-governmental nature of Amnesty International gives greater objectivity to its reports on state practices in human right.

Africa and Amnesty International

It will be worthy to state that; Kumi Naidoo, a lifelong social justice and environmental campaigner from South Africa, born in Durban in 1965 is the current Secretary General of Amnesty International, Kumi's first taste of activism came at the age 15 when he organized and took part in an anti-apartheid protest that saw him expelled from his school, and as a result of his continued anti-apartheid activism he was forced to live in exile in the UK in 1968.

A general overview in summarizing the human rights situation in Africa shows that, the African human rights landscape was shaped by violent crackdowns against peaceful protesters and concerted attacks on political opponents, human rights defenders and civil society organizations, meanwhile, relentless violence against civilians in long standing conflicts was compounded by the stagnation of political efforts to resolve these crisis, according to amnesty. Org. Intolerance of peaceful dissent and an entrenched disregard for the right to freedom of peaceful assembly were increasingly the norm, from Lomé, to Freetown, Khartoum to Kampala and Kinshasa to Luanda, there were mass arrests of peaceful protesters, as well as beatings, excessive use of force and in some cases, killings, political dead lock and failures by regional and international bodies to address

long-standing conflicts and their underlying causes were also in danger of becoming normalized, and leading to more violations with impunity in almost all the nation states in the Africa continents. Amnesty International in taking note of issues on human rights violations, good case in study are:

1. In Cameroon, civil society activists, journalists, trade unionists and teachers were arbitrarily arrested, and some faced military court trails, the government banned the activities of political parties and civil society organizations, many remained in detention on spurious charges relating to national security.
2. Chad's authorities arrested and prosecuted human rights defenders, activists and journalists to silence criticism of the government, including in response to rising anger at the economic crisis.
3. In Equatorial Guinea, police detained activists, highlighting the authorities' willingness to abuse laws to intimidate and silence dissent.
4. In Eritrea, thousands of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners were detained without charge or access to lawyers or family members, many having been held over 10 years.
5. In Ethiopia, Arbitrary detentions continued under the state of emergency declaration until it was lifted in June, the government ordered the release of 10,000 of the 26,000 detained in 2016 under the declaration meanwhile, hundreds were detained under the draconian anti-terrorism proclamation often used to target government critics.
6. In Mauritania, Mohamed Mkhaitir, a blogger accused of apostasy, had his death sentence counted but remained in detention even after he had served his sentence, meanwhile two anti-salary activists remained jail.
7. The Authorities in Madagascar intimidated and harassed journalists and human rights defenders in an attempt to silence them, those daring to speak out against illegal trafficking and exploitation of natural resources were increasingly targeted through the use of criminal charges.
8. Sudan's government persisted in stifling dissent, with opposition political party members, trade union activists, human right defenders and students increasingly targeted by the security forces, they faced arbitrary arrests and detention on trumped up charges, and routine torture and other ill-treatment.
9. In Uganda, Academic Stella Nyanzi was detained for over one month for face book posts criticizing president and his wife who was the Minister of Education.
10. In Zambia, Pastor Evan Mawarire – founder of the flag movement – suffered political persecution and harassment, until he was acquitted following the change in government in November.

In the face of all these, some governments have even moved to introduce new laws to restrict the activities of human rights defenders, journalists and opponents, for instance, a draft bill in Nigeria and draft amendments in Malawi's NGO law introduced excessive intrusive and arbitrary controls on the activities of NGOs, including rights groups.

Amnesty International takes it upon itself to campaign against such repression on the rights of people and ensure it takes commensurable efforts at ensuring the people punished innocently by governments and those positions of authority and power gets justice, from Africa to the rest of the world, similar measures apply and once a case is established and initiated against a particular breach in the human dignity of a particular individual, or group, Amnesty International on notification takes it up, and start the campaign against such leaders, calling it out, and ensuring

that the world joins hands in condemning such acts of injustice while measures to remedy such situation and to avoid a repetition is put into place.

Summary and Conclusion

It is a truism that most Nigerians do not know about the activities of Amnesty International and how they operate, but the essence of this article is to create more awareness on the existence and readiness of this nonprofit organization in helping out societies and its people in petitioning unrepentant leaders who have formed the habit of violating citizens inalienable fundamental human rights and holding them accountable as well as freeing victims of dictatorship from slavery. Amnesty International has a functional clinic in University of Nigeria, Enugu campus where students, academic and non academic staffs of the University and even the general public go to lay their complaints if their rights are abused, other higher institutions can emulate such giant stride and replicate such laudable move with the aim of checkmating human right abuses like fiduciary offenses between lecturers and their students. The need for us all to respect the rights of everyone else can never be over emphasized, because we may end up as the next victim of human right abuses, hence the need to avoid the vicious circle, by encouraging, supporting and building strong institutions and organizations instead of strong individuals to stabilize and idealize the incontestable generational need to protect at all times the inalienable rights of mankind, for example according to Usman, and Agbakwuru (2021) US lawmakers are holding down a proposed sale of attack helicopters to Nigeria, citing poor human rights record of President Muhammadu Buhari's government, as it grapples with multiple security crises. The deal, according to US officials and congressional aides familiar with the matter is worth \$875 million. The lawmakers on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, according to a report reviewed by Foreign Policy magazine, have reportedly delayed clearing a proposed sale of 12 AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters and accompanying defense systems to the Nigerian military, citing the drift of the present government in Nigeria towards authoritarianism and human rights violations, same vein, Oluwafemi (2021) agreed that, "The report noted that behind-the-scenes controversy over the proposed arms sale illustrates a broader debate among Washington policymakers over how to balance national security with human rights objectives" this scenario best highlights the argument put forward by Nigeria's foremost human right lawyer, Femi Falana (SAN) on Channels TV interview on 29th July, 2021 during an interview on "Politics Today" anchored by Seun Okinbaloye, where he argued that Human Rights takes precedent over National Security, in opposition to Nigeria's Abubakar Malami (SAN), Attorney General's perspective that National Security must take precedent, because the number one job of the president who decides which, is the protection of the lives and properties of Nigerians and not that of those in power, so that the allegations of gross human right abuses by governments in power does not encourage the image of Nigeria as a civilized state amongst the comity of nations in the global space.

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