



ACTIVISM:

**THE
POCKET GUIDE
TO TAKING
POSITIVE ACTION**

**THIS HANDY POCKET GUIDE IS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
WHO ARE FED UP WITH JUST SITTING AROUND
WORRYING ABOUT THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS.**



PHOTO BY: AMELIA GREGORY (WWW.AMELIASMAGAZINE.COM)

**WITH THE RIGHT SKILLS, INFORMATION,
AND ENTHUSIASM YOUNG PEOPLE ALL OVER
THE WORLD CAN MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN!**

WHAT IS ACTIVISM?

Across the world young people are taking action to stand up for the issues they believe in. From feminism to the environment, poverty to international health, young people are taking positive action to achieve social and political ends.

ACTIVISM is an empowering approach towards sustainable progressive change. Through activism there is hope in finding ways to make things better.

ACTIVISM is about speaking out on behalf of those who are less able to do so themselves. It is about helping those whose voice is not being heard to gain a platform where they can be heard.

ACTIVISM is a means of carrying out advocacy and campaigning activities in order to enable people to influence decisions affecting their lives and bring advances that empower communities and individuals.

**ACTIVISM IS BEING A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS,
STANDING UP FOR THE WEAK AND FRAIL,
ENGAGING THE HUMAN SPIRIT.
IT'S PUTTING YOUR HEAD ABOVE THE PARAPET.
BEING HEARD. BEING SEEN. BEING COUNTED '**
DAME ANITA RODDICK -
(FOUNDER OF THE BODY SHOP AND LIFE LONG ACTIVIST)

ARE YOU READY TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED?

**“IF
YOU THINK
YOU ARE TOO
SMALL TO BE EFFECTIVE,
YOU HAVE NEVER
BEEN IN BED
WITH A
MOSQUITO”**

— BETTY REESE

HOW CAN I BE AN ACTIVIST?

If you are passionate about something and want to take a stand to change the status quo then you already have the most important ingredient in the activist mixture!

Now all you need are some clever tactics.

Activists around the world get involved in a whole host of activities to get their voices heard ranging from writing letters to politicians, all the way to chaining themselves to buildings!

In this guide we will give you advice and insight into how you might become an effective activist by using some of the following tactics:

1. Writing Letters
2. Lobbying Decision Makers
3. Public Engagement
4. Street Stunts
5. The Media
6. Peaceful Protest

**DANCE YOUR ANGER AND YOUR JOYS,
DANCE THE MILITARY GUNS TO SILENCE,
DANCE OPPRESSION AND INJUSTICE TO DEATH,
DANCE MY PEOPLE.
KEN SARO-WIWA – NIGERIAN ACTIVIST**

TACTIC 1 : WRITING LETTERS

Politicians (MPs) pay attention when potential voters write to them or send them an action card. They pay much more attention when they receive a well written personal letter which forces them to do more than send a generic letter back.



A good rule of thumb, used by many politicians, is that a generic letter / email / campaign postcard is worth a vote in the next election, a personal letter is worth 10 votes, a face to face visit is worth perhaps 50 votes.



TOP TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN LETTER

The key to good letter writing is to turn the three key points of the campaign (problem, solution, what to do) into a personal letter.

KEEP IT SHORT: One side of A4, in 11 or 12 point text is enough. Leave space for your address and signature. Make sure it looks like a letter not a big page of text. Politicians are busy, and have short attention spans. Offer to send them more information if they're interested and/or you feel you need to.

KEEP IT SIMPLE: Tell the reader what you are going to say, and what you want them to do in the first line. Only include one ask in a letter, even if there are other things you want the reader to do. Save them for another time.

MAKE IT PERSONAL TO YOU: Think about what the problem/solution will mean to you, and how it will affect your life. Tell the reader why you care enough to write this letter.

MAKE IT PERSONAL TO THEM: Think about how you can suggest why the reader should care. Perhaps how it will affect him/her, the area they live in, or how it will affect an area that they are specifically interested in. Research is key here.

BE POLITE: Even if you've disagreed with the reader on almost everything in the past be nice to them. Expect the best, use relevant titles, try to word things you disagree with as suggestions about how things could be better.

VERIFY THEY ARE YOUR MP: Always include your address and post code so that your representatives can verify that you are one of their constituents, otherwise they may not act for you.

ASK FOR A REPLY: Always close your letter with the line "I look forward to your reply," or your MP may not reply!

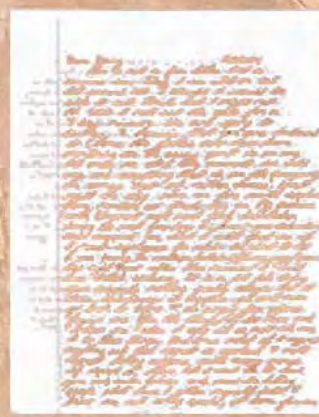
Experienced politicians are good at spotting generic campaign letters, and quite quickly the central party office will issue a template response to all of their MPs.

The objective is to avoid this happening to you, and to force your politician to actually think about their response.

RESEARCH: NGOs will normally provide the basics about an issue, but if you have time, do a little bit more research. If you can find a relevant media article, or a few more key facts then this will help you personalise your letter. For example

I saw an article in the Telegraph on the rate of extinction of rare birds, and as a keen bird watcher I thought you would like to...

WORDS AND PHRASES: Use different words, phrases language, swap the arguments around and never copy and paste bits of text. Try to avoid sounding like an academic textbook, avoid using too much technical jargon and too many figures. If you need to use some jargon, then make sure you understand what you are saying. Use your own words and style, and remember you do not need to be an expert, only a concerned constituent.



IMAGINE THE CONVERSATION: Use your own style, but perhaps imagine your letter as a conversation with a reader you know well. Present your argument, imagine how they will respond, present your counter argument, imagine how they will try to avoid committing themselves to doing something, and then present why they have to do something about it.

USE THE RELATIONSHIP: If you have had contact with the politician before then use that relationship. Thank them for their help on past issues, and suggest you're confident they can help you this time. Alternatively, if you have disagreed in the past, explain why you think that this is the issue they can help you with, and tell them why they should.

IF IN DOUBT, POST IT: vary the way you contact your local politicians, use email, online web forms, comment on their blog, perhaps even pick up the phone, but if you're unsure print your letter off and send it by post. The more effort you put in, the more likely they are to read it.

FINALLY: Try and make your letter interesting. Ask a friend / partner to read it and if they find it sends them to sleep, shorten it, liven it up, include a joke, but do something.

TACTIC 2: LOBBYING DECISION MAKERS

Politicians can be a huge asset to our campaigns – getting media coverage, raising issues with ministers, sponsoring and voting for legislation.



The easiest way to lobby your MP is to write a letter or send an email. Meeting them can be ten times as effective.

Lobbying is the practice of individuals and organisations trying to influence the opinions of elected representatives. Your MP is democratically elected to represent the views of constituents. So remember, they work for you! Therefore it is essential that you ensure your elected representative:

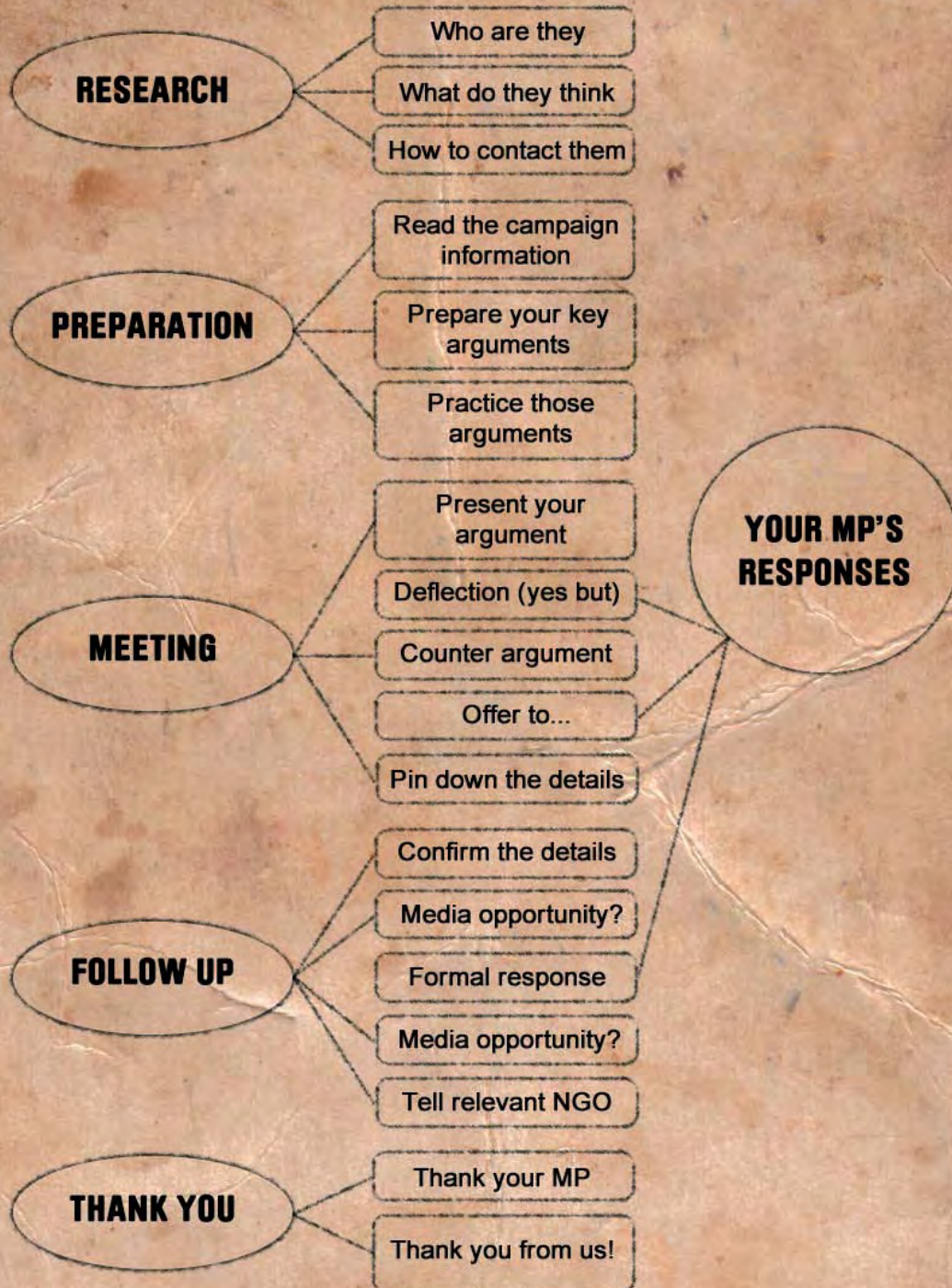
- Is informed about the issue
- Understands your position
- Becomes convinced that they should adopt your position

Make sure you communicate in a constructive, assertive and polite manner in order to get your position across effectively.

Dealings with government can be especially intimidating for some. But remember, if you are in a democracy you are entitled to play a part in the governance of your country. Indeed, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

'EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO TAKE PART IN THE GOVERNMENT OF HIS COUNTRY, DIRECTLY OR THROUGH FREELY CHOSEN REPRESENTATIVES.'

THE LOBBYING PROCESS



TOP TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE LOBBYING

MAKE SURE YOU ARE WELL PREPARED but don't worry, it's likely you will know more about the issue than your MP!

HAVE A CLEAR AIM: Know what you want to achieve.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND THE ISSUE then go through the points and request you have prepared. Ask the MP how much they know about this issue and what their current position and past voting is.

ASK YOUR MP TO DO SOMETHING SPECIFIC: (if appropriate).

FRAME THE ISSUE in reference to their interests and voting history. If they're not interested in the particular issue, then consider some of the broader implications.

MAKE YOUR PRESENTATION INTERESTING: pictures, multimedia, different voices, not a long monologue.

FIND OUT IF THEY WILL BEND: They might be unswayable, in which case you can go for the re-election/votes angle if constituents would be upset or the local media is interested. You could also find out who their rivals are.

RESEARCH THE FACTS: Know your stuff about the campaign, the arguments against, what's currently blocking change, levels of public support, media coverage, latest news, their local opposition's views, political opportunities (forthcoming votes etc).

COLLECT DOCUMENTATION OR MATERIALS: leave these with the MP.

RESEARCH YOUR MPs CURRENT POSITION: what issues they agree/disagree with & their reasons, their voting history (do they even turn up to vote?), what's on their website, what committees they're on, personal interests, their party's policy, their election majority, other organisations they support, companies they're linked to.



GET TO KNOW YOUR MP BEFOREHAND: write letters or visit.

INTRODUCE THE ISSUE: explain your interest via e-mail, phone, letter or face to face meeting.

THINK about what you want to get out of the meeting.

POLITICIANS are renowned for saying a lot, without stating their opinion on anything! If you receive a vague reply see this as an opportunity to take your lobbying to the next level to try and get their specific opinion on the issue.

TACTIC 3: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

One of the most effective ways to raise awareness of your campaign and get thousands of people on board is to engage with the public. Getting active supporters to go street campaigning is a tactic used by many civil society organisations in order to get public support for a campaign.

PEOPLE RECALL:

- **7% OF VERBAL INFORMATION (WHAT IS SAID)**
- **38% OF VOCAL INFORMATION (HOW IT IS SAID)**
- **55% OF VISUAL INFORMATION (WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE, HOW YOU BEHAVED)**

SO FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:

- **SAY ONLY THE MINIMUM: LESS IS MORE (VERBAL)**
- **SAY IT WELL, WITH PASSION AND ENTHUSIASM (VOCAL)**
- **TRY TO HELP PEOPLE TO 'SEE' WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO UNDERSTAND (VISUAL PROPS)**
- **SMILE!**



When street campaigning it is important to remember that you are there to deliver the message of the campaign and get the public to take an action. Try not to get into long discussions which will have limited impact or try to convert someone to your way of thinking. A key tip whoever you are campaigning for is to be clearly recognisable as working for that organisation, so that members of the public understand why you are there.

SO, WHAT SHOULD YOU REMEMBER AS YOU SEE A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC APPROACHING YOU?

- 1) YOUR 3 KEY CAMPAIGN MESSAGES**
- 2) THE TARGET OF THE CAMPAIGN**
- 3) WHAT YOU WANT THE PUBLIC TO DO**
- 4) WHAT YOUR OPENING LINE TO THEM IS**



The most important thing to remember is to be confident and try not to worry if you don't know everything about the campaign – it's most likely that you will know more than the people on the street and most people won't want to know more than the key messaging.

If you face someone difficult just finish the conversation politely and move on. Street campaigning is a brilliant way to learn about the campaign thoroughly and perfect your campaign pitch. It makes good practice before visiting your MP on the same issue!

TACTIC 4: STREET STUNTS

Street theatre and publicity stunts are a great way to engage the public and gain media exposure for your campaign. All it takes to plan a stunt is some careful planning and creative thinking. Before planning your stunt, have a think about some of the following questions:

- What is the key message that you want to get across?
- Who do you want to hear that message?
- Is this a one-off stunt, or just one in a series?
- When is the best time to do this stunt?
- How many people can you realistically expect to turn out?



Once you have decided what you wish to get across from the stunt you need to ensure that it is as effective as possible and doesn't break any laws. Now comes the time for some serious organisation, planning and creativity!



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

PROPS AND BANNERS: how can you make your action as creative and noticeable as possible?

THE LAW: do you need police permission? What about other regulations? Make sure at least one person has followed this up - know where you stand with the police or council authorities if they arrive.

RESEARCH: ensure you have some handy facts and figures to be used in news releases, leaflets and briefings.

LEAFLETS: in order to engage and inform the public you should try to find or write one.

MEDIA: send out press releases, make sure there's a good photo opportunity, and maybe appoint a media spokesperson. With the right visual image you can will increase your chances of getting coverage in the paper and increase the impact of your stunt.

PUBLICITY: make sure people who might be interested in taking part in your stunt know the what, when and where.

BRIEFING: ensure that people taking part in the stunt know what it's about.



STUDENT STOP AIDS CAMPAIGN



PHOTO BY: TIM RAWLINGS [PURPLET100.DEVIANTART.COM]

TACTIC 5: USING THE MEDIA

There are many reasons why the media is a really useful tool for a campaigner to use. The media can:

- Raise awareness about your campaign
- Put pressure on decision makers to create change
- Attract more people to the campaign
- Improve the image of the campaign.

Use the media as a tool to raise your profile and get your message across - a little bit of work on your part can get a story read by thousands of people. It's definitely worth the effort and can make the difference in a campaign.

So first of all you need to think about what your story is. In order to get published you need to ensure that your story is interesting and newsworthy to ensure that a journalist will want to publish it.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER HINTS TO HELP YOU WRITE SOMETHING THAT A JOURNALIST WOULD WANT TO USE:

- Write about something happening now or about to happen – make sure it is current news.
- Ensure for a local paper that their is local relevance.
- Write a story to highlight a campaign launch, event or other interesting activity.
- Make sure you keep it simple.
- Write about a debate or opposing views from decision makers at a public meeting.
- Remember that human interest stories will have more effect than a bunch of statistics.
- Is there any controversy or scandal which is relevant?

- Hold quirky, unusual or unexpected events and activities.
- Organise a humorous photo opportunity or stunt and take pictures.
- Can you find a celebrity who would get involved?
- Try using humour or irony.
- Add some quotes from MPs, organisations or local people.

There are a few different ways you can try to get your story covered in the media and here we will give you some advice on writing a letter to the editor and writing an effective press release.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

You can write a letter to the editor in direct response to an article published in the paper. This is a great way to get your message across to a large number of people. You can do this by identifying articles that link into your campaign and then using that article as a platform to voice your opinion. The best letters are those that show a strong reaction so don't be afraid to voice your opinions!

PRESS RELEASES

Press releases are a standardised way of communicating with journalists. If written well it will tell them what the story is at a glance – making their job easier and making it more likely they will cover your issue. Journalists get hundreds of press releases every day so you need to make sure yours stands out from the crowd. Think about who your intended audience is and contact the media outlets who publish to the right demographics. For example a women's health magazine may be interested in covering a story about maternal health.

TOP TIPS:

KNOW YOUR MEDIA – read your local paper, listen to your local radio and watch your local TV so you know how they report stories and what type of stories they like. Try and build up a relationship with relevant journalists so they are more likely to cover your story.

KEEP YOUR PRESS RELEASE SHORT AND TO THE POINT – preferably all on one page or maximum two.

KEEP IT PUNCHY - focus on one or two key messages and don't forget to add evidence.

FOLLOW UP YOUR RELEASE – ring the news desk to check they have your release, whether they will be covering the story and if they have all the information they need.

PICK YOUR TIME TO RING JOURNALISTS – try not to ring close to deadlines as they won't have time to chat. You can find out their deadlines by ringing the news desk.

IF THE JOURNALIST ISN'T INTERESTED IN YOUR STORY, ASK WHY – it will be useful learning for your next story.

DON'T BE PUT OFF – there might be a whole host of reasons why your story isn't used – a bigger news story might have squeezed it out, they may have just run a similar story or it might not have grabbed the editor of the day. Keep trying.

INTERESTING PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES MIGHT GENERATE MEDIA INTEREST – particularly for TV, which needs something to film.

SEND YOUR PRESS RELEASE IN THE BODY OF THE EMAIL – don't send it as an attachment and don't include logos. Emails with attachments often get bounced back.

PRESS RELEASE EXAMPLE

For immediate release: [date]

(If you want the media to use the story as soon as they receive it)

Or

Embargoed for: [time/date]

(This ensures that a journalist does not use the release until a certain time - embargoes can put a journalist off - try to use them only if you have to)

Headline:

(Make the headline straight to the point – it needs to sum the story up clearly so journalists are drawn in and know exactly what the release is about)

Photo opportunity: (What it is, where it is, when it is and contact details)

Paragraph 1: Summarise the story - who, what, where, when and why. All key information needs to be in this paragraph

Paragraph 2: Put in more details to flesh out the story you have outlined in the first paragraph

Paragraph 3: "Quotes from you or someone relevant to the story." Don't try to cram too many points into one quote – each quote should make one point. Try not to make the quote too cheesy or just about the PR of the event.

Paragraph 4: Extra relevant information

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

- Provide background information in case they run a longer story
- Outline what you have to offer: pictures, interviewees
- Outline any additional relevant information or facts and figures, but keep it short.

CONTACT: Make sure you supply numbers where you can be reached day or night. This can make the difference between your story being covered or not

Name: [type name1] Tel: [type tel1]

TACTIC 6 – PEACEFUL PROTEST

Peaceful protest can be an effective campaigning tool. A well-organised peaceful protest is a powerful way of raising the profile of your campaign, and because it is so visible it can be great for building networks and alliances by bringing your campaign to the attention of others who may share your views and concerns.

Peaceful protest is not extreme or unlawful; it is a vital part of a democratic society and has a long and respected tradition in this country. Many of the rights and freedoms we enjoy today were gained because people were prepared to go out on the streets and protest – ranging from women's right to vote, the rights of gay and lesbian people, and workers' rights to be part of a trade union.



Make sure you publicise your protest and try and get as many people there as possible. Ensure you are agreed on what you are there for, and that everyone feels that they are part of the protest – a genuinely united group is much more powerful than a group that feels they have been brought there by one or two leaders.

Do not behave antagonistically in dealing with the police, company employees or members of the public, stay calm and seek to reason. If told to do something, ask why, politely – even if the other person is not being polite.

Assert your right to protest. Remember that you have a right to protest, and you are following a noble tradition with distinguished predecessors.



PHOTO BY: JOSEPH STEELE [WWW.GETONTHEWALL.COM]



EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

ARTICLE 11:

11.1. Everyone has a right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association.

11.2. No restrictions shall be placed on this right other than such as are prescribed by law, and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health and morals, or for the protection of the rights of others



PHOTO BY: TIM RAWLINGS [PURPLE100.DEVIANTART.COM]



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Tim Rawlings/Radical Images

PHOTO BY: TIM RAWLINGS [PURPLET100.DEVIANTART.COM]

RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT, THE YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY COORDINATES BOTH ADVOCATES FOR ACTION AND THE STUDENT STOP AIDS CAMPAIGN IN THE UK

Advocates for Action is a network of young people advocating on issues related to youth sexual and reproductive health and rights across the globe. Advocates for Action believes that young people have the right to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, services and justice, and believes that decision makers are not doing enough to ensure this.

www.advocates4action.org



The Student Stop AIDS Campaign is a network of student societies across the UK who believe that the world's response to the HIV pandemic is insufficient and unacceptable. They campaign and lobby to bring about changes in national and international policy which will turn the tide on the spread of HIV and minimise its devastating impact on people and communities around the world.

www.stopaids Societies.org.uk

student stop **AIDS** campaign

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ANY OF THE TACTICS OUTLINED IN THIS GUIDE OR TO GET MORE INVOLVED WITH ONE OF THE NETWORKS CONTACT:

campaigns@restlessdevelopment.org

THANKS FOR READING THIS GUIDE AND WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF ACTIVISM!

We hope that this guide has spurred you to take positive action, giving you the skills and ideas to get involved in activism whatever the issue or campaign. All that leaves is for you to get out there and fight for freedom from oppression and injustice for all!

This guide was brought to you by the campaigns team at Restless Development, the youth-led development agency.

**RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT**
THE YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



**MASSIVE THANKS TO RICHARD MARTIN AT GREENPEACE UK FOR
INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE ACTION AND FOR DEVELOPING
LOTS OF THIS USEFUL MATERIAL!**

DESIGN BY AL ROWLEY



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