

# Navigating NGO–Government Relations in Human Rights: New Archival Evidence from Amnesty International, 1961–1986

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This research note unveils new archival evidence from Amnesty International's first twenty-five years (1961–1986) to shed light on the realization of international human rights as Amnesty balanced “nonpolitical politics” through multifaceted government relations. The research draws from minutes and reports of eighty meetings of Amnesty's executive leadership and interviews from the 1983 to 1985 Amnesty Oral History project, all collected from the International Institute of Social History. The records show that during this time Amnesty relied on government and foundation funding to exit a severe financial crisis. Amnesty also cultivated a private diplomatic network with governments for access and advocacy and conducted side bargains with closed countries for access and reforms. In one sense, the new evidence complicates the conventional wisdom that Amnesty was only financed from small, individual donors and stayed away from private government dealings. In another sense, the new data extend existing insights about INGO strategic action by revealing Amnesty's pragmatic trade-offs when maintaining arms-length relations with governments to better appreciate the organization's early challenges and accomplishments. The note ultimately contributes to scholarship on the strategic choices of INGOs and provides new data for future research on the agency of nonstate actors in global governance navigating complex government relations.

Esta nota de investigación presenta nueva evidencia documental de los primeros 25 años de Amnistía Internacional (Amnesty International), de 1961 a 1986, para arrojar luz sobre el cumplimiento de las normas internacionales de derechos humanos mientras Amnistía balanceaba la “política no política” mediante relaciones gubernamentales polifacéticas. La investigación incorpora actas e informes de 80 reuniones del liderazgo ejecutivo de Amnistía y entrevistas de 1983 a 1985 del proyecto Historia Oral de Amnistía (Amnesty Oral History), recopiladas del Instituto Internacional de Historia Social. Los documentos muestran que, en ese momento, Amnistía necesitó financiación gubernamental y de fundaciones para salir de una crisis financiera grave. Amnistía también cultivó una red diplomática privada con gobiernos a cambio de acceso y defensa, y tuvo negocios paralelos con países cerrados a cambio de acceso y reformas. En un sentido, la nueva evidencia complica la sabiduría convencional de que Amnistía solo tuvo financiamiento de donantes pequeños e individuos y se mantuvo lejos de los negocios privados con gobiernos. En contraste, los nuevos datos amplían las percepciones existentes sobre la acción estratégica de organizaciones no gubernamentales internacionales (ONGI), revelando las concesiones pragmáticas de Amnistía al mantener relaciones independientes con gobiernos, y permiten apreciar mejor los desafíos y logros iniciales de la organización. La nota, fundamentalmente, contribuye a la investigación sobre las decisiones estratégicas de las ONGI y brinda nuevos datos para futuras investigaciones sobre la autonomía de los actores no estatales que navegan relaciones gubernamentales complejas en la gobernanza global.

Cet exposé de recherche dévoile de nouvelles preuves issues des 25 premières années d'archives d'Amnesty International (1961–1986) pour apporter un éclairage sur l'application des droits de l'Homme tandis qu'Amnesty équilibrait la « politique apolitique » par le biais de relations gouvernementales à plusieurs facettes. Cette recherche s'appuie sur des minutes et rapports de 80 réunions de la haute direction d'Amnesty, ainsi que sur des entretiens qui ont eu lieu entre 1983 et 1985 dans le cadre du projet Oral History (Histoire orale) d'Amnesty. Ces données ont toutes été recueillies auprès de l'Institut International d'Histoire Sociale. Les archives montrent que durant cette période, Amnesty a dû compter sur le financement de gouvernements et de fondations pour sortir d'une grave crise financière. Amnesty a également cultivé un réseau diplomatique privé avec des gouvernements pour faciliter son accès et son plaidoyer dans le pays concerné tout en menant des négociations parallèles avec les pays fermés pour y favoriser son accès et les réformes. En un sens, les nouvelles preuves compliquent les idées reçues selon lesquelles Amnesty ne serait financée que par de petits donateurs individuels et resterait à l'écart des affaires gouvernementales privées. Mais en un autre sens, ces nouvelles données enrichissent les renseignements existants sur l'action stratégique des organisations non gouvernementales internationales en révélant qu'Amnesty s'était livrée à des compromis pragmatiques en entretenant des relations avec les gouvernements tout en restant à distance. Ces renseignements nous permettent donc de mieux apprécier les premiers défis et accomplissements de l'organisation. En définitive, cet exposé contribue aux études sur les choix stratégiques des organisations non gouvernementales internationales et fournit de nouvelles données pour les recherches futures sur l'intervention des acteurs non étatiques dans la gouvernance mondiale tandis qu'ils naviguent dans des relations gouvernementales complexes.

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*Amnesty is non-political and yet it is in the heart of politics.*<sup>1</sup>

In 1977, the Nobel Prize for Peace was awarded to Amnesty International (AI). The prize committee felicitated Amnesty's dedication to “at all times be neutral,

impartial, and independent” (Lionæs 1977). The Nobel recognized the then sixteen-year-old organization for making governments release political prisoners, termed “prisoner of conscience” (POC), and ban torture. Amnesty was founded by British lawyer Peter Benenson in 1961 after publishing an appeal on behalf of POCs in *The Observer* (Benenson 1961). Amnesty is now considered the world's leading international non-governmental organization (INGO) (Stroup and Wong 2017, 54–55; Clark 2001; Hopgood 2006).

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Blane, MacBride interview, June 8, 1984, AI 987, 21.

Scholars characterize Amnesty as “the NGO that made human rights important” (Wong 2012, 84). During the period of Amnesty’s founding until the Nobel, the organization’s independence and effectiveness were perpetually in tension. Indeed, Amnesty managed complex external relations with governments by being “nonpolitical” while operating from “the heart of politics,” as referenced by an Amnesty staffer in the epigraph.

This research note unveils new archival evidence from Amnesty’s first twenty-five years (1961–1986)<sup>2</sup> to shed light on the realization of international human rights as Amnesty balanced “nonpolitical politics.” It draws from minutes and reports of all eighty meetings of Amnesty’s executive leadership, the International Executive Committee (IEC),<sup>3</sup> in addition to interview transcripts from the 1983 to 1985 Amnesty Oral History project, all collected from the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.<sup>4</sup> The records show that during this time Amnesty relied on government and foundation funding to exit a severe financial crisis. Amnesty also cultivated a private diplomatic network with governments for access and advocacy and conducted side bargains with closed countries for access and reforms. The note heeds Amnesty researchers’ advice in 1976 “to recognise and define the role of ‘hidden front’ work, whereby AI works without publicity through other people and institutions” (AI 424, 53). Importantly, the evidence only pertains to the first twenty-five years of Amnesty due to the thirty-year moratorium on Amnesty archives. While interviews may supplement the gap, IEC records are more reliable as most staff are not privy to external relations.

In one sense, the new evidence complicates the standard narrative that Amnesty was only financed from small, individual donors and stayed away from private government dealings. Amnesty is said to be “funded entirely by membership support and voluntary donations... The organization accepts no monies from national governments” (Clark 2001, 15). Scholars assert that Amnesty “carved its niche by relying on small donors, many of whom had first been inspired by Benenson’s article and responded with cash, time, and in-kind gifts. Because of the success of the Appeal, therefore, Benenson was able to build on the support of volunteers and create an NGO independent of government or foundation funding” (Wong 2012, 88, citing Buchanan 2009). Amnesty is argued to be “always skeptical about governments and corporate money, seeing its moral mission as the very antithesis of power” (Hopgood 2013, xii). Former staffers recall that “Amnesty didn’t take money from foundations and it didn’t take money from governments” (Dezalay and Garth 2006, 235, fn1). Within its first five years, Amnesty is claimed to have “cemented an unambiguous policy of refusal either to conduct private negotiations with governments or to take government funds” (Clark 2001, 14–15). Amnesty did so because it believed “it is not credible to name and shame a government with which you consistently align” (Hopgood 2013, xiii). In light of this near-consensus, the note uncovers how Amnesty would have had trouble surviving through member donations alone and without private government deals in its first two decades. The standard claims result from a data gap as acknowledgements of funding sources and government deals are buried in IEC mission updates. The note closes the

data gap by analyzing the eighty IEC meetings, where each meeting could feature up to thirty mission updates.

In another sense, the new data extend existing insights about INGO strategic action. Cooley and Ron (2002, 16) find that relief INGOs face pressures to secure new contracts, “pushing other concerns—such as ethics, project efficacy, self-criticism—to the margins.” Prakash and Gugerty (2010, 3) treat INGOs like firms to study the balancing of normative concerns and instrumental incentives for organizational survival. Avant (2004, 363–64) argues that principled actors’ commitment to mission and their “proper role” make them unwilling to engage in pragmatic trade-offs. The data confirm that Amnesty was resistant to some pragmatic trade-offs, such as the “rule of three”—for balancing East, West, and South in POC case selection—slowing Amnesty’s expansion. But the data also highlight that Amnesty was willing to make other pragmatic trade-offs like accepting some government and foundation funding as well as brokering deals with closed countries for access and reforms. As Eckel (2013, 196) acknowledges, “only in a prolonged process of trial and error did the Secretariat manage to build up the institutional strength necessary for Amnesty to wage forceful public ‘campaigns’.” Moreover, while the literature has referred to Amnesty’s “negotiated rather than clandestine entry” for closed countries (Hopgood 2006, 24), specific deals and their implications have not been studied. Here, Amnesty’s side bargains implicate INGOs’ “information politics” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 6), which publicize some causes over others (Bob 2005; Carpenter 2014). Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers (2005, 569) examine Amnesty’s country reporting between 1986 and 2006 to find that while Amnesty reported on many of the most repressive countries, it did not do so for all. The evidence of side deals presented here extends the Ron et al. finding further back in time and situates some of Amnesty’s information politics within its survival imperative.

Finally, Amnesty’s budding status as a “gatekeeper” (Bob 2005) during this time (Clark 2001) offers additional expectations for government relations. Stroup and Wong (2017, 65–66) expect leading INGOs to collaborate with states, but not to “use condemnation as a strategy because of the desire to attract, rather than repel.” Leading INGOs should also broker multistate coalitions, especially with middle-power states who use such collaboration “to advance their soft power” (Stroup and Wong 2017, 66). The data confirm that Amnesty used a multistate network of middle-power states such as Scandinavian countries. However, Amnesty also wielded state condemnation as a bargaining chip for private reforms. While the literature on leading INGOs provides useful expectations, its applicability for Amnesty is limited in the period under study.

The note proceeds as follows. The second section overviews why Amnesty strove for government independence. The third section traces how Amnesty exited a financial crisis with help from government and foundation funding. The fourth section describes Amnesty’s diplomatic networks for access and advocacy. The fifth section details Amnesty’s side bargains with closed countries for access and reform. The sixth section concludes.

### Striving to Stay Clean

In 1961, Amnesty entered a daunting international landscape for human rights. After World War II, the international community passed the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1949 Geneva Convention. However, the world was no closer to implementing human rights.

<sup>2</sup>Amnesty archives place a thirty-year moratorium. The last available year during data collection was 1986.

<sup>3</sup>The IEC met twice a year until 1968 when it began meeting quarterly.

<sup>4</sup>The substantial histories of Amnesty (Buchanan 2002, 2004, 2020) do not draw on the IEC minutes and reports consulted here (AI 412–AI 426; AI 33–AI 40; AI 408–AI 410; AI 972–AI 975).

The United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights, established in 1946, prohibited direct criticism of member states. Over the 1950s, “practical measures to give life to human rights principles began to lag far behind the rhetoric” such that “an international ‘human rights’ regime ... did not exist” (Clark 2001, 3–4). Amnesty’s closest model was the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), which did not “normally release to the public the details of what its delegates have witnessed” or shamed governments (Clark 2001, 10). Amnesty aimed for both access and shaming. Remarkably, it succeeded. A few months after Benenson’s *Observer* appeal, AI was formed. National Sections coordinated members within their countries and paid dues to the International Secretariat (IS) in return for POC case sheets for letter-writing campaigns. The Nobel acknowledged that between 1972 and 1975, of the 6,000 POCs adopted by Amnesty, at least half were released (Lionæs 1977). Amnesty addressed broader treatment of all prisoners, helping pass the 1984 UN Convention against Torture and articulating an international norm against the death penalty. At the eve of the Nobel, the Soviet pronouncement of Amnesty as “a tiny group of nonentities who represent no one and nothing” (Wren 1977) assured the organization was the opposite.

In constructing human rights claims, INGOs engage in a “form of communicative counter-hegemony, speaking rights to power” (Brysk 2013, 16). Thus, INGO “authority and influence is based on moral legitimacy and persuasive power” (Carpenter 2014, 12–13). Amnesty’s mission of “bearing witness” had “special, moral authority” (Hopgood 2006, 26). Projecting an air of objectivity helped Amnesty “cultivate a position as a disinterested and autonomous ‘third party’ actor in the international system” (Clark 2001, 11). Such “moral capital” (Kane 2001, 10) may transfer. For instance, leading INGOs are essential to issue-definition and serve as a legitimating resource for other transnational actors (Carpenter 2014, 8–9). But in a “dirty hands” problem, INGOs’ moral capital is compromised by the practical realities of advocacy and humanitarian work (Slim 2002; Rubenstein 2015). Scholars have followed INGO accountability scandals “related to corruption or the mismanagement and misappropriation of funds” (Hielscher et al. 2017, 3). On the one hand, INGOs like Amnesty recognize that survival is important so there is someone to defend their causes (Stroup and Wong 2017, 82). On the other hand, “once you have authority, you protect it,” which meant that Amnesty tried to steer clear of “pollutants such as money, interests, and politics” (Hopgood 2006, 6; 14–15). Given the Cold War, the founders had “a quasi-obsessional identification with neutrality” (Dezalay and Garth 2006, 235). They set policies to project neutrality: adopting POCs from “groups of three”—East, West, South; not ranking countries in human rights reports; separating prisoners “from the reasons for his or her imprisonment”; and banning the adoption of violent POCs (Hopgood 2006, 60–62, 100).

One major source of preserving Amnesty’s moral capital was government independence, especially in financing. Neville Vincent, Amnesty’s first treasurer, reflected: “I don’t know of any occasion when I was there that we knowingly received any government funds of any kind” (Vincent interview, June 7, 1984, AI 993, 14). Upon prodding, Vincent qualified with two exceptions: “One major kind is that we can accept direct subsidies from government for the specific purpose of relief. The other is that we accept indirect subsidies in the form of conscientious objectors allowed by the governments to work in the Amnesty office during their time of conscientious objection service, or in the form of charity status, or sometimes lower rent on property” (Vin-

cent interview, June 7, 1984, AI 993, 14). Benenson admitted getting “help from the Information Research Department, the anti-Communist propaganda section of the British Foreign Office, while setting up Amnesty, and [that] this relationship continued after 1961” (Buchanan 2004, 270). While Benenson reflected that he found nothing wrong with accepting “open funding from a government source,” he acknowledged that other IEC members were “against it” (Benenson interview, November 12, 1983, AI 982, 38).

Amnesty had not committed to a clear position on private deals of support with governments at its founding. When discussing the original appeal, the *Observer*’s editor could “not even imagine anybody asking” the British government’s support (Astor interview, June 20, 1985, AI 979, 11). But Benenson asked. He already had “friendly” relations with the government having worked for British Intelligence during World War II (Letter, Benenson to Hoare & Co., January 9, 1967, AI-B6). He was educated at elite institutions like Summer Fields, Eton, Balliol College, and Oxford, all training grounds for future leaders (Buchanan 2002, 577–78). In a 1961 letter to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, Benenson mentioned they shared a past as a “Colleger and Balliolman” when asking for Macmillan’s support (Letter, Benenson to Philip Woodfield, June 4, 1961, AI-B6). However, MacMillan cautioned Benenson of a public alliance of Amnesty with governments, “pointing out that the value of movements such as Amnesty lay precisely in their not having any direct links with governments. Benenson replied that this should not prevent the campaign ‘from having private understandings, or for its ultimate objectives from being those of Her Majesty’s Governments’” (Buchanan 2002, 588).

The stakes of government independence became clear in twin crises of 1966–1967 that threatened to end the young organization. First, Benenson agreed to take £30,000 (£563,000 today) for humanitarian funds in Rhodesia from the British government, which claimed it to be from a secret millionaire (Buchanan 2004, 272–73). A report commissioned by the IEC “not only noted that government money for Rhodesia had been handled by Benenson, but also that Amnesty appeared to have received such assistance for salaries and possibly also for investigative missions abroad” (Buchanan 2004, 274). Benenson seemed to believe the money came from a millionaire, but admitted it was wrong to not disclose his negotiations with the government to the IEC. Second, Amnesty had written a report on the British government’s torture of prisoners in British-occupied Aden (now part of Yemen). Robert Swann, who managed daily affairs as Benenson’s health deteriorated, embargoed the report. Based on the Rhodesia affair and a break-in at Amnesty offices, Benenson “suspected government infiltration of Amnesty and had the report published outside of Britain without AI’s official approval” (Clark 2001, 15). Peter Archer, an Amnesty founder and Member of Parliament, disclosed: “In those early years we’d got on quite well with the Foreign Office, but this was predominantly a British organization criticizing foreigners, and the British Foreign Office thought that was fine. And we really fouled up our relationship when we criticized the British government over Aden” (Archer interview, June 4, 1984, AI 978, 23).

The scandals led to Benenson’s resignation and established Amnesty’s need to be wary of formal government links. Amnesty Chairman Seán MacBride—former Irish Foreign Minister and Nobel Peace laureate—underscored that “one of Amnesty’s challenges all along has been whom it allies with and whom it doesn’t ally with” (MacBride interview, June 8, 1984, AI 987, 51). A decade later, Chairman Thomas Hammarberg warned in reference to working with

governments at the UN: “We have to keep ourselves at some distance. Otherwise we risk being drawn into situations where it would be difficult to stay ‘clean’” (AI 424, 17). Hammarberg was responding to the USSR and Argentina’s attempt between 1975 and 1978 to withdraw Amnesty’s UN consultative status, charging the organization with “politically based activities” and “carrying out overt sabotage of decisions of UN bodies” (Martens 2006, 387). Amnesty fought and won. However, the threat of withdrawal made Amnesty “careful not to accept any funding from governments as this could be interpreted as being accountable to those official sponsors” (Martens 2006, 388).

In its early years, Amnesty strove for government independence in financing and private deals to secure its moral capital. As the events of 1966–1967 illustrate, “Amnesty’s political autonomy was not always maintained in practice” (Dezalay and Garth 2006, 237). However, the appearance of independence “became vital to protect Amnesty as a symbolic moral authority” (Hopgood 2006, 72). Yet, the young organization also required assistance if it was to survive a serious financial crisis.

### Financial Help to Exit a Crisis

Benenson urges researchers: “If you really want the crux of the history of early Amnesty ... ‘look at the accounts’” (Benenson interview, November 12, 1983, AI 983,156). Amnesty did not begin as a membership-based subscription scheme. Instead, it relied on *ad-hoc* donations based on appeals from eclectic donors that included church groups, lawyers, and artists. One amusing benefactor was an American in Rome: “Now this fellow not only gave us \$500, but kept on getting letters from me because I thought he was a rich American, and he gave us more dollars in the course of the year, turned out to be a sculpture smuggler” (Benenson interview, November 12, 1983, AI 983, 119). As Amnesty expanded in the early-1960s, expenses ballooned for salaries, conferences, printing, posting, and research trips. Staffers bought their own office supplies (Hopgood 2006, 23). Fundraising was a challenge: “Nothing was more difficult than to raise money for Amnesty. Not like the [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children] for children, or seeing pictures of a starving child as Oxfam show. We couldn’t do that too easily” (Vincent interview, November 8, 1983, AI 993, 36). Benenson was acutely aware of the challenge. Following reports in 1967 of the CIA financing the International Commission of Jurists, Benenson believed the charges as “you can’t get that sort of money out of the ordinary giving public” (Benenson interview, November 12, 1983, AI 982, 37).

By 1965, Amnesty was in a serious financial crisis, “making it necessary to think carefully whether it was now possible to expand, or remain static” (AI 412, 23–24). It projected an annual income of £12,600 to stay afloat, of which £3,500 came from the Prynne Hopkins Fund, an American foundation that had funded Amnesty from the beginning (AI 412, 23–24). By September, Rowntree Foundation in Britain agreed to give £2,500 annually (AI 412, 29). In March 1966, Prynne Hopkins increased its donation to £5,000 (AI 412, 31–32). Thus, more than half of Amnesty’s funds in the mid-1960s came from two large foundations. Moreover, Amnesty engaged in “creative” accounting by using POC relief monies to “pay administrative expenses” (Hopgood 2006, 70). Amnesty stopped misusing the funds after a warning from the British tax authorities (Hopgood 2006, 231, en80).

The financial crisis forced the IEC to issue its first policy directive on accepting money from governments in March

1966: “The Swedish Section applied for a million kroner from the Swedish Government and a discussion followed as to whether Amnesty could accept money from governments. It was decided that in this case the initiative should be left to National Sections and each case should be considered individually on its merits” (AI 421, 18). The IEC thus refused to create a formal policy prohibiting accepting money from governments. In fact, MacBride would then “meet the Swedish Foreign Minister to discuss this application by the Swedish Section of Amnesty International” (AI 412, 31–32). The Swedish government bankrolled many important Amnesty research missions, including Algeria (1967), Iran (1968), Malawi (1968), Brazil (1968,1969), Greece (1969,1970), Indonesia (1969,1970), Tunisia (1970), Spain (1970), and Vietnam (1973).<sup>5</sup>

Despite this funding source, by November 1968 Amnesty had a budget deficit in the region of £10,000 or £150,000 today (AI 412, 62). This proved a problem for Amnesty’s participation in the Kyoto Congress the following year, which was “an excellent opportunity for Amnesty to assert a leadership role with regard to the treatment of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience throughout the world. It was agreed that efforts should be made to raise £5,000 [£75,000 today] to cover a special project in this field” (AI 412, 69–70). The Swedes pledged £400 (AI 413, 3). The research department worried that lack of material resources would impact Amnesty’s moral capital: “Inadequate briefing of observers, the press officer or the Director General [make it] so that Amnesty’s reputation for informed judgement—rather than random protest—might suffer, thus reducing its power to influence governments, the press, and the public” (Hopgood 2006, 232, en12).

In March 1969, the IEC issued its second directive on government funding. The discussion first “noted that the UN had expressed no objection to NGOs receiving donations from governments and that the new Human Rights Institute to be established in Strasbourg was inviting donations from governments” (AI 412, 79). Then, the IEC agreed that Amnesty “may receive donations towards the budget of the organisation from governments, provided the donation is disclosed to all enquirers and to the IEC and National Sections. ... Any National Section is entitled to write to the Secretary General inquiring about sources of funds for each mission but it was recognised that it would not always be possible to make such information available” (AI 412, 79).

In December 1969, Amnesty also pursued funding from large American foundations, such as Ford and Carnegie (AI 412, 91). In the postwar context, Ford had “strategically timed” funding to those “who were building the foundations of the human rights field” (Wong, Levi, and Deutsch 2017, 91–92). Examples include seed money for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in 1970 (Young 2010, 46) and Helsinki Watch in 1979, which became Human Rights Watch (Dezalay and Garth 2006, 241–42; Korey 2007). It is thus puzzling why Ford did not fund Amnesty. The NRDC attracted Ford funding as a first-mover in a sparse field and reputation as an entrepreneur (Young 2010, 32). These characteristics would apply equally to Amnesty. The literature provides some explanations for Ford overlooking Amnesty. Funders preferred local NGOs over INGOs (Wong, Levi, and Deutsch 2017, 82). Moreover, Ford only became interested in political prisoners in 1974–1975 (Korey 2007, 36), years after Amnesty’s dire funding

<sup>5</sup> Algeria: AI 412, 43; Iran: AI 412, 66–67; Malawi: AI 412, 57; Brazil: AI 412, 66–67; AI 412, 91; Greece: AI 412, 86; AI 413, 13; Indonesia: AI 412, 76; AI 413, 4; Tunisia: AI 413, 9; Spain: AI 413, 4–5; Vietnam: AI 414, 64.

requests. Also, Ford staffers claimed their colleagues thought of Amnesty as “a communist front organization” as of 1976 (Dezalay and Garth 2006, 241–42). Other interviews reveal that Ford believed that Amnesty would not accept foundation money for operating expenses and would only do so for special programs (Korey 2007, 44). But when Ford became interested in funding South African litigation through a special grant to Amnesty, Amnesty’s nonviolent policy prohibited consideration (Korey 2007, 152). Instead, Ford funded the Lawyers Committee and the ICRC (Korey 2007, 174–83).

In any case, over the early-1970s, Amnesty slowly took charge of its finances. In 1972, it hired McKinsey and Anderson consultants (under greatly reduced fees) who recommended strict austerity and more targeted fundraising (AI 413, 84). The success of Amnesty’s Campaign Against Torture in 1972–1973 led to an explosion in membership from 20,000 members in 1969 to 100,000 in 1976 and then 200,000 in 1978 (Eckel 2013, 193). The increased dues brought the organization its first budget surplus in 1975 (AI 416, 13–15). In 1969, Amnesty’s budget was £20,000 (Eckel 2013, 193). By 1979, it was £1.3 million (Hopgood 2006, 84).

Amnesty’s early financial struggles were met with funding from some governments through its National Sections, especially the Swedes, and some large foundations. These connections constituted a nascent government network. After its finances improved, Amnesty nurtured the network to tackle another looming challenge: country access.

### Leveraging Access and Advocacy through a Diplomatic Network

As Amnesty’s country reports gained attention, it saw a serious curtailment in obtaining access for research missions. In 1971, the IEC “expressed concern at the number of countries that were refusing missions by Amnesty” (AI 413, 36). Gaining access to “closed countries” was vital for Amnesty so it did not appear to only select prisoners from more open countries (Hopgood 2006, 100). Access was such a problem that in 1979 “only six countries accounted for three quarters of all Amnesty [POC] adoption groups” (Eckel 2013, 205).

Amnesty sent agents covertly, but it did not always go well. In 1966, Amnesty member Niels Groth went unofficially to Guinea and was arrested within forty-eight hours of arrival. The IEC debated whether they should claim Groth as an official delegate or declare “he was simply a member of Amnesty travelling in that part of the world and making incidental enquiries” (AI 412, 37). Amnesty decided to support Groth as an official delegate while negotiating with the Danish Ambassador to Ghana and Guinea for his release. Amnesty was also “in contact with various aluminum companies with great influence in Guinea,” hoping “that some pressure could perhaps be brought to bear along these lines” (AI 412, 44). Amnesty would continue sending unofficial delegates when it could not obtain official access, such as in Malawi in 1968 (AI 412, 57).

For a more sustainable solution, Amnesty built networks with friendly and unfriendly governments. Friendly governments were largely Western European countries who were early backers of Amnesty, such as the Scandinavians. Unfriendly governments were those whom Amnesty was investigating at the time, which changed frequently. Often a prior relationship did not predetermine the role a government would play in the network. Amnesty’s UN representative recalled that in the mid-1970s the Libyan

Ambassador “took us around [the General Assembly] and introduced us to a number of the Arab diplomats and said ‘I advise you to know these people—you may need them some day!’” (MacBride interview, June 8, 1984, AI 987, 44). Similarly, Benenson was snubbed by the United States for diplomatic assistance early on: “The State Department was extremely suspicious. It was only when they learned that I was a Catholic that they would pursue the conversation at all” (Benenson interview, November 12, 1983, AI 983, 111).

Amnesty used the diplomatic network in four ways. First, diplomatic relations were useful for obtaining visas and accessing government officials. For a landmark report on Israeli torture in 1969, Amnesty worked with the Arab League to secure access to Jordan (AI 412, 66–67). The Swedish Ambassador to the Soviet Union helped obtain access to Indonesia in 1969 (AI 412, 88). For a mission to Mexico in 1970, Amnesty secured assistance from the Mexican Ambassador to the United States (AI 413, 3). The Polish Ambassador to Norway was used for a mission to Poland in 1970 (AI 413, 5). Amnesty used the Soviet Ambassador to Switzerland for arranging a Scandinavian parliamentary delegation in 1970 (AI 412, 93). Amnesty met repeatedly with the Soviet Ambassador to Britain for setting up government talks in Moscow throughout 1971 (AI 413, 30). At the same time, Amnesty negotiated access to South Vietnam with their Ambassador in Germany (AI 413, 35). The British Ambassador to Turkey helped fast-track visas in 1971 (AI 413, 74).

Second, ambassadors also acted as intermediaries for passing information. Per Martens (2006, 382), Amnesty was offered “information for political reasons. For example, when a topic is too sensitive to be discussed in a forum of governmental delegates, UN officials encourage AI to write an open letter to the High Commissioner who then has to respond to the issue.” In 1970, at the height of a crisis resulting from the Israeli torture report, Amnesty negotiated with the Israeli Ambassador to the UN at side events (AI 412, 93). The British Ambassador to Brazil would discuss allegations of genocide with Amnesty (AI 413, 4). The Mexican Ambassador in the United States indicated a favorable time to approach the newly elected government for releasing POCs (AI 413, 12). The Brazilian Ambassador to Britain suggested that June would be better than March for applying for a mission in 1971 (AI 413, 29–30). The same ambassador warned that uncoordinated National Section activity in Brazil was interfering with Amnesty’s mission (AI 413, 36). In 1973, the Turkish Ambassador to Britain said Amnesty’s Turkey report was outdated and gave an additional list of ten nonviolent torture cases (AI 414, 15). MacBride discussed his visit to North Vietnam with the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Britain in 1972 (AI 413, 97).

MacBride’s stature made him especially useful as an unofficial Amnesty intermediary. When attending a UN Seminar on Human Rights in Dakar in 1966, MacBride agreed that “although he could not be an official delegate of AI he could have informal discussions with Ministers” (AI 412, 30). Later that year, MacBride visited Malawi to discuss the situation of POCs with the Attorney-General, who admitted there were at least 500. MacBride “felt that most effective action could be taken in London and said that he would see the Head of the Malawi Department at the Commonwealth Relations Office to see what could be done” (AI 412, 32–33). MacBride was also key to Amnesty’s relationship with the USSR, as detailed in the next section.

Third, Amnesty’s diplomatic network helped with research missions on the ground. In 1967, Amnesty was building a case against Greece in the Council of Europe based on reports of torture following the military coup. The

Greek mission was important as it followed the 1966–1967 scandals and Benenson’s resignation. Amnesty sent its representative, Anthony Marreco, to Greece who described “the extremely uncooperative attitude he had met with in Athens, both from Ministers and from contacts given to him by the International Secretariat” (AI 412, 47–48). Amnesty then sent a group of eleven parliamentarians from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland to Greece. The parliamentarians “were granted interviews with all the chief Ministers in Athens. They were also allowed to visit Andreas Papandreou and a prison in Athens where 12 men were held, six of them former Centre Union deputies. They were allowed to talk to these prisoners for more than two hours” (AI 412, 47–48). In January 1968, Amnesty released a torture report, “Situation in Greece.” Following the parliamentarians, Amnesty was able to send Marreco on an official mission to Greece, after which the IEC perceived Amnesty “had reaffirmed its position and regained public confidence” (AI 412, 52). A second report followed in March, alleging “not only that torture had occurred, but also that it had been official policy” (Clark 2001, 41). In November, Amnesty met with the Human Rights Commission at the Council to provide additional reporting. In 1969, Greece withdrew from the Council under massive pressure, marking a momentous victory for Amnesty and its diplomatic network.

Finally, diplomatic networks also aided Amnesty’s advocacy at the UN Commission on Human Rights. Regarding the Convention against Torture, Clark (2001, 35) details how Amnesty worked with governments as an “active participant in the norm-drafting process.” Martens’ (2006, 381) interviewees revealed that Amnesty would provide friendly governments with information to bring up at the Commission. New data show Amnesty also pumped contacts for information. Amnesty’s UN representative, Nigel Rodley, had access to confidential working groups from which NGOs were officially excluded. At a 1976 meeting of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Rodley knew that the sub-commission had forwarded the cases of Bolivia, Equatorial Guinea, Malawi, Uganda, South Korea, and Sri Lanka to the Commission: “The communications relating to South Korea and Sri Lanka were from AI reports on these countries. The failure of the working group to take up Brazil while at the same time taking up the situation in Sri Lanka can only be described as extraordinary” (AI 424, 3). Since 1972, Amnesty had reported on Brazilian torture and “death squads.” Knowing that Brazil was not recommended, Rodley drew attention to it at the general meeting. Crucially, Rodley “was able to break precedent by naming specific countries since [he] was able to associate that had already been made by individual members of the sub-commission. This opened the way for other NGOs to do the same thing” (AI 424, 3). Also, with the help of the Swedish Ambassador, Rodley succeeded in pushing for a new working group to examine the inadequate documentation received by the Sub-Commission from the Commission (AI 424, 4).

As Amnesty established itself as a government watchdog, its diplomatic network required nurturing governmental relations. Amnesty did not shy away from exerting pressure against its network. For instance, the IEC asked National Sections to contact Brazilian ambassadors after the publication of the Brazil Torture Report (AI 413, 137) and to approach American ambassadors to discuss Vietnamese prisoners before the Paris Peace Accord (AI 414, 13). Thus, in using governments for access while also shaming them, Amnesty was engaged in the art of foreign relations. In

1977, Amnesty would describe these functions as “External Affairs” (AI 418, 146).

### Bargaining for Access and Reforms in Closed Countries

Amnesty’s external affairs strategy with closed countries consisted of making private bargains for access or reforms. After Amnesty concluded a research mission, it presented the government with its findings and gave an opportunity to make reforms before Amnesty went public. Amnesty referred to these as “high-level” missions as opposed to “low-level” research or trial observation missions (AI 412, 75–78). Scholars have noted that Amnesty “worked rather silently, if persistently, prodding repressive governments with letter writing, diplomatic contacts, and occasional publications” (Eckel 2013, 196). This section makes explicit that the “silent” work was conducted quite frequently in high-level talks. Such talks were part of Amnesty’s strategy from the beginning as evident from how Amnesty secured the release of its first POC:

Perhaps with an eye to publicity we selected Archbishop Beran, later Cardinal, who had for eight years been imprisoned away from his archdiocese at Prague .... Although [MacBride] came back with a reasonably favourable published report on the situation of Catholics in Czecho-Slovakia, this was presumably the price he had to pay for securing a loosening of the Archbishop’s bonds. (Benenson memoir, August 1983, AI 982, 12)

MacBride returned with “a reasonably favorable published report” as “a price he had to pay” for the release. Over the years, the IEC would debate what and how much to publicize from its missions with an eye toward its government relations.

Amnesty had four strategic uses of publicity in closed countries. First, Amnesty wielded international publicity as a weapon for continued country access. In 1965, a Spain and Portugal mission report noted that

although the Spanish Government appeared to be on unusually good terms with the AMNESTY movement, they were responsible for a very irate letter being recently sent to Sean MacBride in his capacity as Secretary-General of the International Commission of Jurists; on the other hand, the Portuguese are on good terms with the International Commission, but are Anti-AMNESTY to the extent of not allowing our last two delegates to leave the airport at Lisbon. However, since then AMNESTY sent an investigator “incognito.”

It was generally thought that Spain was improving; and that things there were nothing like so bad as had been so in recent years. ... It was decided that the report on Portugal should be sent to the Council of Europe. It was decided that every effort should be made to publicise and criticize recent arrests in Portugal. It was decided that Spain should not be commented upon, until after an effort had been made to influence the Portuguese government. (AI 412, 25–26)

The contrast between Amnesty’s strategy toward Spain and Portugal in publicizing human rights findings corresponds to their differing external relations with Amnesty. Portugal had previously denied access to Amnesty and was being uncooperative (Vincent interview, November 8, 1983, AI 993, 14), which led to Amnesty sending an “incognito” agent; Amnesty decided to send the Portugal report to the Council of Europe. Spain had been more open in accepting

Amnesty's representatives and was on "unusually good terms;" Amnesty decided not to publicly comment on Spain at the time or refer it to the Council.

Amnesty's relations with Libya is another instance of trading publicity for access in closed countries. Amnesty tried getting access to President Gaddafi in a high-level mission in 1976 to discuss recent amendments to the Penal Code. Amnesty had no trouble securing a visa through the Libyan Ambassador in London. But once Amnesty's field agents landed in Tripoli, the Legal Department said only Gaddafi could approve prison visits and that a meeting would not happen. Over the next several days, Amnesty's agents worked with contacts in the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to lobby different government officials. They finally succeeded. The agents remarked that although it took them "five days to get a meeting with the President, we should consider ourselves lucky: the Dutch Ambassador to Egypt, accredited to Libya, spent two weeks in a hotel in Tripoli waiting to present his credentials, before leaving in disgust" (AI 425, 80). In the meeting it became clear that "Gaddafi appeared to have very little real understanding of what AI is all about" (AI 425, 80). Still, he allowed Amnesty to visit prisons. The IEC agreed with the agents' recommendation to not publish the mission report (AI 425, 82).

Second, Amnesty also used publicity to make side bargains with closed countries for private reforms. Amnesty had maintained ongoing relations with Iran since the late-1960s. In a 1969 mission, the IEC "agreed that the report should be treated confidentially until the end of April by which time, it was felt that the Iranian authorities would have had an adequate opportunity for carrying out the reforms and gestures of leniency which [Amnesty's agent] had requested. If there were no response by the end of April, a public statement would be made by the International Secretariat and National Sections would be encouraged to campaign on the basis of the report" (AI 412, 76). The Shah promised amendments to the Penal Code to limit the power of military courts in political trials and of SAVAK (secret police) during pretrial interrogations. In November, the IEC considered these reforms and "agreed that there was need for clarification and substantiation of the intentions of the Shah on these two points. The IEC noted that an amnesty had been announced for Human Rights Day, and it was agreed to await the 10<sup>th</sup> December before publishing the Iran report in a revised form. If there were a substantial number of Amnesty adopted prisoners released a further decision would be taken regarding publication" (AI 412, 92). These side bargains would often delay reports by one to two years as negotiations continued.

Amnesty's external relations with the USSR for private reforms took many years to establish. Amnesty's first mission to the Soviet Union to seek out research contacts was in 1969 (AI 412, 75–78). Then, it organized a Scandinavian parliamentary delegation in 1970 "to try to obtain some form of recognition by the USSR of the function and value of Amnesty International" (AI 412, 93). Next, MacBride led a delegation to Moscow during the World Congress of Peace Forces in October 1973 for "opening a regular dialogue between Amnesty and the USSR" (AI 414, 62). The visit received international attention because of the mention of human rights at the conference (Smith 1973). However, the press did not report that MacBride also met the Soviet Minister of Justice and the Procurator General (AI 414, 113). The Amnesty delegation concluded that "the Soviet authorities are prepared to continue discussions with Amnesty. The Chairman stressed that any accusations against the Soviet authorities should always be well-founded

and backed by concrete evidence, although it was clear that Amnesty work in the Soviet Union must continue as before" (AI 414, 122). The IEC also agreed that maintaining a Soviet connection would positively "influence the attitude of other Eastern European countries and could form the basis for new approaches to Czechoslovakia and East Germany in particular." Crucially, Amnesty decided a report on Soviet psychiatric hospitals would not "be for immediate release" (AI 414, 124; AI 415, 73–74). The report would not be published until two years later when the Soviet authorities would detain Amnesty's Soviet group members in 1975.

Third, Amnesty's bargains for reforms invoked different levels of international publicity, ranging from publishing a report publicly to sharing findings privately. In March 1969, Amnesty was ready to release a report on Israeli torture. After high-level talks, Amnesty "agreed that the Israeli Government should be asked to set up a commission to investigate allegations of ill-treatment of Arabs during the period of interrogation and immediately after arrest. If no favourable response were received by the end of April, from the Israeli authorities, the reports on Israel and the Middle East would be published" (AI 412, 77). The report remained unpublished. In September 1969, the IEC discussed the Israeli government's request for Amnesty not to "give evidence to the special UN Committee making a study of the treatment of Arab prisoners by the Israeli authorities" (AI 412, 84–85). Amnesty decided it would give evidence to the UN but also agreed "not to publish the report at the present stage" (AI 412, 84–85). When word leaked of Amnesty's UN meeting in December 1969, Israel banned Amnesty. Amnesty responded by releasing the torture report in 1970, which it had withheld for a full year while backchannelling with the Israeli government.

Finally, Amnesty's high-level missions led to pragmatic trade-offs for building the human rights movement. In 1975, Amnesty had identified expanding National Sections in right-wing dictatorships as a high priority. In 1976, a year after General Franco's death, Amnesty's Spanish mission considered the dangers of creating a national committee that was not accepted by the new government:

A lot of the effectiveness of AI's work in Spain depends on the prestige of the organization within the legal and governmental bodies. If for example our application was turned down the consequences would be grave for our work. It would mean that in some eyes we were not a powerful enough body to obtain acceptance and in others that there were positive valid reasons for returning our application, i.e. political views of members. It is most important that we retain such goodwill as exists within the government as without it we could easily have certain privileges withdrawn. (AI 425, 51)

When given the opportunity to expand its official presence in a post-Franco Spain that still carried out brutal tactics of the previous regime, Amnesty decided against authorizing establishing a group that would compromise its governmental relations.

By the mid-1970s, more Amnesty missions were approved for high-level government talks than for research or trial observation. In April 1975, half of the four proposed missions and 60 percent of the seventeen pending missions were for government talks (AI 416, 60). In July 1975, all three proposed missions were for high-level talks (AI 416, 117). By the end of the year, 83 percent of the twelve proposed missions were for high-level talks (AI 416, 188). Amnesty's research department drew attention to this trend, pointing

out in 1976 that “very few IEC-approved missions in the past year had been designated specifically and solely as research missions... They were in strong agreement that research missions are important to the quality of AI research” (AI 424, 50–51). After the complaints, none of the four proposed missions at the following IEC meeting were for government talks, but 55 percent of the twenty pending missions still were (AI 424, 105–6). A year later, 56 percent of the pending eighteen missions were for government talks (AI 425, 13). By fielding so many high-level missions, a large majority of the IEC’s time was spent on external relations. In recognition of this, the IEC created a subcommittee on “government relations” in 1975, renamed “strategy” in 1976. In 1977, the IEC requested the IS “to prepare guidelines on the problem of AI having a uniform policy in relation with all governments including national sections’ relations with their own and other governments” (AI 418, 68). The guidelines never materialized as the 1970s came to an end.

### Conclusion

This research note presented new archival evidence on AI’s first quarter century to trace its government relations. The note complicates the standard narrative on Amnesty’s ability to maintain government independence in building the international human rights movement (Clark 2001; Dezalay and Garth 2006; Hopgood 2006; Wong 2012). But the note extends insights on INGO strategic action by foregrounding Amnesty’s pragmatic trade-offs (Avant 2004) in its struggle to maintain moral authority (Clark 2001; Hopgood 2006; Brysk 2013; Stroup and Wong 2017) when facing pressures to survive (Cooley and Ron 2002; Prakash and Gugerty 2010). Amnesty nurtured a multistate diplomatic network that included middle-power states (Stroup and Wong 2017) for conducting multilateral advocacy (Clark 2001; Martens 2006) and initiating research access. Meanwhile, Amnesty’s side bargains with closed countries traded publicity for continued access and private reforms in another angle on INGOs’ “information politics” (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005; Carpenter 2014). Finally, the note provides new data for future research on the agency of global nonstate actors navigating complex government relations (Martens 2006; Stroup 2010; Stroup and Wong 2017).

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