

ACTION: SPEAK UP

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves . . . defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Bible: Proverbs 31:8–9 NIV)

Silence renders sufferers invisible (which is exactly what their persecutors want). Speaking up, however, gives them form and presence. Those who due to displacement or systematic discrimination are impoverished and without means; those who have been silenced through imprisonment, intimidation, and threat; those who have been buried under a pile of propaganda, or pushed deep into the fog of war out of sight and out of mind, rely on *our* voice to make their plight known.

So speak up and shatter the silence!

- Talk to family, friends, neighbors and colleagues—over dinner, over coffee, after church, while walking, via social media—wherever and whenever the opportunity arises.
- Write letters/emails to the editor for publication in local, national and international—as well as denominational—newspapers, journals and magazines.
- Phone in and contribute to talk-back radio.
- Add your presence to peaceful demonstrations, rallies and prayer vigils. The bigger the rally the more likely it is to attract media attention which will further amplify the message.
- Join an advocacy group and participate in their advocacy campaigns.
- Write, as a concerned individual, to your local Member of Parliament (MP).

Writing

Letters to the editor—that is, emails written for publication—should be short (less than 250 words) and to the point. Do not include attachments or hyperlinks as these will usually result in your email being automatically rejected.

The contact details of MPs are published on government websites. Although contacting them by email is acceptable, emails (which flood in daily) are easily deleted and risk being diverted to junk mail folders. For a whole lot of reasons, hard copy—good old ink on paper, bearing your signature, and travelling by “snail mail” to be received by hand—is better.

When writing to an MP or diplomat, your letter must be polite but never patronizing or ingratiating. Hostile, demanding, lecturing letters are not well received and will likely be filtered out at the secretary’s desk.

Letters need to be concise and to the point: one or two pages, with a decent font, decent spacing, and plenty of white space so it is easy on the eye. Use dot points, stay on track, keep focused. A letter that is long, complex, or verbose will probably not be read at all, and will also likely be filtered out at the secretary’s desk. Busy MPs and diplomats do not have time for rambling philosophical arguments, they simply want to know what concerns you and what you would like to see done. Include your contact details and keep any replies.

If Christians and other concerned persons were to write routinely to their local MP, I imagine it would greatly improve the quality of partyroom and parliamentary debate—and the outcome. Swamping the foreign minister is but one form of advocacy; flooding the party room is another—one I suspect might be more effective.

Finally and most critically, all speaking and writing must be reasoned, disciplined and gracious. If you are a Christian, your advocacy should be undergirded, driven and sustained by prayer. Pray that God will direct your paths, give you the words, open the doors, and bless your efforts. For: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain”* (Psalm 127:1 ESV).