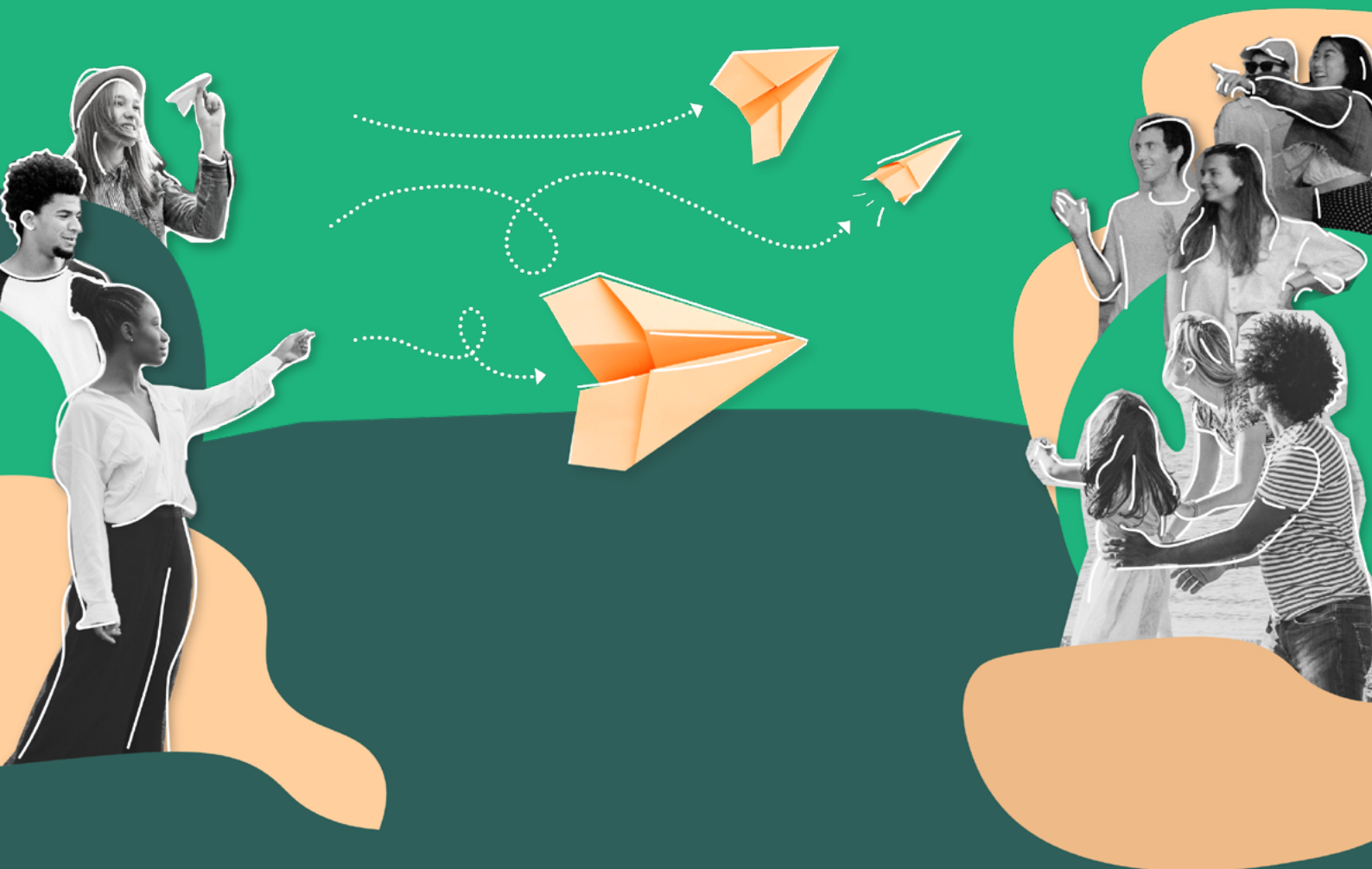


# HOW TO MESSAGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

*A communications guide for organisations  
promoting human rights*



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December 2022*

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Liberties welcomes queries from campaigners who are interested in receiving training on values-based framing or would like assistance or feedback on communications products they are developing based on this guide. Please email the author ([i.butler@liberties.eu](mailto:i.butler@liberties.eu)) or Liberties ([info@liberties.eu](mailto:info@liberties.eu)).

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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is a tool for organisations in the human rights sector that want to communicate more effectively with the public to build support for human rights-related causes. This includes civil society organisations, foundations, international organisations and national bodies promoting human rights.

The guide is divided into three parts. Part One sets out 4 general rules for how to talk about human rights. Part Two outlines how to structure a persuasive message. Part Three offers guidance on what kinds of visual materials to use when delivering your message over social media.

Readers who are communicating specifically on the rights of people from marginalised groups should use this guide in conjunction with the guide '[How to message on the rights of people from marginalised groups](#)'. The latter contains additional techniques you should incorporate into your messaging to bring people from marginalised groups into your audience's circle of concern; that is, their understanding that the cause you are promoting is important to them because it concerns 'me', 'people I care about' or 'people like me.'

## ***There is no public: there are several publics.***

The guide refers to our supporter base and to the moveable middle. Public audiences tend to divide into at least three segments. Those who are solidly in favour of human rights, those who are solidly against, and those in the middle. This middle group can usually be broken down further.

Those in favour of human rights can be thought of as your 'base' and include your existing supporters, but also people who would be very likely to support you if you can reach them with your messages. Research in different countries suggests that this base can be anything between 15% and 25% of the population.<sup>1</sup> The same is true of your opponents. Your base and your opponents won't usually change their position. But the middle segment(s) do, and the middle is usually the biggest chunk of the public.

Political analysts sometimes refer to the middle as moderates, but it's better to think of them as the moveable middle. They have conflicted views on human rights – some pro, some anti. And they will change their attitudes, depending

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this research is unpublished, but for published research that segments the population see research by More In Common on attitudes towards migration, available via their [website](#).

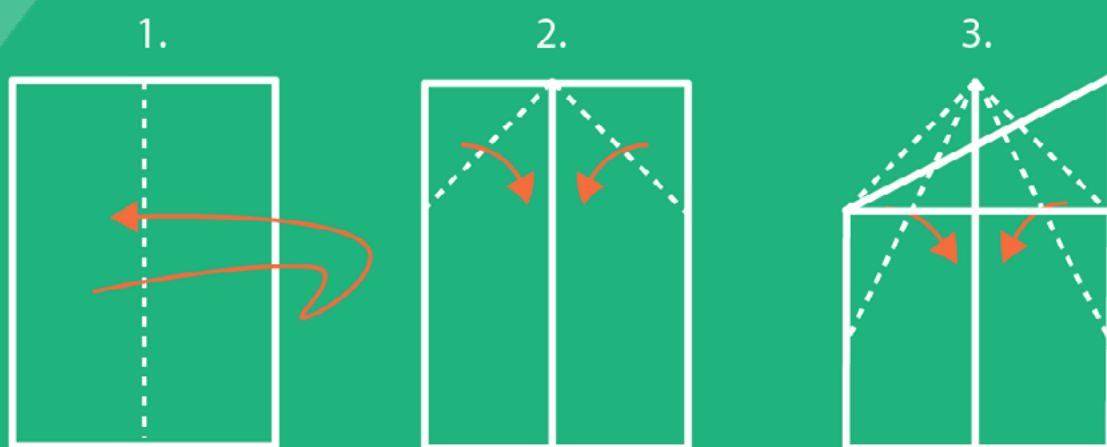
on what kind of messaging they receive. If our opponents succeed in making them think of human rights as a threat to their culture, security, or their status in society, they will become more anti-human rights. If we can succeed in making them realise how human rights allow them to bring things they find important into their lives, they will become more supportive of human rights.

At the moment, activists tend to use messages that only appeal to our supporters; our messages don't tend to appeal to the middle. Many of the reasons our messages don't appeal to the moveable middle are set out in Part One of the guide, along with advice on how to change this.

If our goal is to build support for our causes then we need to speak differently to the middle, but also to the base. This is because we rely on our base to disseminate our messages to the middle, especially given the limited resources many NGOs have to fund campaigns capable of reaching the middle directly.

The guide draws heavily on the work of Anat Shenker-Osorio of ASO Communications on various human rights and social justice causes and related projects, such as We Make The Future. Much of the advice in this guide uses or adapts messages tested by these organisations in the USA. However, users can only be sure that these messages are effective by testing them in their national context and adjusting them as necessary.

# ***PART ONE: FOUR GENERAL RULES FOR TALKING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS***



The four rules set out below are general principles for communicators to follow when talking about human rights. Communicators should read them together with Part Two: How to structure a winning message. While the four-part structure shows communicators what order their message should come in, the four general rules explain the content of the message.

## **Rule 1: Explain what rights bring to the lives of your audience.**

### **Current bad messaging habits**

a) Our sector tends to talk about rights using language that makes them seem like abstract objects that people possess. For example, we use phrases like: ‘human rights are under attack’; ‘we must protect human rights’; ‘the government is taking away people’s rights’; ‘policy x is bad for our human rights’; ‘we fight for people’s rights’.

Further, we talk about rights as if they are ends in themselves: something that must be protected on principle. So when we criticise a particular law, policy or event, we often just say that it’s bad ‘because it violates human rights’ or a par-

ticular right, or we tell people that they should care about an issue simply because it’s a question of human rights, for example saying ‘women’s rights are human rights’.

b) When we do explain what human rights bring to our audience, we sometimes appeal to the wrong values. For example, by saying human rights are good for the economy or security. It’s important to keep in mind that things like the economy and security become important to the public because of how much certain politicians and media outlets emphasise them. But we know from research and campaigning that activists can do the same and make our own values more important by talking about them in a persuasive way.

c) We tend to use a lot of jargon and technical terms. It’s fine to use these in advocacy towards policy-makers or with experts, but not with a non-expert audience.

### **Why this doesn’t work with people outside our existing supporters**

a) Our base of existing supporters is already convinced that human rights are important on principle. Telling our base that they should support or oppose something on the grounds that it’s good or bad



‘for human rights’ is often enough to get their agreement.

But we know from research that the moveable middle need more. Before they can get behind what you’re saying, they need to understand how the cause you’re promoting delivers things they find important.

b) We also know from research that when we say that the right we are promoting is good for the economy or to prevent crime there is a high risk that our audience becomes less supportive of human rights.<sup>2</sup>

This is because people’s attitudes and opinions are in great part determined by the values they prioritise and the way they view the world. The language we use in our messages can trigger or suppress certain values and worldviews, which then has an impact on people’s attitudes.

Messages that bring to the top of people’s minds ideas that their security is under threat or that our purpose in life is to serve the economy or accumulate wealth, lead them to express more selfish and restrictive attitudes. They find helping others less important, place less importance on individual freedom and, conse-

quently, become less supportive of human rights.

c) When your audience doesn’t understand the terms you’re using they will tune out, feel like they’re not well-informed enough to have an opinion and even think that you’re stupid. Jargon can also hide from your audience what you’re really talking about.

## **What to do differently**

Your audience needs to see how human rights give them the means to bring the things they find important into their lives, the lives of people they care about, or the lives of people whom they consider to be like them.

If the cause you’re promoting relates to the rights of people in a marginalised group, check out the advice in our sister guide ‘[How to message on the rights of people from marginalised groups](#)’. That guide contains additional techniques you should incorporate into your message that bring people from marginalised groups into your audience’s notion of ‘me’, ‘people I care about’ or ‘people like me’.

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<sup>2</sup> If you’d like to read more about how values influence attitudes and see some results of testing on which values correspond to greater support for human rights, see: [PIRC & Counterpoint, ‘Building bridges: Connecting with values to reframe and build support for human rights’, 2016.](#)



- a) That means that we need to talk about rights as a means to an end. We need to show our audience that rights are tools that we use to create the lives we want.<sup>3</sup>
- b) When we name the things that human rights bring to our lives we need to appeal to values and world-views that underpin pro-human rights attitudes. Based on research and testing, we know that we can shift attitudes in favour of human rights by explaining how they do things like: giving us greater freedom and control over our lives, allowing us to show care and compassion, allowing us to create a

fairer society or allowing us to cooperate with others.

- c) Instead of using terms like ‘access to healthcare’ or ‘access to education’ use language that connects to your audience’s everyday experiences. For example ‘to be able to see a doctor / get treatment in hospital’ or ‘go to a good school’.

## Examples

Here are some examples of how to apply these rules. These examples relate to how we talk about human rights generally, rather than specific rights.

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Try</b>
Human rights law requires that every person, no matter our age, gender, colour, religion or sexual orientation, gets the same treatment.	Human rights give each of us the tools to demand that we are treated as equals, no matter the colour of our skin, who we love, who we pray to or how old we are.
Human rights law obliges governments to guarantee people’s basic needs.	<p>Human rights give us the means to demand that our leaders fund the things our communities need to thrive, like good schools and modern hospitals.</p> <p>or</p> <p>Human rights give us the tools we need to build the lives we want to live and the communities we want to live in.</p> <p>or</p> <p>Human rights give us the means to pick leaders who will do what’s best for us and listen to our concerns.</p>

<sup>3</sup> For further examples of how to explain human rights as tools, see the following publication, which this section draws on: [Anat Shenker-Osorio, ‘A brilliant way of living our lives: How to talk about human rights.’](#)

<b><i>Instead of</i></b>	<b><i>Try</i></b>
Human rights guarantee that every person is treated with dignity and respect.	Human rights give us the means to make sure that all of us, no matter where we live, where we come from or what we look like, are treated with equal worth and dignity.
Human rights protect the vulnerable and marginalised from abuse by the powerful	Human rights provide all of us with the tools to demand we are treated with dignity.
[Organisation] defends the rights of everyone in [country].	[Organisation] ensures people in [country] can use their rights.
We want to secure the rights of people living in poverty to food, housing and a decent income.	We want to ensure people, no matter where they live or what they look like, have enough to make ends meet by changing the rules that allow too few hands to hoard too much wealth and create poverty.

Below are some examples of how to explain specific rights in more tangible terms, including how to describe rights violations.

Notice that instead of merely saying that a right has been violated, the examples explain the impact on people. Further, instead of noting that a vio-

lation is occurring using the passive voice, the examples pick out who is responsible for the violation. This is an important part of rule 2.

<b><i>Instead of talking about rights in the abstract...</i></b>	<b><i>... describe what they deliver for people</i></b>
Everyone has a right to freedom of assembly or association.	No matter how we vote, most of us want our elected representatives to listen to our concerns. When we use our right to come together and protest / work together through associations, we can demand that our leaders solve the problems we're worried about.
This proposal would limit the right to protest.	The government wants to stop citizens coming together so that it doesn't have to listen to us.

<b><i>Instead of talking about rights in the abstract...</i></b>	<b><i>... describe what they deliver for people</i></b>
<p>Children have a right to data protection.</p> <p>Facebook is collecting and selling users' information in violation of data protection laws.</p>	<p>Most of us want our children to be free to use the internet without being targeted by aggressive corporate marketing.</p> <p>Facebook makes its profits by collecting and selling information about how we behave to... companies that harass us with ads / politicians who use it to spread hate / false information / manipulate who we vote for.</p>
<p>We have a right to media freedom.</p> <p>The government take-over of the public service broadcaster violates the freedom of the media.</p>	<p>No matter our politics, most of us agree that our elected representatives should do what's best for all of us. For us to know what our politicians are doing, we rely on journalists to be free to report without fear or favour.</p> <p>Our leaders want to control what the public broadcaster can say, so that they can cover up their failings and attack their opponents.</p>
<p>The rule of law / an independent judiciary is a fundamental requirement of a democracy.</p> <p>The proposed law is bad for the rule of law.</p>	<p>Most of us want our leaders to fund the schools, hospitals, roads and buses our communities rely on. To make that happen, judges check that our representatives are following the rules and not pocketing our resources. Judges need to be independent from politicians so they can do their job without fear or favour.</p> <p>Our leaders want to make it easier for certain politicians to take away our freedoms and defund our schools and hospitals.</p>
<p>Everyone has a right to participate in their democracy.</p> <p>The planned reforms for redrawing boundaries between constituencies are bad for democracy.</p>	<p>The only way for democracy to work for all of us is if it includes all of us. That's why every person has an equal vote in elections.</p> <p>Our leaders want some citizens' voices to count more than others when we go to vote.</p>
<p>We are all protected by the prohibition on cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.</p> <p>The prohibition on degrading treatment is being violated with regard to people in police detention.</p>	<p>Whether you're a child in care, an older person in a nursing home, or someone held by the police, we should all be treated humanely and with dignity when we are in the care of the state.</p> <p>Parts of our police force are treating people in their custody in a degrading way.</p>

***Instead of talking about rights in the abstract...***

***... describe what they deliver for people***

We are all protected by the right to a clean environment.

Plans to widen the motorway will increase air pollution by 10%.

All of us want our families to have clean air to breathe and water that's safe to drink.

Plans to widen the motorway will put more polluting cars on the road and dirty the air we breathe.

Everyone is protected against discrimination.

Ethnic profiling is a violation of the prohibition on discrimination.

No matter the colour of our skin, who we love, who we pray to or how old we are, most of us agree that all of us should get the same opportunities to do well in life.

All of us want to feel free to move around our communities without fearing the police will stop us just because of the colour of our skin.

Children have a right to education.

Giving parents vouchers that they can spend on private schooling instead of properly funding public schools violates the right to education of the poorest families.

Every child should be free to get a good education that will prepare them and our country for the future.

Every child should get the same good quality education, no matter how much their parents have in their wallets.

The right to housing is universal.

Unaffordable prices for renting or buying a house or apartment amount to a violation of the right to housing.

Home is the place we lay our heads, hold our loved ones and make our memories. It should be within everyone's reach.

Many of us cannot rent or buy a home because the government has allowed corporations to keep wages low and landlords to raise prices.

Workers have a right to a fair / minimum wage.

Deregulation would allow employers to pay less than the current minimum wage, which violates the right to fair working conditions.

Everyone who works should be paid enough to support their families.

Certain politicians want to allow corporations to pay people who work so little that they cannot make ends meet.

## **Rule 2: Explain who is doing what and why to cause the problem**

### **Current bad messaging habits**

- a) The human rights sector tends to dedicate the weight of our communications to describing or portraying the injustices we are fighting. For example, with visuals showing suffering, statistics about levels of abuse or discrimination or describing a problematic law or policy.
- b) We also tend to expect the abuses we describe to speak for themselves: we expect our audience to share our understanding of the problem and solution, merely from seeing the harm and without further explanation.

### **Why this doesn't work with people outside our existing supporters**

Focusing your messaging on describing or displaying the harm might be enough to mobilise your existing supporters who understand something about the issue. But it isn't effective at getting most people to support our causes. Focusing the bulk of your message on

talking about the harm you want to remedy works against us in two ways:

- a) Even people who agree with us will feel like the problem is too big to solve and won't be motivated to support our call to action.
- b) When we leave statistics and images to speak for themselves there's a big risk that our audience will not interpret what they see in the way we want them to. People will interpret the harms by reaching for their 'common sense'. And this 'common sense' is made up of the dominant ways of framing the issue in the media and by politicians – which often works against us.

### **What to do differently**

Research and testing show that we need to change two things in the way we talk about the problem we want to solve.

- a) Adjust how much of our overall message is about the harm we want to address. It should make up no more than a third of our message and be sandwiched between our vision of what we want the world to look like and our solutions for how we can work together to make that happen. There's more on this in Part Two.

Your audience will be more motivated to address the problem if you

remind them of what they want the world to look like and that there is a solution they can get behind. Getting people to act for something (e.g. ‘fund our communities’) is much more potent than getting them to act against something (e.g. ‘stop corruption’).

- b) Don't just describe or set out the harm you're talking about. Explain where the harm comes from: who is doing what and why to create the problem? Are there certain individuals, organisations or interests behind the problem?

Explaining the who, what, why stops people relying on inaccurate dominant ways of thinking pushed by our opponents to explain the problem. It also makes your audience realise that the problem can be solved: if the problem is a product of decisions made by people, then people can solve it by deciding to do things differently.

Talking about where the problem comes from also means that you need to stop using the passive voice (e.g. ‘the right has been violated’). Instead use the active voice (e.g. ‘the ministry has violated the right’) because it identifies who / what is causing the problem.





## Examples

<p><b>Scenarios where activists hope that the statistics or images showing the harm will 'speak for themselves'</b></p>	<p><b>The way people outside your supporters are likely to interpret these statistics / images, based on dominant ways of thinking promoted in the media</b></p>	<p><b>How you might explain the who / why / what of the problem</b></p>
<p>Campaigners promoting equal pay for women want the public to recognise that women are paid less than men and that this is a problem. To accomplish this, they publish statistics to illustrate that women earn less than men across society.</p>	<p>There are some bad employers who are breaking the rules by paying women in the same role as men less. Therefore, the solution is better enforcement of the rules.</p> <p>Women are natural carers for children, which results in career breaks, making women less experienced than men and therefore likely to take less senior positions. Therefore, the difference in salaries is inevitable.</p>	<p>The corporations employing people who clean our offices and care for our older relatives refuse to pay the people who work for them enough to make ends meet. The vast majority of people doing this work are women. The government should require employers to pay working people enough to support their families, no matter their gender.</p> <p>or</p> <p>The rules we have created don't support new fathers to spend time with their babies during the first months, and force women to put their careers on hold. By pushing career breaks only on women, we hold them back unfairly. If we gave both parents support to care for their newborn, men and women would be just as likely to take time off around the birth of a child.</p>
<p>Campaigners fighting against ethnic profiling want the public to realise that the police are disproportionately targeting people from ethnic minorities and that this is discriminatory. To accomplish this, they publish statistics showing a disproportionately higher arrest rate for people from ethnic minority groups compared to the majority white population.</p>	<p>Higher arrest figures for people from ethnic minorities are due to them being more prone to criminality than the majority population. Therefore, these statistics do not signal that there is a problem of structural discrimination in policing.</p> <p>There are a few 'bad apples' in some police forces. The solution is to retrain or punish the handful of officers who are prejudiced.</p>	<p>Media outlets and certain politicians promote a myth that ethnic minorities are more prone to criminality to stoke fear because this sells newspapers / wins them votes. This creates support for officers to over-police ethnic minorities, which distorts arrest figures, creating bad statistics that police rely on to justify discriminatory policing.</p>



<b>Scenarios where activists hope that the statistics or images showing the harm will 'speak for themselves'</b>	<b>The way people outside your supporters are likely to interpret these statistics / images, based on dominant ways of thinking promoted in the media</b>	<b>How you might explain the who / why / what of the problem</b>
<p>Campaigners fighting for humane reception conditions for people seeking asylum want the public to realise that newcomers are being detained and held in degrading conditions. To achieve this they use visuals showing people who migrate being held in camps, behind fences.</p>	<p>People who migrate are detained because they pose some kind of threat to society.</p>	<p>Today, certain extremist politicians try to win political support by making us fear people based on their race or where they come from. They hope we will blame newcomers for the problems they have caused like holding down wages or allowing fossil fuel corporations to overcharge people.</p>

## **Rule 3: Neutralise your opponents' messages by exposing their malign motives.**

### **Current bad messaging habits**

Sometimes the problem our sector faces is not just that there is a harm that needs to be corrected, but also that our opponents are lying about what they're doing. When our opponents attack human rights, they often use smear campaigns to get public support. They portray human rights, certain marginalised groups they protect or the organisations that promote them as threats to our security, religion, traditions and customs, or social

or economic stability. For example, authoritarian regimes often try to justify restrictions on LGBTIQ people by smearing the latter as a threat to children or restrictions on people who migrate by smearing them as a threat to public safety or resources.

Activists have a habit of reacting to our opponents' lies by directly contradicting them, using facts to counter their claims. Unfortunately, this tends to backfire.

### **Why this doesn't work with people outside our existing supporters**

When we try to counter our opponents by directly contradicting their claims, we end up reinforcing the original damaging message, rather than the correction. To contradict a

claim we need to repeat it, and repetition makes information stick in the brain. The emotive words carry more weight and the words we use to negate the false claim ('no', 'not', 'no one', 'nothing') get forgotten. For example, saying that 'no one is illegal' or 'LGBTIQ people are not paedophiles' will just tend to entrench the original damaging frame that people who migrate are lawbreakers or LGBTIQ people are a danger to children.

## ***What to do differently***

So, how do we neutralise our opponents' messaging? Use a three-part message, known as a 'truth sandwich'. A truth sandwich follows the same structure as a normal narrative or message, as set out in Part Two: How to structure a winning message.

1. Values: rather than directly contradicting your opponents, begin by reminding your audience why they find the cause you are promoting important. Instead of directing attention to your opponents' message and letting them set the agenda, this allows you to bring your cause back into focus.
2. Explain the problem: expose your opponents' malign agenda; why are they attacking activists, the causes you promote or the groups you work with? Allude to your opponents' lies but don't repeat them.

3. Explain the solution: return to the cause you are promoting by talking about how we can bring the situation into line with the values you outlined in the first step.

4. If this is part of a campaign, remind your audience of past successes and ask them to do something to show their support. This is explained further in Part Two: How to structure a winning narrative.

## Examples

Scenario	Traditional response	Truth sandwich response
<p>Certain politicians smear NGOs alleging that they are foreign agents and call for transparency requirements</p>	<p>Even if we receive funding from outside the country, we are not foreign agents, we're just promoting human rights. We get funding from different places (here's a list with the amounts) and we have safeguards in place to ensure we're independent from our donors (here are the safeguards).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No matter our party, most of us want our leaders to fund the things our communities rely on like good schools and hospitals.</li> <li>2. But today certain politicians are taking the resources we contribute to line their own pockets and enrich their business friends. When we call them out, they point the finger at us for the problems they are causing.</li> <li>3. When we join together, we can demand that our leaders fund the things our communities need to thrive.</li> <li>4. Call to action and reminder of past successes.</li> </ol>
<p>Certain politicians attack judges for striking down legislation that criminalises humanitarian assistance to people who migrate.</p>	<p>Migrants have a legal right to seek asylum to escape war or persecution. Judges are merely applying the law, and politicians shouldn't interfere with the independence of the judiciary.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People come here to give their families a better life after they had to leave their homes.</li> <li>2. But today, certain politicians try to divide us. They want us to fear newcomers and they point the finger at judges who protect our values of care and compassion. These politicians hope we will blame newcomers and the courts for the problems they have caused, like holding down wages while letting house prices rise.</li> <li>3. We reject their attempts to divide us. When we come together, we can demand that our leaders deliver the things all of us need, no matter where we come from.</li> <li>4. Call to action and reminder of past successes</li> </ol>

## ***Rule 4: Emphasise what you want things to look like and how your solutions deliver that.***

### ***Current bad messaging habits***

Many in the human rights sector devote little attention to the solution, for example just saying that: ‘the government must do better / make meaningful changes / comply with human rights’, or must stop or reverse a measure. And

when we do talk about solutions, we tend to use technical legal or policy terms that hide what our solutions deliver for people.

### ***Why this doesn't work with people outside our existing supporters***

Your audience needs to see that the problem you're talking about has a solution that they can support, which will correct the problem and bring the situation back into line with what they find important. Outside your supporters, your audience will not be able to see how a technical law or policy delivers the things they value unless you spell it out.

### ***What to do differently***

The solution you give needs to match to the problem you've explained and its causes and you need to show how the solution will correct the situation to bring it into line with the vision you set out earlier.

You can name the policy or law you are promoting. But focus more on what the policies deliver for people and how they bring the problematic situation back into line with the vision of the world you outlined in the first part of your message.



## Examples

Below are some examples of how to talk about the laws and policies we are promoting in a way that explains what they deliver to our audience.

<b><i>The policy</i></b>	<b><i>Explaining the policy in terms of what it delivers</i></b>
Increase the minimum wage	Working people should earn enough to support their families. That's why we support a higher minimum wage.
Create an anti-corruption unit	When our contributions fund the things our communities need, we can all thrive. An anti-corruption office can make sure our leaders fund our lives.
Reduction in emissions	When we cut polluting gases we give our families clean air for a healthy future. That's why we're calling for a reduction in emissions.
Safe and legal migration routes	It should be possible for people to come here without needing to risk their lives and everything they own. That's why we're calling for safe and legal routes.
Transparency measures / access to documents	When our leaders show citizens what they are doing with our resources we can demand that they fund the things we find important. That's why we're calling for transparency.

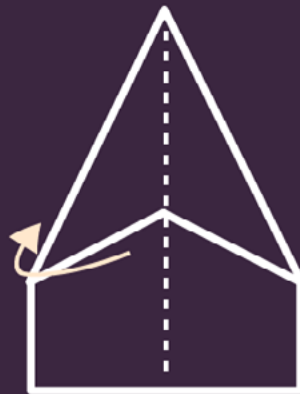
# ***PART TWO: HOW TO STRUCTURE A WINNING MESSAGE***



4.



5.



6.



This section shows you how to implement these general rules into a winning message. A winning message follows a specific structure and order. The order is important and has an impact on how effective the message is at moving people.

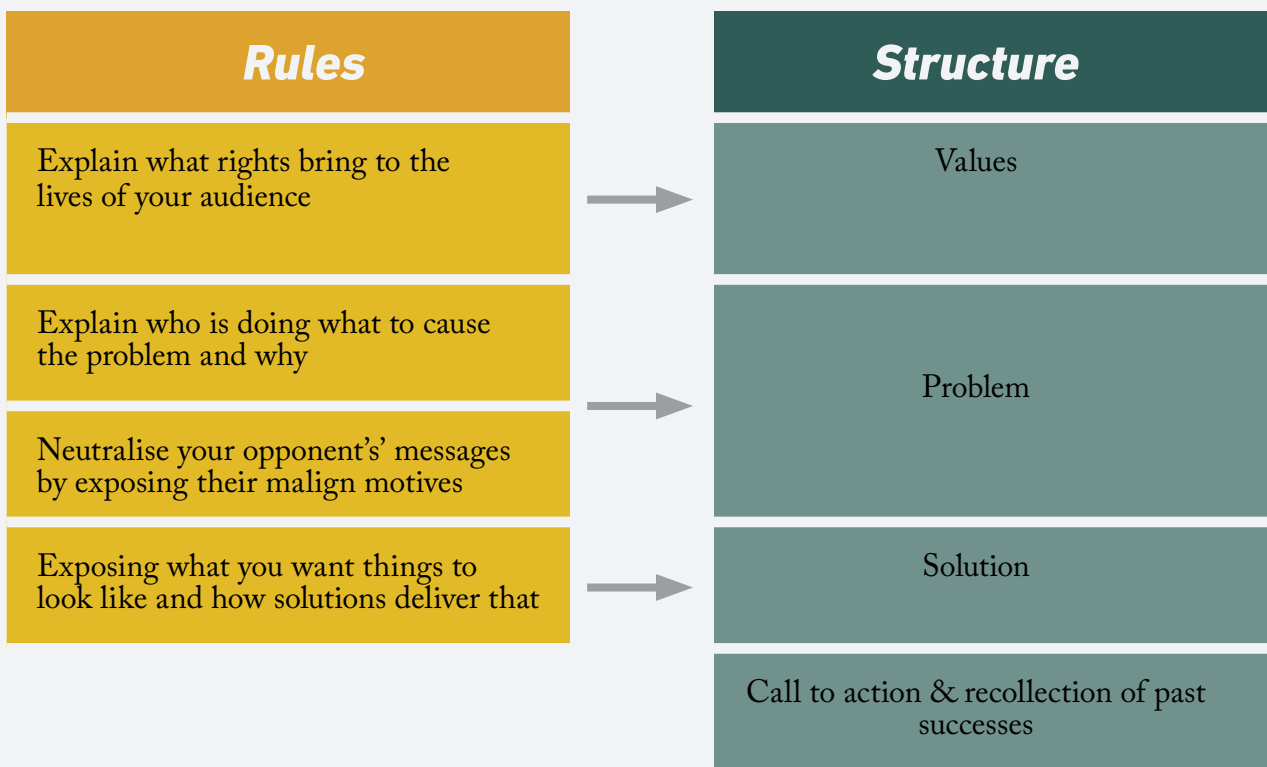
## I. Values

Begin your message by reminding your audience how the cause you're promoting helps to make them free, allows them to show care or compassion, creates a fairer society or allows them to work with others. For human rights activists this means explaining how the rights you're talking about deliver these values. The explanations and ex-

amples set out under Rule 1 show you what this looks like in practice.

## II. Problem

Identify who is doing what and why to cause the problem. If part of the problem is that your opponents are using smear campaigns against you, the groups you work for or other institutions that promote human rights, explain the malign motive behind what your opponents are saying. Remember that you should devote no more than one third of your overall message to talking about the problem. The explanations and examples set out under Rules 2 and 3 show you what this looks like in practice.





### **III. Solution**

Show your audience that there are things we can do to bring the situation back into line with the values you set out in the first step, and that by coming together, we can demand these changes. Don't forget to talk about what your solutions deliver rather than just naming the policies you're asking for. The explanations and examples set out under Rule 4 show you what this looks like in practice.

### **IV. Call to action and recollection of past successes**

By asking your audience to do something to show that they support your solution you help to build their attachment to your cause. Research shows that when people take action to support a cause it helps create a 'social identity' for them, which in turn makes them more likely to remain engaged and take further action in future. This is important if you're trying to expand your base of supporters to mobilise in future campaigns. A call to action can be something small like asking them to share or respond to your content.

Research also shows that even when you convince your audience to agree with you, they can still be reluctant do things you ask of them because they have a sense of fatalism and feel that 'nothing changes'. But giving them

examples of times in the past when something in society was changed for the better by people coming together, you can help to overcome their scepticism. The example you give need not relate directly to the cause you are promoting. Here are some examples:

'Just like we joined together to achieve paid parental leave / marriage equality / free pre-school day care / care for each other during the pandemic ... we can demand that our leaders... If you agree, share this content / talk to a neighbour / tell us why you care and include the campaign hashtag ...'

### **Examples of human rights messages using the four-part structure**

Below are some examples of how to apply the general principles of human rights messaging using the structure of an effective message.

#### **How to use the four-part structure**

Follow the four-part structure in full as often as you can. We've tried to give examples here that are short enough to be used on social media but, of course, you won't be

able to deliver the whole message in full every time. Sometimes, you will only have space to use a word or phrase that captures the essence of your message, like a slogan with an image. The idea is that this makes your audience recall your full message which they have received through other products. Other times you may need to focus on a single element of your message that needs more attention, for example to change how your audience understands the problem, emphasise past successes, break a stereotype or hammer home your vision of a better future. Look at

your campaign materials in the round and ask: are there enough products carrying the whole message for my audience to see it; do my other products either remind my audience of that overall message or help them understand it? And don't forget, you don't need to deliver all your message in text: you can represent elements of it through images and videos. More on this in 'Part Three: Guidance on audio-visual materials'.

## **Topic: Gerrymandering**

### ***Longer message (for use in interview, video script or to structure a blog)***

No matter who we vote for, most of us believe that voters pick our leaders, our leaders should not get to pick their voters.

But a handful of politicians have divided us into constituencies in a way that makes it easier for them to be re-elected, instead of according to the number of people who live in the area. They want the votes of their supporters to count more than others.

When we come together, we can demand that our representatives draw constituency lines that give each of our voices an equal say over who governs for us.

[Insert call to action & recollection of past success]

### ***Shorter version (for social media post)***

Most of us agree that we choose our leaders, not the other way around.

But certain politicians want some people's votes to count more than others so they can stay in power.

Everyone should have an equal say over who gets to govern for us.

For further guidance on fair districting, including samples of visual resources, see: [ASO Communications et al., 'Fair districting guide with social content'](#).

## **Topic: Hate campaigns**

### **Longer message (for use in interview, video script or to structure a blog)**

No matter our party, most of us agree that candidates are supposed to attract voters by convincing us of their vision of a better future.

Unfortunately, for certain politicians being in office is about making money for themselves and their corporate donors. Because they have nothing to offer, they try to win votes by making us fear each other for who we love, who we pray to or the colour of our skin.

We reject their attempts to divide us. When we join together across our differences, we can demand leaders who work for all of us and not just the very richest.

[Insert call to action & recollection of past success]

### **Shorter version (for social media post)**

Most of us want candidates who court voters with a vision of a brighter future.

But some politicians just want to make money for their corporate donors. Because they have nothing to offer, they peddle fear & hatred.

Joining together we can demand leaders who work for all of us.

For further guidance, including visual materials see:

[We Make The Future, 'Digital toolkit: Fund our future'](#)

[We Make The Future, 'Race class narrative: Example language'](#)

## **Topic: Fair wages and being part of a trade union**

### **Longer message (for use in interview, video script or to structure a blog)**

We all rely on people who drive our buses, stock our supermarket shelves, and care for our loved ones when they're sick. People who work deserve to earn enough to support their families.

But the billionaires running corporations refuse to pay the people who make their profits enough to make ends meet.

When we join together in a union we can negotiate a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. So that all of us can give our loved ones a home and have free time to spend with the people we care about.

[Insert call to action and recollection of past success]

**Shorter version (for social media post)**

People who work deserve to earn enough to support their families.

But many corporations refuse to pay a fair wage to the people who create their profits.

By joining together we can demand that greedy billionaires pay people who work enough to live on.

Examples of videos for campaigns on fair working conditions and trade unions:

[Join. For a better life.](#); [Save our weekend.](#)

**Topic: Rule of law**

**Longer message (for use in interview, video script or to structure a blog)**

No matter our party, most of us want leaders who use our resources to fund the schools, hospitals and roads our communities need. Independent judges check that politicians stick to the rules to make sure our contributions reach the services we rely on.

But today certain politicians are taking our resources for themselves and their corporate friends. They want to hand pick the country's top judges so that the courts will look the other way when they line their pockets with our contributions.

We know what works. For decades we have had rules that guarantee that our judges don't answer to politicians. By joining together, we can demand that our judges answer only to the law, so that our leaders fund the services our communities need to thrive.

[Insert call to action and recollection of past success]

**Shorter version (for social media post)**

Most of us want leaders who fund the schools & hospitals our communities rely on.

But some politicians want to hand pick judges so the courts look the other way when they steal our contributions.

Joining together we can demand independent judges who protect the funds we need.

For further guidance see: [Israel Butler, 'A short messaging guide for proponents of the rule of law'](#).

## **Topic: Media freedom**

### ***Longer message (for use in interview, video script or to structure a blog)***

No matter our background or where we live, most of us want our elected representatives to govern for all of us. To make sure our leaders are doing what's best for us, we rely on independent journalists to report the truth, and get answers to the questions we want answered.

But today certain politicians want to take control of the public broadcaster so they can dictate what we hear from journalists.

By coming together, we can demand that journalists are free to report on how our leaders are using the powers we've given them, so that our representatives answer to us for their choices.

[Insert call to action and recollection of past successes]

### ***Shorter version (for social media post)***

Most of us expect journalists to hold our leaders to account & report the truth.

But our leaders want to dictate the news so that they don't have to answer to us.

Together, we can demand that journalists are free to report on the how politicians use the powers we give them.

## **Topic: Protest**

### ***Longer message (for use in interview, video script or to structure a blog)***

No matter our party or what we do for a living, most of us want our elected representatives to listen to our concerns.

But a handful of politicians want to silence us by using bogus fines and lawsuits and misusing police officers to scare the citizens they are sworn to protect.

We reject their attempts to intimidate us. We know that when we join together across our differences we can demand a government that listens to its citizens.

[Insert call to action and recollection of past successes]

### ***Shorter version (for social media post)***

Most of us want our elected representatives to listen to our concerns.

But a handful of politicians want to silence us by using fines & misusing the police to intimidate the citizens they are sworn to protect.

Together we can demand a government that listens to its citizens.

For further guidance on the right to protest in the context of police reform, including visual materials see: [We Make The Future](#), [Digital & messaging toolkit: We know what keeps us safe](#). Example video: [Protest is as American as Baseball](#).

# ***PART THREE: GUIDANCE ON AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS***



7.



8.



9.



When you're using audio-visual materials, keep in mind that images are more striking than words. Whatever you represent in your image will constitute the biggest chunk of the overall message. This means that unless you're trying to mobilise only your existing supporters, you should not use your image to portray the harms you are trying to solve. Focusing on the problem can be useful if we want to inject energy into our supporters because it will tend to elicit anger and frustration from them. But if we want to talk to people outside our supporters, it's counterproductive. Remember: when we make the harms the biggest part of our message people outside our supporters will feel overwhelmed and demotivated, because the problem will seem too big to solve.

If you want to move people to agree with us, you should use the image to portray your vision of how things should be / the future you want to see, or your solution or your call to action or recollection of past successes.

## Images

Here are links to four visuals taken from the organisation 'We Make The Future' which illustrate well how to use visuals to display positive or informative elements of your message, rather than focusing on the harms or injustices you are combating.<sup>4</sup> The first

image portrays campaigners' target audience taking the action that campaigners are trying to encourage (to vote). The second image shows a vision of what life looks like when the solution campaigners are asking for is implemented (government funding of public services). The third image contains a reminder of our shared humanity and values (designed to diffuse divisive rhetoric from opponents). The fourth image breaks down who is behind the harm and their motivations (corporations that blame users of social services to distract from their wealth hoarding).

Below are links to images from campaigns on three topics. The following paragraphs contrast examples of ineffective against more promising visuals to give campaigners inspiration when developing their own products.

### **Respect for women and girls**

Here is a collection of images from the left the European Commission's 'Say no! Stop violence against women' campaign. As seen here, campaigns promoting respect and equal treatment of women and girls tend to be phrased negatively, calling the audience to 'stop' or 'end' harm. Often these campaigns use imagery that depicts the harm or the harmful behaviour, as can be seen among the linked campaign materials. Activists would do better to use posi-

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Similar images can also be found in: [We Make The Future](#), '[Digital toolkit: Fund our future](#)'



tively phrased language that expresses the cause they're fighting for in terms of what the situation should be, rather than what they want to end. Or alternatively to use imagery to help the audience understand who or what is causing the structural problems that allows violence against women and girls to continue and why.

Here is a collection of images from UN Women's 'Orange the world' campaign. Some of these visuals repeat the mistake of focusing on the harm by showing or suggesting acts of violence and abuse. Other images are more positive, showing some of the solutions proposed by campaigners, like support services or solidarity.

The municipality of Victoria's 'Respect women' campaign contains images with groups of 'ordinary people' reflecting a cross section of society, attributing certain statements to them, such as 'respect is...' and 'call it out'. Showing groups of people that reflect your target audience asserting a particular opinion or social rule functions as 'social proof', which can influence the behaviour and attitudes of your audience. Social proof signals to your audience what kinds of behaviour are acceptable among the social groups they belong to.

Here is an image is from the French Red Cross and Red Crescent's 'Orange the world' campaign. The image is relatively neutral, but the language is positively phrased, reminding the

audience of the standard of treatment we all want for ourselves and others. It would probably be more effective to adjust the wording to something like: 'All of us want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe', as this would remind men, boys as well as women and girls who have not experienced violence that we're talking about treatment of people they care about.

***Respect all of us no matter how old we are.***

This image is from a UN campaign against ageism. It focuses on the harm that campaigners want to fight – the negative stereotypes attached to age – rather than how things should be: that all of us deserve to live in dignity regardless of age. The darkness, negative self-identification over the faces and their negative expressions are likely to be unappealing to the audience and work against the invitation in the text to 'join the movement'. Again, most campaigns against ageism focus their images and language on the harm that they are against, rather than showing the world they want to build.

This image is taken from the same UN campaign against ageism, is more positive because it encourages us to think of how things should be and the joy we express when we feel a sense of belonging in society.

These images are taken from an unlaunched campaign prepared by an advertising agency, which was intended

to create a positive image of ageing. These images display older people expressing joy or in positive situations and either says that age is irrelevant to what we can do or is something that enables us to have new experiences.

### **People who migrate**

This image is taken from our own [Liberties website](#). It is typical of the kind of scene used by campaigners, which is to focus on the harm they are combating. Research shows that this backfires, as audiences tend to interpret images of people who migrate behind fences as confirmation of the dominant framing pushed by our opponents, which is that people who migrate are dangerous and therefore need to be locked up.

These images are from a [campaign by GetUp](#), hosted on the website of [Words To Win By](#) a podcast which chronicles case studies of successful social justice campaigns. Two of these images are good examples of how to create empathy with people who migrate by highlighting how they have the same aspirations and values as our audience. This is helpful to dissolve negative stereotypes pushed by our opponents.

These are images are from a pilot campaign, '[Together Human](#)', by Juma. They emphasise that people who migrate are already part of our society and have a lot in common with the audience, like the jobs they work in or the hobbies they pursue. This helps to counter the perception pushed by our

opponents that people who migrate cannot integrate into our societies.

## **Humour**

Using humour can be a good way to disarm viewers who might otherwise be sceptical about your message. However, be careful when using irony or sarcasm. The latter only work when your audience is already familiar with the issue and agree with your position. That means you should be careful using irony or sarcasm when targeting people outside your supporters.

Examples of content using humour:

'[Fund our future](#)' (on fair taxation & funding economic and social rights)

[Election campaign video](#) (diffusing the power of anticipated smear campaigns)

## **Videos**

Campaign videos should run for no more than one minute, and 30 seconds is even better.

For examples of videos that contain a message following the four-part structure, see:

'[Together for yes](#)' (on access to abortion).

'[Join. For a better life](#)' (on trade union rights).

‘A place where all people can thrive’  
(on access to clean energy).

For examples of shorter videos, see:

‘Make this a place where everyone can breathe’ (effective with African Americans and people of colour in the USA aimed at making their perception of Black Lives Matter protests more favourable).

‘Be a voter’ (effective at motivating people turned off by politics to vote).

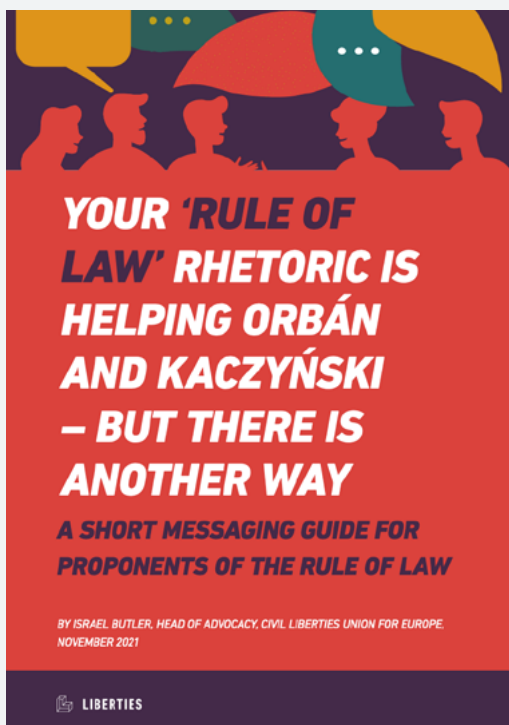
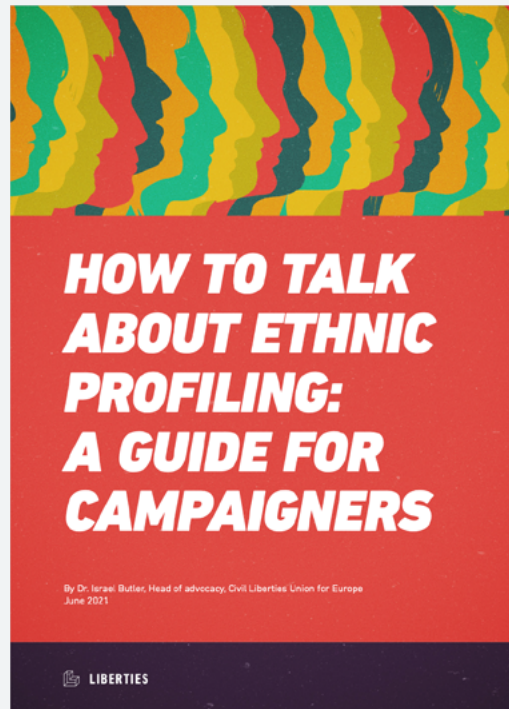
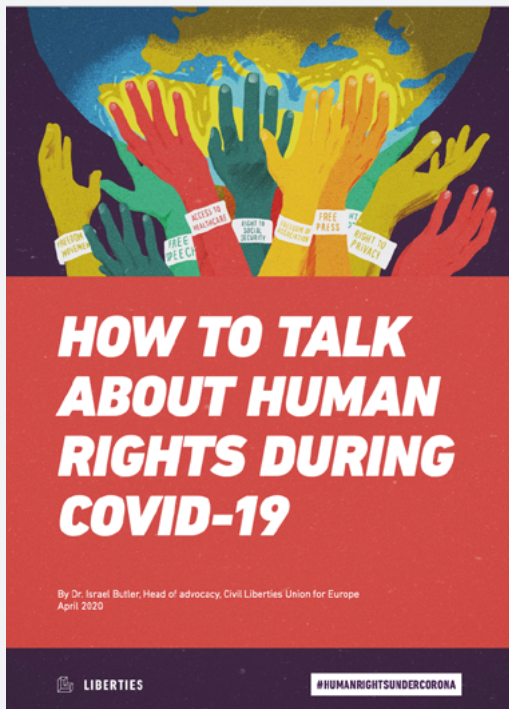
‘Accurate, honest, fully-funded education’ (for other audio-visual resources on the right to education, see: We Make the Future, ‘Messaging guide and digital toolkit, ‘Freedom to learn’).

‘Together for Yes’ compilation (campaign in Ireland promoting access to abortion care).

# GET IN TOUCH

Readers who would like to receive training or mentoring from Liberties in how to apply the advice in this guide should feel free to write to us at: [i.butler@liberties.eu](mailto:i.butler@liberties.eu).

Other messaging guides published by Liberties are available on our [website](#).





The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a non-governmental organisation promoting the civil liberties of everyone in the European Union. We are headquartered in Berlin and have a presence in Brussels. Liberties is built on a network of 19 national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU.

### **Website**

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3rd floor

12099 Berlin

Germany

### **Link**

<https://www.liberties.eu/f/kdleeg>

### **Download further messaging guides**

[How To Talk About Ethnic Profiling](#)

[How To Talk About Human Rights Under The Pandemic](#)

[A Short Messaging Guide For The Proponents of The Rule of Law](#)

[How To Talk About Civic Space: A Guide For Progressive Civil Society Facing Smear Campaigns](#)

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