

Prisoner of Conscience

Jenni Williams

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Jenni Williams of WOZA at the I.S.
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Jenni's Story

Jenni Williams lives in Zimbabwe, a country in Southern Africa. A lot of people in Zimbabwe live in extreme poverty. People living in poverty face many problems. These include not having enough food or clean water, living in poor or dangerous housing, not being

able to send their children to school, and not having choices in how they would like to live their lives. These are things that all human beings should have – they are human rights.

The human rights of many people are being denied by the government in Zimbabwe. In 2003, Jenni and some of her friends decided to do something to help people in their country. They started a group called WOZA – Women of Zimbabwe Arise. Jenni's group brings people in Zimbabwe together to stand up for their human rights and freedoms. Because they disagree with the government, Jenni and lots of her friends have been put in prison. Jenni has been arrested 33 times, simply for speaking out against the government.

Members of Amnesty International support Jenni by sending letters and emails to the police in Zimbabwe, telling them that they should not arrest her as she has done nothing wrong. She is simply standing up for the rights of people in her country. The support and friendship of people around the world makes Jenni and the group feel like they are not alone. This gives them the courage and strength to continue their struggle for human rights.

Activity:

Can you find Zimbabwe on a world map or globe?

Activity:

*Which human rights are being denied to Jenni Williams and her friends from WOZA in this story?
Look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights poster to help you answer this question.*

Where? Zimbabwe
Who? Jenni Williams and other human rights defenders
When? Prisoner since 2003



Location of Zimbabwe in Southern Africa

Zimbabwe Facts

- **Population:** 12,521,000
- **Capital:** Harare
- **Official languages:** English, Shona, Ndebele



Members of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) in 2009

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“Amnesty International is our big sister. When I’m in prison, if I know that someone, my big sister, is shouting for me, telling people about me, then I feel less distressed, less frightened and less alone”.

Jenni Williams

Activity:

Read the story of Jenni Williams and her friends from WOZA.

In your group, talk about what Jenni's life might be like.

Answer these questions:

- *Is it fair that Jenni was put in prison for speaking out against the government of Zimbabwe?*
- *How do you think Jenni felt when she was arrested by the police?*
- *Do you think it is important that people around the world support Jenni and her friends? Why?*
- *How would you feel if you were put in prison for giving your opinion?*

Explain your ideas to the whole class.

What is a Prisoner of Conscience?

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A prisoner of conscience is someone who is arrested and put into jail simply for their opinion and what they believe.

Why Does This Happen?

Sometimes, governments don't want people to talk about what they think, especially if the person's beliefs could take power away from the government. Some people think that their government is doing something wrong and want to work to make things better for ordinary people. Some people practice a different religion than most other people in their country and are treated badly just because they are different. Everyone has the right to their own beliefs and opinions. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, governments are not allowed to arrest or imprison people for what they think.

What Does It Mean To Have Freedom of Thought?

Freedom of thought means you are allowed to think whatever you want and have whatever opinion you want without being punished by your government or treated badly by anyone else.



Prisoner

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What Does It Mean To Have Freedom of Religion?

Freedom of religion means that you are allowed to believe whatever you want to and practice whichever religion you'd like to, whether it's Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, any other religion, or no religion, without being punished by your government or treated badly by anyone else.



School Children protesting with Amnesty about Prisoners of Conscience

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What Happens to Prisoners of Conscience?

Often, prisoners of conscience are arrested secretly, and aren't always told exactly why. They are often kept in jail for a very long time, sometimes without ever having a trial. When there are trials, they are often unfair, as the government wants to make sure the person is kept in prison even without a good reason. Prisoners of conscience are often treated poorly, not allowed to speak to their lawyers or family, aren't allowed visitors, and are even sometimes denied access to basic needs like food, water, and health care.

Quick Facts: In 2010...

- **Prisoners of conscience** were being held in at least **48** countries throughout the world
- Prisoners were given **unfair trials** in *at least* 55 countries around the world
- **"Freedom of Expression"** (being allowed to talk about your opinions and beliefs) was **restricted** or denied in *at least* **96** countries around the world. That's **60%** of all of the world's countries.