

'Letters for Mercy' - writing guidelines



WRITING TO YOUR MP

Your MP is your representative in the House of Commons and contacting them to gain their support for an issue can make a real difference. Writing to your MP provides an opportunity for action in the areas that specifically interest you. Also, many MPs have said that receiving a personal letter from an individual is highly effective in highlighting issues to them.

Your MP can take a number of actions on your behalf, including:

- Writing to government Ministers to raise your concerns. If your MP writes to a Minister on your behalf they will receive a reply signed by the Minister while a letter sent directly to a Minister will probably only be seen by a civil servant
- Signing an Early Day Motion (EDM) in the House of Commons. These motions give the government an idea of what issues matter to MPs and they can be influential if enough MPs sign them
- Raising issues during debates and tabling parliamentary questions to the government

Step 1: Who is my MP?

- You can find out who your MP is at www.locata.co.uk/commons or phone the House of Commons Information office on 020 7219 4272

Step 2: Addressing your Letter

- Once you have found out the name of and some details about your local MP, you can write to them at the House of Commons:

(Name of MP) MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

- Your letter should begin, Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms followed by the MP's name
- Sign off your letter with, "Yours sincerely"
- If your MP is or has been a Minister, then your letter should begin, Rt Hon (Name) MP

Step 3: Writing an Effective Letter

- Get to point straight away. MPs are busy so make sure the letter has a clear title
- Keep it short. One side of paper is usually sufficient to make your points. Long letters are less likely to be read
- Be polite. The response you get is likely to be more positive and helpful if your approach is a constructive one. If you have time, thank your MP for their reply. This will help to build a better relationship with them.
- Use your own words. You are likely to make a more significant impact on your MP if you express points in your own words.
- Remind your MP why the issue is important
- Recognise things that your MP may have already done on the issue
- Make it really clear what you are asking them to do in response
- State that you are writing as a Micah Challenge supporter
- If you have met your MP before, mention this

Remember!

- Include your full name and address – it needs to be made clear that you are a constituent and the MP has to be able to send a reply
- Only write to your own MP: an MP's job is to look after the concerns of their own constituency
- If you write a letter by hand, make sure it's legible and if you print your letter, sign it personally
- Stick to one issue per letter
- MPs who are Ministers can't do certain things such as sign Early Day Motions (EDMs) but you can still ask them to take note of the issues
- You can use *Hansard* to find out what questions your MP has asked recently or what speeches they have made, available in most libraries or online at www.parliament.uk

SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO REQUEST OF YOUR MP

This is an opportunity for you to write to your MP on the area that specifically interests you. When writing to your MP it is important to express that you are writing as a supporter of Micah Challenge UK and specifically the *Blow the Whistle* campaign.

It is also important for you to ask your MP to do a specific task. This can be signing an Early Day Motion, which is like a Parliamentary petition for MPs to sign, tabling a question on an issue or writing to the Prime Minister or Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn.

With this in mind below are the five policy asks of the *Blow the Whistle* campaign and some suggestions of what you might want to ask to your MP to do within the specific issue of choice.

One of the first things you can do, which fits into each of the areas below, is ask your MP to sign EDM 1219 on keeping the promises made at the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles.

HIV and AIDS

Ensure money and plans are in place to deliver HIV prevention, treatment and care by 2010.

Ask your MP to:

- Sign EDM 107 on Universal Access to HIV Treatment by 2010 if they have not already done so
- Email Hilary Benn urging him to ensure that the G8 development ministers undertake action to ensure the achievement of Universal Access to HIV Prevention, Treatment and Care by 2010

For more background information visit www.stopaidscampaign.org.uk

Water and Sanitation

Ensure that the G8 agrees a robust Global Action Plan on water and sanitation and then work hard to implement it.

Ask your MP to:

- Sign EDM 1113, which is calling for an end to water poverty
- Write to the Prime Minister to ask him to ensure that the G8 reviews their commitments to water and sanitation when it meets in Germany, and that it commits to drafting a new Global Action Plan by 2008

For more background information visit www.endwaterpoverty.org

Stop Climate Chaos

Ensure that the UK's Climate Change Bill includes an annual target of reducing domestic carbon emissions by at least 3%.

Ask your MP to:

- Write to the Secretary of State for the Environment, David Miliband, expressing support for the draft Climate Change Bill but expressing concern that:
 - the target of 60% cuts by 2050 is not ambitious enough - it should be at least 80% if we are to avoid dangerous climate change
 - five year budgets will make it difficult to hold the current Government to account - the budget periods should be shortened, preferably to yearly targets
 - emissions from aviation and shipping are not included in the targets proposed - it is vital that they be included
- Write to the PM asking him to use his influence at the G8 and at the UN Climate Change talks in December to obtain an international agreement that will keep temperature rises below 2°C. This must come into effect when the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012.

For more background information visit www.tearfund.org/climatechange

Trade Justice

Ensure regional trade agreements such as the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements help bring about trade justice.

Ask your MP to:

- Write to Hilary Benn urging the UK government to increase significantly its efforts to influence other EU member states to produce public positions on EPAs that are at least in line with its own position, and actively and publicly raise its objections to EPAs with the European Council and European Commission
- To write to the Prime Minister to ask him to stop forcing developing countries to liberalise through regional trade agreements and allow them the flexibility to choose their own trade policies according to their development needs

For more background information visit www.tearfund.org/trade or www.worldvision.org.uk/server.php?show=nav.41

Inclusive Education

Ensure the inclusion of disabled children within national education plans.

Ask your MP to:

- Email Hilary Benn urging the UK Government to ensure that the 10-year education plans are inclusive of disabled children before funding them
- Write to the Prime Minister asking him to urge the G8 donors who have not yet reached their *fair share* of overall funding for basic education to commit to reach this level by 2008, when an additional 40 countries are likely to be able to significantly expand their basic education programmes

For more background information visit www.worldvision.org.uk