
Letters capable of changing lives

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On Wednesday, 11th December, the K4 student club changed into one of the 25 places in the Czech Republic where you could have participated in a Letter Writing Marathon “Write for Rights”– one of the world’s biggest human rights event organised yearly by Amnesty International to mark International Human Rights Day (10th December).

While many others might have been chatting on Facebook, reading Tweets or checking their e-mail, the Marathon’s participants got hold of pens, pencils and paper and enthusiastically started to write letters of support for wrongfully imprisoned, persecuted or oppressed people from all around the world. In the K4 club, attention was drawn to cases of the Ethiopian Eskinder Nega, sentenced to 18 years for criticising the government, the Mexican Miriam Lopéz, who was tortured and sexually abused by soldiers, and to the case of hundreds of inhabitants of the Nigerian region Badia East, who are left without home after a forced demolition in the region.

All letters written during the “Write for Rights” days (6th – 16th December) are addressed to the main representatives of the countries concerned and should influence them and cause an improvement of the current situation. Although it may seem that one cannot reach much just by writing letters, the opposite proved to be true. The power lies in numbers, and Amnesty International organises “Write for Rights“ in countries all over the world – everyone can run their own event: group of friends, school, company – one just has to register. Solely during the last year, almost two million letters were sent to bring the authorities to action. The movement has so far achieved e.g. the release of blogger Jabbar Savalan (Azerbaijan) or the establishment of a Special Cabinet for Women in Guatemala.

The number of visitors in K4 this year shows a growing interest for the event – without doubts also thanks to a rich accompanying programme of the evening, organised by PUSA, the Prague University Group of Amnesty International, with the help of Lungta, a non-governmental non-profit organization concerned with Tibet and Tibetan culture. Visitors of the event could have seen a photo-exhibition about Tibet, listen to a Himalayan fairytale for adults, taste Tibetan soup Thungpa or watch a documentary about the 11th Panchen Lama. One of the guests of the evening was a Tibetan writer and poet, Sonam Gyaltsu. A folk singer Alena and the beat band Podzemníci played to accompany the letter writing.

Acclaim came not just from the visitors – also the team of PUSA were satisfied with the event. The number of hand-written letters only proves that the “Write for Rights” evening organised by PUSA in K4 fulfilled one of the group’s main goals – to wake public’s interest in human rights. PUSA, the first university group of Amnesty International established in the Czech Republic, operates at Charles University for four years now and offers student the possibility to take part in events such as signing of petitions, flash mobs and other events and campaigns to support victims of injustice.

Only time will show, what improvements in the field of human rights will be achieved thanks to the Letter Writing Marathon 2013. It seems, however, that even in an era of texting, e-mails and social networking, letters have not lost their significance and romantic charm. Hopefully it will also turn out that not every marathon will be just a long-distance run.

David Williams is a third year student studying a BA in Music from University College Dublin, and is studying here on Erasmus for one year with the Faculty of Education in Charles University. David is focusing on his love for music with his Violin and Conducting ambitions. David was keen to write for the iForum as his ideal job would be related with media, radio and performance.