


Appendix C. Best Practices: Using Popular Social Media Platforms for Effective Human Rights Advocacy

The Advocates Post

The Advocates for Human Rights works globally to fight injustice, rebuild the human rights movement.

“I have a bullet in my foot from trying to vote!”



By Michele Garnett McKenzie

I'm sitting in my office, catching up with a former client. A member of the political opposition who fled Cameroon and sought asylum nearly a decade ago, she had stopped by to show me her new U.S. passport. Our talk turned to the November elections—she was so proud to finally be an American citizen and to be voting for the first time in the United States.

But when I mentioned that Minnesotans will be deciding whether to amend the constitution to require government-issued photo identification to vote, she became angry. I didn't have to frame the issue for her. I didn't have to give her any background about the Voting Rights Act or explain that this is a voter restriction proposal that threatens to disenfranchise thousands of Minnesotans. Before I could even tell her that The Advocates opposes the measure her eyes flashed and her voice became stern.

“You have no idea how precious the right to vote is,” she told me. “I have a bullet in my foot from trying to vote!”

Blogs

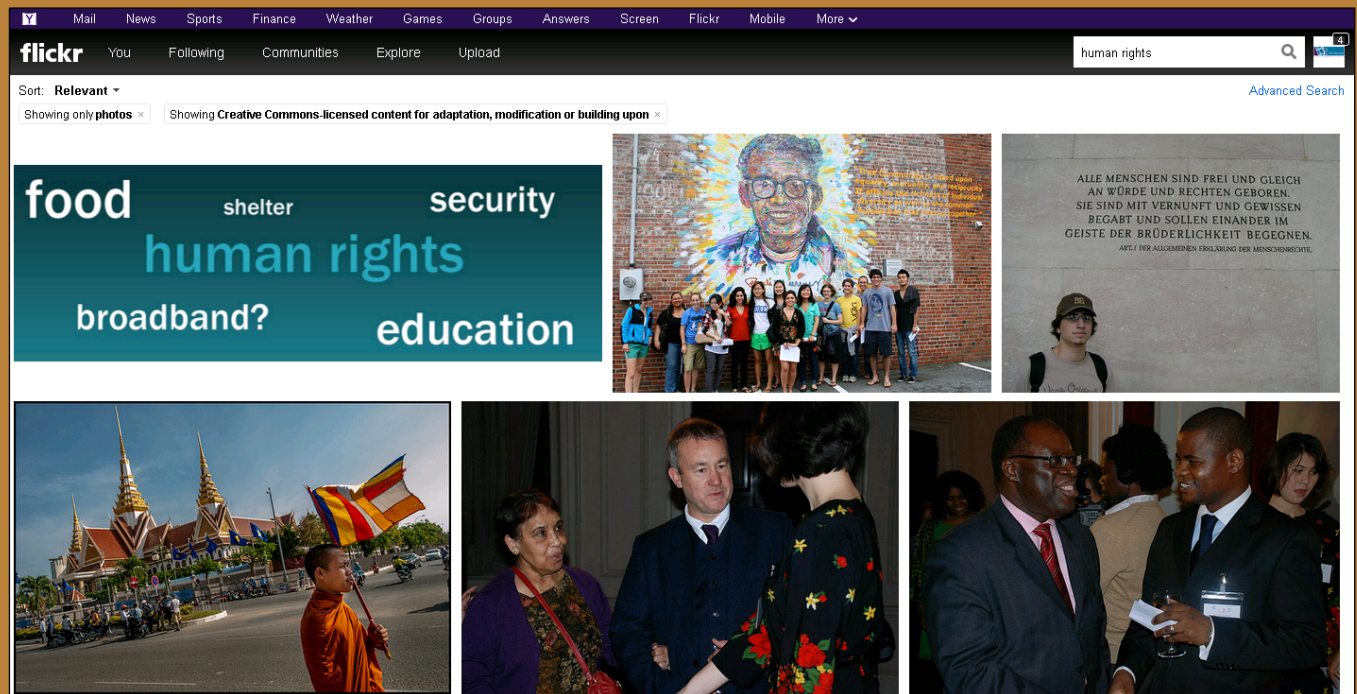
Blogs are a highly visual medium, so it's good to dedicate some attention to planning out photographs and other graphics used in blog posts. Effective blog posts often lead with engaging personal stories and conclude with an action item for the reader to get involved. Blog posts can also be a good networking tool; a blog post can cross-reference and link to another post by an ally covering the same issue or event. Advocacy-oriented blog posts on human rights topics can be particularly effective when they draw readers in by beginning with the story of a person personally affected by the topic, as demonstrated above. Nonprofit Tech for Good offers content ideas for blog posts: <http://www.nptechforgood.com/2013/03/06/11-blog-content-ideas-for-nonprofits-2/>.

Blog posts should be brief and include heading and block quotes to make it easier for the reader to identify the main points. If an organization has a lot to say on a topic, it should consider doing a series of shorter posts, rather than one long one.

Practitioner’s Tip: Using Photo Sharing Sites to Find Images for Social Media Advocacy

Creative commons photo sharing sites like flickr.com can be a great source of images for blogs and other social media. Users who find an image they’d like to use should click the “Request to license” link near the license on the photo page. If there’s no “Request to license” link, users should consult the author’s profile to see whether they grant a general license, or contact the member directly via FlickrMail by hovering the mouse over the author’s “buddy icon” and clicking the arrow to open the “person menu.” Give the owner of the photo as much information as possible about the photo and how it would be used.

In many cases, Flickr users issue a general Creative Commons license for others to use their photos. Flickr allows users to do an advanced search that limits results to Creative Commons-licensed content. Another option is an advanced Google image search (http://www.google.com/advanced_image_search) limited to usage rights that are “free to use or share.” A third option is Wikimedia Commons (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page), a database of more than 20 million freely usable media files. Even if a source is in the public domain or has a Creative Commons License, advocates should be sure to cite the photo source as the author requests and to include URL to the original image, as well as information about or a link to any particular Creative Commons license that applies to the work.¹



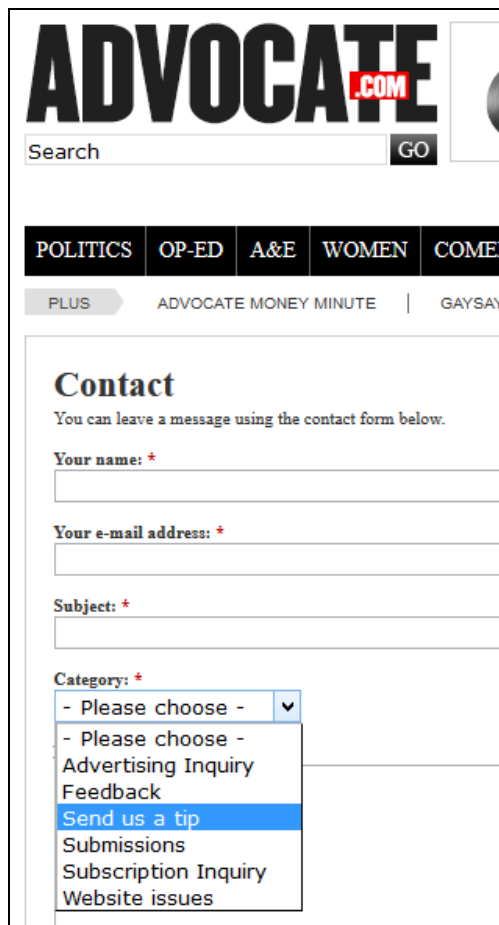
1. Getting the word out

Organizations should update their blog regularly. But groups cannot rely on a blog alone as a definitive form of public advocacy; readers may not check blogs frequently even if they support the organization that maintains the

¹ Flickr, “General Flickr Questions,” accessed Jan. 23, 2014, <http://www.flickr.com/help/general/#157>.

blog. Advocates who maintain a blog must share the blog address and links to specific blog posts with the public so people know they can read the blog for information. As with organizational websites, the public will not visit the blog as a source of human rights information unless they know about it. Email alerts and other social media can generate blog traffic. Most blog platforms allow authors to identify keywords to describe each blog post. These keywords can help drive traffic to the blog by increasing the likelihood that a post will turn up as a result when the keywords are used as a search term. Advocates should identify high-traffic blogs and other online news sources that may be interested in a particular blog post, and then reach out to those sources to alert them about the post and ask that they help get the word out.

Some local news organizations “reblog” interesting posts; advocates should make sure that their blog is on the radar of these media outlets, and should contact them directly whenever they publish a particularly timely or thought-provoking post. Many online news sources look for tips from readers as a way to share content, so advocates can and should tip them off about new and timely blog posts:



2. Moderating comments

Allowing unfettered public comments on a blog can be problematic. Individuals may post biased, insensitive, incendiary, or uninformed comments in response to a blog post, and spam comments can be rampant. The organization should have a policy for moderating such comments and promptly removing them. It is a good practice to clearly state the comment moderation policy in the blog. For example, The Advocates for Human Rights uses the following comment policy statement: Please comment to join our community of human rights

advocates. The Advocates for Human Rights produces this blog in a spirit of thoughtful communication. Comments are open, but are moderated.

Ten Simple Tips to Create Powerful Blog Posts, from Blogtips:²

1. Make the title short, catchy, and clear.
2. Sculpt the paragraph. The first paragraph is critical to convincing the reader to read the entire post.
3. Tell a story to help the reader relate to the issue on a personal level and to keep the reader engaged.
4. Use pictures. Blogs are a highly visual medium.
5. Make it short.
6. Use simple, concise, accurate language.
7. Use short paragraphs.
8. Use hyperlinks to reference other sources, blogs, etc.
9. Round up the blog post to make the reader feel like the story is complete.
10. Have fun!

3. Event-based blogging

Organizations can create a specialized blogging strategy around important events. In the lead-up to the event, groups should: (1) identify any ally organizations that are also planning to cover the event; (2) make writing assignments for all individuals who will draft blog posts for the organizational blog and establish deadlines for submitting and reviewing drafts; (3) publish a post providing some background and context for the event, along with preparations and expectations.

Examples of Event-based Blogging

1. The Advocates Post provides some background about an event and the blogger's expectation and fears about what is to come:



² Blogtips, "Writing Good Blog Posts: The Art of Seduction," Apr. 14, 2013, <http://www.blogtips.org/how-to-write-good-blogposts/>.

2. During the event, participants should publish posts explaining their feelings and expectations, what they did to prepare, and how things are going so far. For an example of this kind of a post, visit:

<http://theadvocatespost.org/2012/12/03/working-together-for-womens-human-rights-in-moldova/>.

3. Soon after the event, a participant should publish a blog post describing how things went, personal reactions, and any next steps. For an example of this kind of post, visit:

<http://theadvocatespost.org/2013/03/11/uns-commission-on-the-status-of-women-annual-meeting-inspiring/>

Burmese Bloggers Report Human Rights Violations During “Saffron Revolution”

In September 2007, the people of Burma rose up against the country’s military regime. At the time, the government tightly controlled the country’s media, making it difficult for outsiders to get information about the situation on the ground. But the movement that came to be known as the “Saffron Revolution” succeeded in getting the world’s attention. Bloggers and other digital activists flooded the internet with photos and videos of monks leading large, peaceful demonstrations against the government. Citizen-journalists used their mobile phones to take photos and videos, and then they secretly uploaded them to the internet from internet cafes, or sent digital files across the border to be uploaded. When the government used violence against the peaceful protesters, activists gave the outside world a glimpse of what was happening inside the country. The social media campaign prompted activists around the world to join the democratic struggle by holding protests and demonstrations in their own countries. Governments around the world issued strong statements against the military regime.³

Facebook

After a group has created an organizational page on Facebook, it can start creating and sharing content to gain followers and to engage its intended audience.⁴ Facebook offers a comprehensive guide called *Building your Presence with Facebook Pages: A Guide for Causes and Nonprofits*, available here: <https://fb-public.app.box.com/s/8dxyv66biabfnesvr3jj>.

Types of content to share on Facebook:

- **Status updates:** Post brief original updates or share posts from other individuals or pages.
- **Videos:** Embed YouTube and Vimeo clips and share them through status updates.
- **Photos:** Facebook is the largest photo-sharing site on the web and posts with images receive three times more exposure than other posts in a NewsFeed. To increase visibility, advocates should upload, share, and tag photos.⁵
- **Links:** Share content from the web by copying and pasting the link into a status update. If the preview appears below the draft status update, the URL can be deleted from the status update and replaced with brief introductory text.

³ Mriduhl Chowdhury, “The Role of the Internet in Burma’s Saffron Revolution,” Scribd (Sept. 2008) <http://www.scribd.com/doc/47535906/The-Role-of-the-Internet-in-Burmas-Saffron-Revolution>.

⁴ Socialbrite, “6 Simple Steps to Create a Facebook Page that just Works,” accessed Jan. 23, 2014, <http://www.socialbrite.org/2012/09/19/steps-to-create-a-facebook-page-that-works/>.

⁵ Socialbrite, “15 Ways to Enhance your Facebook Influence,” accessed Jan. 24, 2014, <http://www.socialbrite.org/2011/02/08/15-ways-to-enhance-your-facebook-influence/>.

- **Interacting:** Groups can tag individuals, organizations, and companies in status updates by typing “@” followed by their name. These tags allow the post to appear in the news feeds of fans and friends of that individual’s or group’s page. Status updates that ask questions can be a good way to start conversations.

Best practices for advocacy on Facebook:

- **Timing:** Post content in the mornings and evenings when users are spending more time on the site. Test out different times to see what time your audience interacts most with the content you share. The 18–24 year old demographic is most active and engages most with pages between 9 and 10 pm. Post content on weekends, too.⁶
- **Quality over quantity:** Be selective about what you post. Post less on Facebook than you would on Twitter, perhaps with one meaningful post once every other day.
- **Keep it short:** Posts between 100 and 250 characters are interacted with 60% more than posts over 250 characters.
- **Be interactive:** Opinion-driven and “fill-in-the-blank” questions will result in 90% more engagement than an average post.⁷
- **Be creative and visual:** Post videos, check in with Facebook Places, and share different types of content. Research shows that visual posts receive the most likes, comments, and shares. Multimedia content increases engagement and time spent on a group’s page.⁸
- **Be patient and consistent.** It will take time to grow a group’s Facebook network and improve visibility. 96% of fans and followers won’t return to a group’s page, so posting frequently is the only way to reach them.⁹

Tips for Increasing Engagement on Facebook

- 27 Ways to Increase Engagement on your Facebook Page, by John Hayden for Network for Good:
<http://www.slideshare.net/johnhaydon/27-ways-to-increase-engagement-on-your-facebook-page-12759591>
- Post Your Way to Facebook Success, from Facebook Marketing for Small Business:
<http://www.pagemodo.com/blog/post-facebook-success-infographic>

YouTube and Vimeo

After setting up a channel on YouTube or Vimeo, groups can start creating video and uploading it to their channels. It is easy for groups to get started with video messaging, and they can create video directly from a computer, tablet, or mobile phone camera.

YouTube has a Nonprofit Program to help organizations’ channels gain more exposure. It allows groups to:

- Add a button for donations within a channel or video;
- Live-stream events free of charge; and
- Ask for YouTube video volunteers.

YouTube also offers a Call-to-Action Overlay to allow groups to control the words and links that overlay a video, which can include a call to action, a request for donations, a link to a website, or additional content.⁸ For more information about Call-to-Action Overlays, consult

<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/150471?hl=en>.

Groups must apply for YouTube’s Nonprofit Program. Applications are available here:
https://www.youtube.com/ngo_apply?action_us=1.

⁶ Pamela Vaughn, “Demystifying How Facebook’s EdgeRank Algorithm Works,” Apr. 23, 2013, http://blog.hubspot.com/understanding-facebook-edgerank-algorithm-infographic_

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Pagemodo, “Post Your Way to Facebook Success,” accessed Jan. 23, 2014, <http://www.pagemodo.com/blog/post-facebook-success-infographic>.

⁹ Vaughn, “Demystifying How Facebook’s EdgeRank Algorithm Works,” *supra* note 6.

For directions on how to set up a Call-to-Action Overlay, watch this tutorial:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFuuVMQoh7M>.

Types of content to share on YouTube and Vimeo

Consider videos that tell a story, explain a concept or promotion, include a contest, update viewers, or thank donors. Be sure to have a clearly defined audience in mind when creating a video. It is helpful to make viewers feel like they can contribute to change by including a call to action in the clip. YouTube recommends that NGOs:

- Post compelling, short, and genuine digital stories;
- Partner with other organizations; and
- Embed video onto other social media platforms.¹⁰

Video storytelling is a tactic that can empower victims of human rights violations, mobilize action, and promote community reconciliation.¹¹ Video is an excellent tool for advocacy campaigns targeting people who may not have strong literacy skills.

Resources for Using Video as a Component of a Social media Advocacy Strategy

- Video Volunteers connects groups with video volunteers and trains advocates on how to create effective video-based advocacy campaigns: <http://www.videovolunteers.org/>.
- WITNESS, in partnership with human rights organizations and activists around the world, has developed a comprehensive toolkit for video advocacy: <http://witness.org/how-to>.
- WITNESS maintains The Hub, an action and resource center for groups interested in incorporating video into their advocacy. Hub members can set up campaign pages and share them with others on the website: <http://hub.witness.org/en/toolkit>.
- For video recording and editing advice, consult Kaltura Open Source Video and Make Internet TV: <http://corp.kaltura.com/>; <http://makeinternettv.org/>.

Video Can Be a Critical Component of an Effective Social Media Advocacy Strategy¹²

350.org created an animated video so that language would not be a barrier in its campaign to educate and inspire people to organize climate change events around the world. The group used YouTube to upload the video; shared it on its website, Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace; and created a Facebook event for the clip. The group sent DVDs of the video to areas with limited internet access.



¹⁰ Jessica Haswell, "How to Maximize Your Nonprofit's Impact with YouTube," accessed Jan. 23, 2013, <http://www.socialbrite.org/2010/08/06/how-to-maximize-your-nonprofit%E2%80%99s-impact-with-youtube/>.

¹¹ New Tactics in Human Rights, "Video Advocacy," accessed Jan. 23, 2014, <http://www.newtactics.org/video-advocacy/video-advocacy>.

Twitter

Twitter can be an effective advocacy tool. For example, users with many followers can generate a lot of interest and support through their tweets. Users can “retweet” (RT) other people’s tweets to their own followers as a show of support and as a way to spread the message.

Hashtags

Twitter users who engage in advocacy often use hashtags and other organizations’ Twitter handles in their tweets as a way to increase the visibility of their tweets. A hashtag is simply the “#” symbol at the beginning of a key word or phrase in the tweet. The hashtag makes it easier for Twitter users to find the tweet in a search, such as this search for the hashtag #deathpenalty:



Twitter handles

A Twitter handle is the “@” symbol followed by the name the person or organization uses on Twitter—typically a shortened version of the person’s or organization’s full name.

¹² Tactical Technology Collective, “10 Tactics for Turning Technology Into Action: Tactic 3: Visualize Your Message,” accessed Jan. 30, 2014, <https://archive.informationactivism.org/en/tactic3casestudy>.



If a tweet uses a person’s or group’s Twitter handle (this practice is called an “@mention”), they receive a notification in the Mentions section of their @Connect page. An @mention should encourage the person or group to retweet the message to their followers and respond via another tweet. Groups should carefully monitor and respond to their @mentions. When groups receive a positive @mention, they should RT and then reply with another tweet thanking the original tweeter and continuing the dialogue. A group with a smaller social media presence may want to use @mentions of more prominent organizations to encourage this type of dialogue and engagement.

Twitter users who follow each other can also send each other private direct messages (DMs). For more information on Twitter’s features, visit <https://support.twitter.com/>.

URL Shorteners

Because tweets are limited to 140 characters, Twitter users who want to share URLs often need to use a “URL shortener.” Many URLs shorten automatically in Twitter. The shortened links use catchy country domains like Libya (.ly), Colombia (.co), Montenegro (.me), Tonga (.to), and Greenland (.gl), for example. URL shortener websites, such as bitly.com, tinyURL.com, goo.gl, and ow.ly, also provide analytics about the number and sources of clicks on the shortened link. URL shorteners are convenient, but they can also be used to mask undesirable or harmful websites and other links. Some email providers and websites block shortened domains in order to reduce the risk of spam and illicit internet activities. Some governments are rumored to block certain shortened domains. And on one occasion, the Government of Libya shut down a link shortening service for violating that country’s pornography laws.¹³

Using Twitter for advocacy

Socialbrite offers a broad range of advice and examples for NGOs using Twitter for advocacy:

¹³ *Tough.ly/treated: Shortened Web Links are Convenient, but They Come at a Price*, The Economist, Oct. 14, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/17249654>.

- 24 Best Practices for Nonprofits Using Twitter: <http://www.socialbrite.org/2011/10/03/24-best-practices-for-nonprofits-using-twitter/>;
- 8 Nonprofit Twitter Superstars: <http://www.socialbrite.org/2011/09/26/8-nonprofit-twitter-superstars/>;
- 12-Step Guide on How to Live-Tweet an Event: <http://www.socialbrite.org/2011/09/30/12-step-guide-on-how-to-live-tweet-an-event/>;
- How to Get More Followers on Twitter: <http://www.socialbrite.org/2009/09/25/how-to-get-more-followers-on-twitter/>; and
- 13 Ways to Get Your Blog Post Retweeted: <http://www.socialbrite.org/2010/01/21/13-ways-to-get-your-blog-posts-retweeted/>.

Visit <http://www.socialbrite.org/category/twitter-2/> for more advice.

Types of Content to Share on Twitter

Twitter is a great vehicle for sharing a group's perspective on breaking events and for driving traffic to a group's website content or blog posts.



RTs can demonstrate and build alliances with individuals and organizations that share the group's perspective. A group can follow up on a RT by replying to the original tweet to initiate a dialogue. By adding a comment in front of a RT, a Twitter user can show enthusiasm for or criticize another Twitter user:



Best Practices for Advocacy on Twitter

Robin Stephenson, a field organizer for Bread for the World, offers ten tips for nonprofits on Twitter:¹⁴

¹⁴ Socialbrite, "10 Rules for How Nonprofits Should Use Twitter," accessed Jan. 23, 2014, <http://www.socialbrite.org/2011/04/08/10-rules-for-how-nonprofits-should-use-twitter/>.

1. If a Twitter user follows an organization, the organization should follow the user back, creating a two-way relationship between the organization and its Twitter audience. (But groups should first verify that the user is not an automated “bot” by reading through some of the user’s tweets.)
2. Develop relationships by interacting with and “retweeting” (RT) followers when appropriate.
3. Interact with followers by asking questions and commenting back to create a conversation.
4. Thank users when they RT.
5. Pay attention to breaking news and trending topics; engage in Twitter conversations, if relevant.
6. Be authentic and personal.
7. Partner and communicate with other organizations.
8. Strategize. Clarify targeted audiences, decide on the number and types of daily tweets to post, and set goals.
9. Keep it short. A RT may not happen if the user has to shorten the tweet.
10. Experiment and keep track of which tweets get the most attention.

Live Tweeting

Live tweeting is a good way to promote interaction and engagement at public events. Minnesota Public Radio’s Wits program, for example, uses Twitter to interact with the audience before the performance begins. A group staging an event can use Twitter to solicit immediate feedback, take questions, and share the event with people who are unable to attend in person.

If several allied groups are going to attend an event, they should coordinate a live-tweeting plan:

- Follow fellow live-tweeters and other allies who have an interest in the event.
- Establish and distribute a list of shared hashtags with fellow live-tweeters and other allies.
- Tweet plans to live-tweet, sharing the relevant hashtags and using @mention to identify other live-tweeters and allies.
- Send direct Twitter messages to targeted allies to let them know about the live tweet and to request RTs.
- Tweet a count-down to the event, requesting RTs and follows.
- Tweet links to more permanent social media (blogs, Facebook pages) that are covering the event.
- Have on-hand a list of allies and their Twitter handles for @mentions during the event.

Tweets during a live event can include brief quotes, summaries of lines of questioning, subjective evaluations of how things are going, questions to people who aren’t attending the event in person, and comments about the live-tweet’s enthusiastic reception on Twitter. If a message is too long for a single tweet, it can be parsed out into multiple tweets, each ending with, for example, 1/3, 2/3, or 3/3, to show that the tweet is “to be continued” across three tweets. Live tweeters should re-tweet generously and reply promptly with thanks to any re-tweeters. After the event, groups should thank new followers and any particularly enthusiastic re-tweeters.

Amnesty International Twitter Campaign Presses U.S. State Department to Respond to Human Rights Violations in Bahrain

On June 15, 2011, Amnesty International launched a call to action on Twitter urging the U.S. State Department to protest the trial of civilians in military courts in Bahrain. Amnesty's tweet was retweeted ("RTed") around the world throughout the day and by the end of the day the State Department directly responded and started tweeting about the situation.

AmnestyInternational @amnesty

Help Bahraini activists and doctors at risk. Join our @Twitter action today! <http://owl.li/5igUQ> #bahrain #feb14

120 RETWEETS 8 FAVORITES

8:44 AM - 15 Jun 11

AmnestyInternational @amnesty

Dear @statedept, pls protest unfair trial of #bahrain activists <http://bit.ly/lXEzpH> #feb14

62 RETWEETS

8:05 AM - 15 Jun 11

Human Rights @ State @State_DRL

I urge #Bahrain to abide by its commitments to transparent judicial proceedings conducted in full accordance with the law <http://ow.ly/5iKf2>

87 RETWEETS 1 FAVORITE

4:00 PM - 15 Jun 11

The image shows a screenshot of a tweet from the official Twitter account of the U.S. Department of State's Human Rights office. The tweet is set against a brown background. The tweet text reads: "@Amnesty, @HRW, @HumanRights1st, et al - We remain concerned about the treatment of those people in detention in #Bahrain. #HumanRights". The tweet has 30 retweets and 2 favorites. The date and time of the tweet is 9:40 AM on June 11. The user's profile picture is the U.S. Department of State seal, and the name is "Human Rights @ State" with a verified badge. The handle is "@State_DRL". There are icons for Reply, Retweet, Favorite, and More. A "Following" button is visible next to the user's name.

 **Human Rights @ State** 
@State_DRL  **Following**

@Amnesty, @HRW, @HumanRights1st, et al - We remain concerned about the treatment of those people in detention in #Bahrain. #HumanRights

 Reply  Retweet  Favorite  More

30 RETWEETS **2** FAVORITES 

9:40 AM - 16 Jun 11

Photograph and Image Credits

Appendix C

page C-1 Michele Garnett McKenzie, “I have a bullet in my foot from trying to vote!” The Advocates Post, Nov. 1, 2012, <http://theadvocatespost.org/2012/11/01/i-have-a-bullet-in-my-foot-from-trying-to-vote/>.

page C-2 Flickr search for human rights images. Image credits, left to right, top to bottom:

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 - URL: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/21065822@N03/4191798821/in/photolist-7oq4Kt-7oq4Gz-bmcWN3-Bg4fk-4cxdQt-6j9MD8-5HN4fs-5HHLcM-bUQyZJ-buVw-6BdKfb-6B9D82-f2dUte-9hsSro-ecl4L2-dLn8Dt-7oq4YP-afhnpR-7xHNDY-ivfEqy-7otYYA-4Um9MM-ivfFD5-ivfgxa-ivfvqv-ifw1cg-ifvzUw-ivfCgW-ivfAEE-ifw3k4-ivfBMj-ivfDaC-ivfC91-ivfNhr-ifw2nc-ivfFny-4BJy7U-4Uqm2u-fygjV-fyuUPj-fywoYj-fygy44-fyuq2b-fyusvU-fyvvyuA-fyiwYk-fyw8qU-fyigGB-fyhvHF-fywHMW-fyfhge>
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page C-8 Yolande Tomlinson (@DrYolande): Please note: Any subsequent republication of Dr. Tomlinson's name or image requires her direct permission.