Amnesty International, a non-governmental organisation, transformed the refugee crisis from a global issue into a personal one for millions, by getting real refugees to respond to users on Twitter.

- The challenge was to inspire people around the world to urge governments to take their fair share of responsibility in the refugee crisis by making it a relevant issue in day-to-day life.
- Ogilvy's research found that human smugglers were collectively pocketing up to $6bn a year, while governments had done little to stop it, an insight which showed Amnesty International how outrage could inspire action.
- Amnesty International filmed real refugees, in real crisis situations, responding in real-time to expressions of outrage on Twitter, where they thanked the tweeter for the support, but explained that outrage is not enough and encouraged them to sign Amnesty International's petition.
- With no paid media, Amnesty International's earned media and PR strategy helped its eight responses reach nearly 190 million people.

### Campaign details

**Client:** Amnesty International  
**Agency:** O&M London

### The summary

**HOW PLANNING HELPED AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TRANSFORM OUTRAGE INTO ACTION FOR REFUGEES.**

By the time you finish reading this paper, another 472 people around the world will have been forced to flee their homes for fear of persecution, danger or death. The total number of displaced people is at 65.3 million, and rising every day.¹
Around 21 million of them are refugees: people who have left their home country altogether - battling dangerous crossings, border closures, violence, abuses and extortion - to seek state protection elsewhere.  

Amnesty International is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to finding lasting solutions to the human rights violations faced by refugees. They harness the individual actions of the people to pressure governments to effect change: actions like sending an email, signing a petition or writing a letter.

The good news is that many people around the world are outraged about the human rights injustices faced by refugees.

The bad: few of them take action beyond voicing their opinion on social media.

This is the story of the strategy behind creative work that would transform the refugee crisis from a global into a personal issue for millions. Work that would inspire them to transform their outrage into action with Amnesty International, on behalf of the 21 million refugees who need them most.

The prologue

AN OUTRAGED TWEETER GETS AN UNEXPECTED REPLY.

From looking at her feed, you could imagine that Thursday 2\textsuperscript{nd} February 2017 was just another day for tweeter @LittleRed_29.

In the morning, she tweets about how important it is for society to talk openly about mental health; how "immigration-haters" should "suck-it"; how Beyoncé had beaten the record for most-liked Instagram photo.

Around midday, she tweets this.

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Every day I am more horrified by the attitudes of some Brits. Where has our basic human compassion gone? #refugeeswelcome #weallbleedred
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Just a few hours later, at 16:15, a refugee named Oscar from the Kakuma camp in Kenya, uses Amnesty International's official Twitter page to reply to her tweet.

He says this.
Eight minutes later, @LittleRed_29 tweets this.

A screenshot of Oscar's reply

This paper is about how this video response, and the many others like it, inspired people on Twitter to transform their outrage towards tangible action for refugees.

The mission

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEEDS THE SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE TO EFFECT REAL CHANGE FOR REFUGEES.
But first, it's important to understand why this happened at all.

With over 21 million people abandoning their homes in search of refuge in another country, the world faces its biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War. Barack Obama has described it as "one of the most urgent tests of our time... a test of our common humanity."²

Many organisations do excellent work for refugees. Médecins Sans Frontières set the example for on-the-ground medical aid, and Save the Children provide daily essentials like food and water.

But these are short-term solutions, propped up by small, underfunded charities.

The real problem is that governments around the world aren't distributing the responsibility, while countries closest to the conflict areas bear the load. Did you know for instance that Lebanon - a country 0.1% the size of Europe - has taken in more Syrian asylum-seekers than all European countries put together?³

We will only see real, lasting change when governments take in their fair share of refugees. This is what Amnesty International is fighting for.

To achieve it, they need all the public support they can get. With this support, Amnesty International can prove to governments that people in their countries care about the human rights of refugees.

Our mission was to inspire people around the world to urge governments to take their fair share of the responsibility.

The insight

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF OUTRAGE.

With guidance and support from Amnesty International - one of the world's foremost authorities on refugees - Ogilvy's planning team started doing desk research to better understand the crisis.

We were outraged by what we read.

We were outraged by human smugglers collectively pocketing up to $6bn a year⁴, while governments did little to stop it. By the UK’s pledge to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020⁵, while millions lived in camps with inhumane conditions in developing countries. By accounts, collected by Amnesty International, of racism and abuse experienced by refugees fortunate enough to be resettled in another country.

The more outraged we became, the more we wanted to do something about it. We were experiencing first-hand the transformative power of outrage to inspire action.

So to inspire people to act, we first considered making them as outraged as we were.

But who's 'them'?

He audience

TRANSFORMING THE "VOCALLY OUTRAGED" INTO DOERS.
We knew it would be impossible to create outrage among those already hostile to refugees. Everyone who agreed with Katie Hopkins' suggestion that we turn gunships on "cockroach" refugees were off the table.

The vocally outraged: our audience "bullseye"

Instead we decided to target anyone with the capacity to feel compassionate and welcoming towards refugees. According to Amnesty International research, 66% of people think their government isn't doing enough to help refugees.

That's 66% of people around the world who are equally outraged at the support their government is giving to refugees.

This is most visible on social media: Twitter in particular, where 96% of the public conversations about refugees take place. Every day, thousands of tweeters voice outrage at the lack of responsibility taken by their government.

Three typical examples of expressions of outrage on Twitter

It's difficult to say how many "vocally outraged" people there are in the world, but using matching statements on the Global Web Index (such as "I think we should all strive for equality" and "I use social media to share my
We realise at that point that we didn’t need to create outrage. There was more than enough in the world already.

But what if we could take all that outrage, and transform it into action?

As Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Kailash Satyarthi puts it:

“Anger is an energy, and the law of nature is that energy can never be created [or] destroyed. So why can’t the energy of anger be harnessed to create a better and beautiful world?”

The problem

THE REFUGEE CRISIS DOESN’T ALWAYS FEEL RELEVANT IN DAY-TO-DAY LIFE, EVEN TO THE OUTRAGED.

Qualitative research showed that there was one main reason people weren’t already taking action with Amnesty International: the plight of refugees doesn’t always feel relevant to their day-to-day lives.

As one person put it: “You know there is all this going on - but at the same time you might be [made] redundant, or your relationship's fallen apart... Our lives keep us busy.”

We realised that to persuade outraged people to allow Amnesty International to channel their outrage towards action, we needed to transform this global, complex issue into a personal one, relevant to them.

The behavioural science

TRANSFORMING THE 'IDENTIFIABLE VICTIM'.

Working with the planners in our behaviour change department, Ogilvy Change, we discovered a behavioural principle called the "identifiable victim effect". It refers to an individual’s tendency to offer more help to one identifiable victim, than a group of unidentifiable ones.

Basically, the more personally connected you feel to someone, the more willing you are to help them.

This became the basis of the brief to the creative team: how do we create the strongest possible personal connection between the refugees and the outraged, to inspire them to transform their outrage into action?

The idea

REAL REFUGEES SEND REAL-TIME REPLIES, TRANSFORMING OUTRAGE INTO ACTION.

The creative team came up with an idea that had never been done before.

It was to film real refugees, in real crisis situations, responding in real-time to expressions of outrage on Twitter.
The refugees would thank the tweeter for the support, but explain that outrage is not enough. That if the tweeter wanted to make a lasting difference, they needed to take action with Amnesty International.

It exceeded the brief. After all, what would make the crisis more relevant to you than seeing a personal message from a refugee in your Twitter feed?

**The sell-in**

**TRANSFORMING AN IDEA INTO A BUYABLE CAMPAIGN.**

We felt so strongly about power of the creative idea, that we treated the creative presentation like a pitch.

We had already presented the strategy to the internationally renowned Magnum Photos, who were moved by the idea and wanted to direct the films.

Anticipating no media budget, we had already written the media strategy: to use earned media - PR, news partnerships, retweets, shares - to direct all outraged users (not just the original tweeters) to the tweets on Amnesty International's page, and from there direct people to [Amnesty.org](http://amnesty.org) to take action.

And we had already devised the customer journey, mapping out how the campaign would reach not only the tweeters and their followers, but more importantly everyone who would see the tweets through earned media.

But putting aside the dangers of filming in conflict areas, this idea came with risk: by telling those who were openly supportive towards refugees that their outrage wasn't enough, we had to be careful not to isolate the very people whose behaviour we needed to change.

**The realisation**

**TRANSFORMATION. WITHOUT A MEDIA BUDGET.**

With a production budget of £50,000, one of our producers flew to the Kakuma camp in Northern Kenya, and the other to the Shatila camp in Lebanon. They found four refugees from each camp who were willing to get involved and share their story.

To show the diverse populations of the camps, our eight respondents were of different backgrounds, ages and genders. Oscar was an ex-nurse and father from Burundi. Samer, an older tailor from Palestine. Heba, a Syrian teacher and ex-student of psychology, who confessed to being harassed by men regularly in the camp.
The eight refugees: Leila, Abu, Amina and Oscar from Kenya's Kakuma camp, and Samer, Heba, Abdul and Koutayba from Lebanon's Shatila camp

A "command centre" was set up in Ogilvy's London office to find the perfect tweets to respond to. Using Brandwatch technology, tweets relating to the refugee crisis were selected based on filters that we had predetermined. Retweets, abuse, news or tweets posted by an inappropriate source were discarded; only original, credible and recent outraged tweets were considered.

The "command centre" in action

Once everyone was happy with the chosen tweet, it would be sent to the producer in the camp best placed to respond. One tweet about child refugees, for instance, was responded to by Leila, a mother in Kenya's Kakuma camp.

Respondents then replied to the tweet on film. To make sure they felt comfortable, a script (written using quotes from earlier interviews with that refugee) was displayed on an iPad for them to read while the camera was rolling.

In each film, the respondent looks to camera, introduces themselves and addresses the tweeter directly. They tell their story, and thank the tweeter for their support, but explain that "tweeting is not enough". They then suggest one action they could take: signing a petition on Amnesty.org that would be used to lobby governments to take in their fair share of refugees. Finally, they hold up a board with the call to action: "Outrage Is Not Enough #TakeAction".11
Filming in Kenya, one of our two shoot locations

Apart from subtitles added for comprehension, the first take of the original videos were posted exactly as they were filmed, within hours of the original tweet. No title cards. No music. No dramatic fade to black with the brand logo in yellow. Just a heartfelt plea, from one human to another.

The results

TRANSFORMING THE PERCEPTION OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS FOR OVER 190 MILLION PEOPLE.

Without a penny’s worth of paid media, our earned media and PR strategy helped our eight responses reach nearly 190 million people.12

That's 190 million people who were invited to take the injustices faced by refugees personally.

The campaign was picked up by scores of publications: industry papers like PR Week and Campaign, magazines like Glamour, and news publishers like the Telegraph and International Business Times.

Screenshots of the news articles reporting on the campaign

But most touching of all was the response from the Twittersphere, who pledged to turn their outrage into action
with Amnesty International.

Screenshot of tweets about the campaign

The lessons learnt

WHAT WE'LL TAKE WITH US INTO FUTURE PROJECTS.

1. **Nerves are good.** It means you're doing something new, exciting and transformative.
2. **Use empathy, not sympathy, to inspire action.** Sympathy isolates. Empathy empowers.
3. **No media budget is no excuse.** With the right strategy, it can be done.

The sources

1. UNHCR (2016): Figures at a glance. (link)
2. White House (2016): Remarks by President Obama at Leaders Summit on Refugees (link)
4. Interpol / Europol (2016): Migrant Smuggling Networks (link)
7. Amnesty International (2016): Refugees Welcome Index (link)
8. Crimson Hexagon (2016): 96% of the public posts referencing refugees on Facebook and Twitter were on Twitter
11. Oscar's film (link)
12. Ogilvy Public Relations (2017): Reach estimate