

HOW TO MOBILIZE SUPPORT WHEN SOMEONE IS TARGETED

RAPID RESPONSE CAN SAVE SOMEONE'S FREEDOM

By Starhawk

Read it on Substack: <https://starhawk.substack.com/p/how-to-mobilize-support-when-someone>

When someone is targeted or arrested unjustly, a quick response can make all the difference. Mohsen Mahdawi, Palestinian student activist, was detained by ICE at his citizenship interview, but swift action by his lawyers prevented the government from transferring him out of Vermont, and he was released after two weeks in detention. How do we organize to provide that level of support for the many others who may be at risk of unjust arrest, deportation, or personal harassment?

If you know someone, some organization, or some community that may be at risk because of their race, gender, activism, immigration status or for some other reason, it's important to prepare ahead of time for what could happen. If you are alone, now is a good time to form a team. If you have formed an action group, joined an affinity group or a political organization, you are in a good position to prepare, plan, take action and follow up. Here's some suggestions as to how:

PREPARE

LISTS OF CONTACTS

Key support person: Someone whose number the person in danger can memorize to call and activate the chain of support. The person detained might not always be able to make a phone call, but if they do have the opportunity, having one number to call can be a vital lifeline, and

knowing it by heart may be important when phones and notes are confiscated.

That key person can then contact:

Legal support: Who is this person's lawyer, or what organization, for example, the ACLU, might be willing and able to quickly take on this case. Have their contact numbers ready.

Personal support: Who among their close friends and family will want to know, and be willing and able to provide personal support? Do they have medical conditions or are they taking medication? Contact information for their doctor, dentist, etc. and lists of prescriptions may be helpful when someone is jailed. Will they need someone to alert their school, job, pay their rent, take care of their kids, feed their cat, etc.? Having that support lined up ahead of time can help the person at risk feel less anxious.

Support for Organizing: It's helpful to have a team of three or more people to coordinate the organizing, as there are many tasks to be done and roles to fill:

Alerting networks: (friends, family, and allied organizations) It's helpful to have these contact numbers and email addresses already gathered. In the old days, we used to have phone trees. Today, this might be text chains, Signal or WhatsApp groups, email addresses, listserves, etc. But having a group of people committed to passing on the message to others who will post and amplify it can get the word out quickly.

Social media: Someone who can post on a variety of social media platforms and get the word out, set up a fund for donations and post updates.

Traditional media: Someone who can write a press release and contact local and national media to cover the story, and be a contact they can reach to set up interviews and stay informed.

A CALL TO ACTION

A good call to action is clear, succinct and provides both a reason why people should take action, and all the information they need to quickly do so. You may not be able to completely prepare one ahead of time, but you can gather:

Short, biographical facts about the person at risk that you will need for background: Innocente Buenpersona is a student at _____ University, here in the U.S. legally for _____ years, working on _____.

Names and contact information for people you will be asking supporters to contact. For example, national, state and local politicians, ICE, legal authorities, consulates or embassies, etc.

PRESS ADVISORY AND PRESS RELEASE

Again, you won't be able to write this ahead of time, but you can collect the biographical and background information, as well as:

Contact numbers of a few people who might be character witnesses and willing to speak to the media. A good press release will have a short quote or two that speaks to the character and actions of the person at risk.

Names and contacts of anyone who might be an expert on the subject or represent an influential group, and willing to speak out. For example, a local Rabbi or representative of a Jewish organization who might counter the charge that protesting against Israeli policies in Gaza is anti-Semitic.

PLAN

Make a rough plan for what actions you might take, and do some preparation. For example, if you plan to demonstrate at the local ICE office if the person in question doesn't return from their scheduled appointment, you can scout the location ahead of time and decide where to call people to meet. You might line up people ahead of time who will commit to being speakers, peacekeepers, police liaisons, media spokespeople, sign makers, etc. and offer training, as needed, in de-escalation, media, legal observing, nonviolent direct action, etc.

When you plan a physical protest, consider your target. Who has the power to make the decision you want? How can they be influenced? Who is responsible for the bad thing you are protesting, and how can you make their actions more costly? In money, prestige, power or public perception? For example, targeting Tesla dealerships has proved very effective in putting pressure on Elon Musk, both monetarily, as Tesla sales tank, and by redefining his brand from cool environmentalism to fascism.

For greatest effect, plan a variety of actions at varying levels of risk and commitment, for example, donating to legal support funds, making calls, posting information, coming out for a demonstration, or taking nonviolent direct action. Someone who takes a low-commitment action today may make a higher-level commitment tomorrow.

Get any permits and talk to the police ahead of time if that fits with your goals.

Secure any equipment needed—for example, sound equipment or bullhorns, and decide who will bring them and look after them.

Organize peacekeepers, police liaisons, legal observers, speakers, etc.

WRITE UP AND SEND OUT A CALL TO ACTION:

A Call to Action should be short, clear, and concise. It needs to include:

Information about the situation: Who, what, when, where, why and how did this bad thing happen?

Why someone should care: How does this bad thing impact us all?

Specific information they need to take action: Phone numbers for representatives or other agencies to call or write, and possibly, a suggested script. Tip: don't include too many. Lists of ten or twenty people to call are daunting, stick with no more than three, although one could be something like the Congressional Switchboard that makes it easy to call representatives.

If you're asking people to come to a demonstration, make sure you include when, where, what organization is sponsoring it, and relevant guidelines.

A donation link to the legal fund or other support is always helpful!

ALERT THE MEDIA

Contact the traditional media with a press release and/or a press advisory. A press release tells what has happened; a press advisory says what you are doing about it and invites press coverage. A press release should be a succinct version of the story you want the media to write. A press advisory should entice them to come and cover your event. It might look like this:

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date

Organization

Contact information: phone, email, etc.

Catchy Headline (pros spend more time writing this than anything else!)

First paragraph:

The who, what, when, where, and why of what happened and, succinctly, why it matters.

Second paragraph:

A pithy, moving quote or two from a character witness or expert on the subject.

Third paragraph:

What's happening now, what to expect or look for in the near future.

Contact person or persons for further information.

PRESS ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date

Organization

Contact info:

HEADLINE: Planned event, including date, time, location and sponsoring organization

First paragraph:

Full information on what is planned, plus the 'why': what is the inciting event or situation, and the who, what, when, where, why and how of that.

Second paragraph:

A pithy quote or two that may persuade them to come—because the issue is so vitally important, because some dramatic action is planned, because there will be theater, visuals, something exciting to see, etc.

Third paragraph:

Summing up what is expected and what enticements will be there.

Contact person or persons for further information.

ALL CAPS BELOW: and visuals, photo ops, etc. For example:

GIANT PUPPETS TESLA CAR BURNED IN EFFIGY! SAMBA BAND

PREPARE PRESS PACKETS

The Media Contacts can give these out to the press on the day, and can include the Press Release, Advisory, and any background information. For example, a full biography of the person who was targeted, more supportive quotes, a list of contacts for more background. You're writing the story you'd like them to write (and sometimes they'll basically just use it!) and providing them with all the information that will make it easy for them to do further research.

PREPARE OTHER MATERIALS

In the pre-internet days, we used to hand out flyers. Now, it might be QR codes. But Know Your Rights cards, fact sheets and other relevant information might still be useful to distribute.

Prepare a way to gather contact information from people who come, so you can follow up with further calls to action and updates.

Have a donation bucket or people committed to pass the hat.

ON THE DAY

Arrive early and set up your sound system, information table, media contact spot, and any other physical supports you might need.

Carry out your protest.

Encourage participants to take pictures, videos, and to amplify the reach of your protest in their own networks.

Collect contact information from interested participants.

Know when enough is enough. Unless you have planned an ongoing vigil, have a set ending time, declare victory, and leave while people have strength left to fight again.

FOLLOWING UP

Continue to send updates, calls to action, plan protests, and keep media attention focused on your issue.

Send out follow up press releases and updates. Thank any media contacts who cover your events and do a good job.

Help support the legal defense by raising funds, showing up for court dates, and offering practical support.

If you've formed an affinity group, you can begin some of the preplanning and information gathering at any time. If you have physical or logistical challenges that prevent you from joining the protests, you can be part of the action by doing some of the research and collecting contacts and information. You may or may not do all of these steps, but the more pre-planning you do, the more quickly you'll be able to mobilize in the event of a crisis. And fast mobilization can mean the difference between indefinite incarceration and freedom!