



**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**

### **Wolfgang Welsch, PoC, East Germany, 1971**

East German Prisoner of Conscience Released from 'Death Cell'

*In 1970, Wolfgang Welsch, 26, was serving his sixth year of imprisonment in Brandenburg penitentiary in the German Democratic Republic. He had been handed down three consecutive prison sentences, amounting to over 10 years, for attempting to emigrate illegally and for 'incitement hostile to the state'. By alerting Amnesty International to his plight via secret messages written on cigarette papers, Wolfgang won freedom from what he described as his 'death cell'.*

An actor and poet, Wolfgang expressed his political opinions through poetry and documentary film-making, and it was these activities that led to his imprisonment in 1964. A secret message, written on a cigarette paper and smuggled out of prison, brought Wolfgang's case to the attention of Amnesty International. In the letter, Wolfgang described his 1.2m by 3.5m "stinking death cell", where he lived in solitary confinement "in semi-darkness without sun and hardly any air". He also described his failing health: "I spit blood, faint and am at the end of my physical strength... the present inhumane conditions seriously threaten my life." His message closed with the plea "Save my life!"

Wolfgang's case was taken up by the Leeds Amnesty International group in the UK, who began writing to the East German authorities. Their letters went unanswered, until they contacted a lawyer in West Germany who agreed to help pressure the authorities. Shortly afterwards, Wolfgang's mother was allowed to visit her son for the first time, and on 24 March 1971, he was released from prison. In a letter to Amnesty International's London office, the secretary of the Leeds Amnesty International group wrote: "We are very pleased to let you know that our adopted prisoner in East Germany, Wolfgang Welsch, has been released... our group now wishes to adopt another prisoner."

According to online sources, Wolfgang Welsch went on to help dozens of people escape from East to West Germany and survived several assassination attempts. A film has been made about his life. See:

[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang\\_Welsch\\_%28Fluchthelfer%29](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Welsch_%28Fluchthelfer%29)

Restricted photo on ADAM here: <https://adam.amnesty.org/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=110422&index=0&total=3&view=viewSearchItem>