

Some organizations with a mission

As you learned in your book, there are many organizations with a mission to do good. Many of them operate independently of governments and are generally grouped together as 'NGOs' which is short for *Non-Governmental Organizations*. In contrast, the American Peace Corps mentioned in *Green Line* is a governmental organization founded by President John F. Kennedy to help people in developing countries and to show the helpfulness of the United States. Here are some important NGOs that you can find out more about:

- The famous **World Wide Fund for Nature**, better known simply as WWF, is present in over 100 countries and does everything its members can to protect nature.
- **Amnesty International** is perhaps the best-known human rights organization. It monitors human rights violations throughout the world, especially in dictatorships (such as North Korea) or countries ruled by authoritarian governments (such as Russia) and speaks up for imprisoned democrats.
- **Greenpeace** is the world's most famous organization active in the protection of the environment and animal life. For example, they are very much against whaling and the killing of dolphins, and some of the group's stunts have been spectacular and attention-getting, but always peaceful.
- **Sea Shepherd** is another environmental-protection group which has also gained publicity with spectacular stunts, especially against Japanese whaling ships. But the group has also generated much controversy for what many critics have described as radical, non-peaceful methods to achieve their goals.

There are many organizations, such as the following two, who also do important work but receive less publicity than the groups already named:

- **Médecins sans frontières**, based in Geneva, is a group of doctors who give very poor people free medical help. They really 'make a difference' for every patient they treat.
- **Reporters sans frontières**, based in Paris, speaks out for imprisoned or murdered reporters in dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. Freedom of the press is what this organization is fighting for, but with peaceful means.



Médecins sans frontières in action

- **Attac** is an anti-globalization organization typical of protest groups founded in the 1980s and 1990s. Attac members have taken part in many anti-globalization demonstrations in many countries. Attac aims for fair trade and the eradication of poverty throughout the world.

There are also NGOs that were founded in Germany, for example:

- **Cap Anamur** (*Deutsche Not-Ärzte e.V.*) does humanitarian work in the medical and social spheres worldwide.
- Karlheinz Böhm's **Menschen für Menschen** helps people in one of the poorest countries in the world, Ethiopia, and has achieved remarkable results. (Karlheinz Böhm is a former film actor who became famous for his roles in the *Sissi* films in the 1950s.)
- **Robin Wood**, an environmental organization, was founded in Bremen in 1982 and is famous for spectacular activities such as climbing factory chimneys of companies known to be big polluters of the environment.

Aside from these and hundreds of other NGOs, there are a lot of very courageous individuals who have a mission – for human rights or for the environment/ animals. Here are a few truly great individuals:

- **Anna Politkowskaja**, a journalist and human rights activist in Russia, murdered in 2006 in her apartment building – by whom is still unknown.
- **Ai Weiwei**, China's most famous contemporary artist and human rights activist, beaten up in his home in China by police and operated on in Munich in the summer of 2009 – and who would have died, if it hadn't been for German doctors.



Anna Politkowskaja



Ai Weiwei

- **Hu Jia**, a Chinese human rights activist, in prison in China for three and a half years, despite being seriously ill.
- **Shirin Ebadi**, Iranian lawyer, Nobel Peace Prize winner and human rights activist, always threatened in authoritarian Iran.

... and there are thousands and thousands more. Tens of thousands of people, for example, are in prison camps in the worst and most brutal dictatorship today, that of North Korea.

One aspect of protest groups is of course public demonstrations, sometimes involving many thousands of protesters. Even if there is usually peaceful intent behind a planned demonstration, they can occasionally turn violent if mistakes are made (by the police or by the organizers) or if militant groups such as anarchists take over the demonstration and

provoke the police. This happened at the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999. Acts of vandalism and property damage turned this peaceful demonstration of over 40,000 people into what was later called 'The Battle of Seattle'. Over 600 people were arrested. The same thing happened in Genoa in 2001 at a G8 summit (a conference of the eight richest nations) when Italian police over-reacted. One young man was killed, hundreds were arrested.