HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE 2016 ELECTION

ACTIVIST TOOLKIT

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
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Amnesty International USA is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3), international human rights organization registered in New York. AIUSA neither supports nor opposes any political party or any candidate for public office. Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections.
Dear Amnesty Activist,

The charged atmosphere of a presidential election brings with it unique challenges and opportunities for human rights organizations like Amnesty International. The office of the President of the United States has the capacity for enormous human rights impact, both positive and negative.

Amnesty International does not take a position on which candidate should be the next President, but we do believe that the next U.S. President must protect and advance human rights here at home and around the world. Amnesty International believes that human rights are not a “Democratic thing” or a “Republican thing.” They are a universal standard that we expect any new administration to prioritize in its foreign and domestic policy.

This is the first of a series of toolkits that will help you raise the profile of human rights in public discourse during the months ahead, while keeping out of the partisan politics of election campaigns. In this toolkit, you’ll find:

- Guidance on what Amnesty representatives (including AIUSA groups) can and cannot do in relation to the 2016 elections
- Questions that can be posed to candidates about human rights issues
- Issue briefs on two areas that are both long-standing priorities for our organization: the rights of refugees and migrants, and the intersection of human rights and national security. (A separate toolkit focusing on these issues is available; see the Resources page.)
- Action ideas for raising human rights during this election season

Later this summer, we’ll provide further actions you can take to help:

- Make human rights a focus of the presidential and vice-presidential debates in September and October.
- Promote a human rights agenda for the next U.S. President
- Establish human rights expectations for the first 100 days of the new Administration

Amnesty International continues its vital human rights work throughout this election season. For more information on the broad range of Amnesty’s campaigns and programs, check out our website: amnestyusa.org

Have any questions? Contact us at: advocacyintern@aiusa.org

Thank you for your commitment to human rights.

Mike O’Reilly
Deputy Executive Director, Policy and Advocacy
Amnesty International USA
IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND THE 2016 ELECTIONS

Amnesty International is a non-partisan human rights organization that neither supports nor opposes any political party, candidate, government, or political ideology. Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections. Because Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) is classified as a “public charity” -- 501(c)(3) -- by the Internal Revenue Service, there are restrictions on the organization’s activities in relation to elections and partisan activities. Here are some guidelines to help you navigate these restrictions and carry out your work as an Amnesty activist during the 2016 election year.

• **Do not oppose or support candidates while acting in Amnesty’s name.** This includes both explicit and implicit opposition or endorsement of candidates. If someone can potentially infer from your message, post, tweet, graphic, etc. that you support or oppose a particular candidate, this is problematic and harmful to our organization. When representing Amnesty International, you cannot attack or approve of candidates’ positions.

• **Emphasize AI’s impartiality.** For 55 years, we have worked to protect human rights in countries around the world in a nonpartisan way. When engaging with candidates or the public, be sure to clarify that Amnesty is a nonpartisan organization that does not support or oppose any political candidate or party.

• **Clarify our nonpartisan approach.** Use this disclaimer on any Amnesty International materials distributed in the context of elections: “Amnesty International USA is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3), international human rights organization registered in New York. AIUSA neither supports nor opposes any political party or any candidate for public office. Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections.”

• **Keep your political views separate.** If you maintain an account on social media that identifies you as a representative of Amnesty International, that account should reflect the positions of the organization and not contain politically partisan information. If you wish to represent Amnesty on social media, then you should have a dedicated Amnesty-affiliated account that is separate from your personal account. You should not post, tweet, retweet, or share anything through your Amnesty account that suggests Amnesty endorses or opposes candidates for public office. You are free to engage in political activities in your personal capacity, as long as these actions do not give the impression that they represent the organization’s views, and as long as you don’t use Amnesty resources to do so (e.g. an Amnesty computer, laptop, mobile device or phone, or from an Amnesty office).

• **Don’t use your group’s social media pages to support or oppose a candidate, and don’t act in the name of Amnesty in support of or opposition to candidates (i.e. campaigning, volunteering, partisan voter registration, etc.).** You are free, of course, to support a candidate or political party in your private capacity as an individual, but please don’t wear Amnesty clothing or identifiers while you volunteer for a candidate or engage in other partisan political activities.

• **What you do for one candidate as Amnesty, you should do for all.** We pose our questions to candidates of all political parties (and we don’t evaluate or comment on candidates’
responses.) If we wish to invite a candidate to a public forum, we must invite all participating candidates in a specific election.

- **Maintain a wide scope of issues.** Amnesty is not a single-issue organization, and we have an interest in hearing candidates' views on a wide range of human rights issues. Spotlighting one issue or a narrow range of issues that separate candidates may be perceived as a partisan litmus test of support or opposition.

- **Don’t seek pledges from candidates.** Regulations prohibit public charities from asking candidates to promise to support a particular issue if elected. In other words, don’t ask questions that can only be answered with yes/no or imply a correct answer. Instead, ask open-ended questions that give candidates the ability to explain their position on an issue.

- **Ask, but don’t debate.** The debates are a good opportunity to highlight the issues we care about. We can ask candidates at an open forum what their views are on a particular human rights issue but don’t comment on their response or seek to debate with them. Opposing or supporting a candidate’s answers could be seen as intervening in an election.

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### 2016 ELECTIONS: ANSWERING POTENTIAL QUESTIONS

**Which presidential candidate does Amnesty International support?**

Amnesty International is a non-partisan organization that neither supports nor opposes any candidate in any election.

**Surely one candidate supports your organization’s positions more strongly than the other. From that standpoint, which candidate is better suited to move forward Amnesty International’s objectives?**

Regardless of who the next president is, Amnesty International will work with the new administration to move the human rights agenda forward in the U.S. and around the world.

**Is it fair to say that one candidate is going to be easier for you to work with that the other? You will have a more sympathetic ear, right?**

Clearly, there are differences of opinion among the presidential candidates on a number of issues. But I reiterate that regardless of who leads the next administration, Amnesty International will continue to push the human rights agenda forward.

**How about Amnesty International supporters and members? Clearly, they must support one candidate over another?**

Individual Amnesty International members, like all other private citizens, can support whomever they wish. Their views on the elections do not reflect Amnesty International's, and Amnesty International neither supports nor opposes any candidate or political party.
RAISING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE ELECTION SEASON

Ask the Candidates for their Positions on Human Rights Issues

What:
• Politely press the candidate to address a human rights concern by showing up at campaign events, online forums, in the media, and wherever else you can reach them. This shows the candidates that people care about human rights, increasing the likelihood that they will support human rights.

How:
• **At an Event:** If a candidate is holding an event in your town, you can attend and try to ask question. Consider bringing signs or flyers with the question on it. If you can’t get the question in front of the candidate, try to talk to their staff or with reporters covering the event.
• **In the Media:** Write letters to the editor of your local news publications, using a recent news hook to draw attention to the human rights question you want to focus on.
• **Online:** Send your question to the candidate via their website, Facebook, or Tweet at them. Guidelines for social media best practices can be found here: http://bit.ly/28MWNyl

How do you pick the question?
• You can pick a question from the enclosed “Questions for Candidates” based on what you think the candidate is likely to cover at a specific event. For example, if the event is intended to address foreign policy, pick a foreign policy-related question. If the event is billed as one focused on domestic issues, then choose a question that deals with a domestic issue.

Educate Your Community

Education is key to real change. When someone hears from you as a friend, relative, or neighbor about a human rights issue you care a lot about, they will go home and think about it and possibly get involved. Over time, this helps change our world. They key is to be polite and build bridges. It can be hard when people disagree, but remember: you don’t need to win arguments about human rights; rather, planting a seed of doubt in the other person’s mind is more important. Do it with a smile and you’ve made an impact for human rights.

What kind of educational action should I pick?
• Table at your school or a busy public location with information about issues.
• Hold a classroom discussion or town hall meeting about one of the issues.
• See the “America I Believe In” toolkit for more discussion points and action ideas.
Respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights must be a priority for all elected officials. Governments around the world should ensure that their policies and practices adhere to the human rights norms on which all countries have agreed. Whether national security, criminal justice, refugees, or any other human rights issue, these standards clarify how governments must safeguard the rights of all people.

You will find below a summary of critical issues that Amnesty International USA is urging the U.S. presidential candidates to address. What are the candidates’ views on these important issues? If elected president, how would the candidate seek to protect and champion the human rights of people across the United States and around the world?

As a nonpartisan human rights organization, Amnesty International USA neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate for office. In keeping with its status as a 501(c)(3) organization, Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections. We do, however, call upon all candidates to make the protection and promotion of human rights a key priority and an integral part of their policies and practices.

**HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES**

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Refugees
A record 60 million people have to date fled their homes in search of safety, making today’s refugee crisis the largest since the Second World War, with more than 19.5 million refugees worldwide, 51% of which are children. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has designated 1.15 million of the most vulnerable refugees as being in need of immediate resettlement. Wealthy countries like the United States currently host a tiny percentage of the world’s refugees. President Obama’s commitment to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees, and Secretary of State John Kerry’s commitment to raise the total refugee acceptance rate in the U.S. to 85,000 in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017 are commendable. But these numbers are far from enough. The U.S. has the capacity and the responsibility to do more. Only 1% of the global refugee population is even considered for candidacy for resettlement in the U.S. Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the U.S., and they undergo an arduous, extensive screening process.

Questions to Candidates:

Refugees
- How would you address the global refugee crisis?
- What is your position on the number of refugees resettled in the U.S.?
- How would you ensure the U.S. and other countries comply with their obligations not to return asylum seekers to situations in which they would be at risk?
Migrants
More than 350,000 men, women and children are detained by U.S. immigration authorities annually. International human rights standards require that detention in immigration cases should only be used in exceptional circumstances, and that it must be justified in each case and be subject to judicial review. However, immigrants can be detained for months or years in the USA without any form of meaningful individualized judicial review of their detention. Amnesty International has documented pervasive problems regarding the conditions under which immigrants are held. These conditions violate both U.S. and international standards on the treatment of detainees.

Question to Candidates:
• Do you believe that the U.S. immigration enforcement and detention system should meet international standards and obligations? How would you define those obligations?

ENDING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN THE NAME OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Guantanamo
All people have the right to a fair trial and the right to be free from arbitrary detention, as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the U.S. has ratified. Despite this, dozens of men are still held at Guantánamo, most without charge, including several who have been cleared for transfer out of the detention camp. Many public officials are arguing that Guantánamo should remain open indefinitely as a permanent offshore prison, potentially to take new detainees.

Question to Candidates:
• How would you address the detention camp at Guantánamo and U.S. obligations under international law?

Torture
From 2002 to 2008, the U.S. government ran secret detention sites where it violated both international and domestic prohibitions on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In the current climate of anti-Muslim fear-mongering and politically driven rhetoric in response to acts of terrorism, some public officials are proposing a revival of the use of torture. The Obama administration has blocked accountability for past abuses. Only by providing accountability today can such abuses be prevented in the future.

Question to Candidates:
• How would you prevent the use of torture?
• Does the U.S. have an obligation to investigate and punish those responsible for torture?

Surveillance
Indiscriminate surveillance programs violate privacy on a mass scale and have a chilling effect on freedom of expression. They may also undermine the precautions that human rights organizations take to ensure the confidentiality of their communications and the identities of their sources.
Despite mounting public concern, the U.S. government has maintained many of its mass surveillance programs. Some law enforcement and police also conduct suspicion-less surveillance of protesters, activists and communities of color.

**Question to Candidates:**

- How would you address the use of suspicion-less surveillance of millions of people in the United States and around the world?

**Civilian Casualties and Drone Strikes**

The U.S. is conducting air strikes and other operations involving lethal force in countries including Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. It is vital that the U.S. adhere to its obligations under international law, including international human rights law and, where applicable, the laws of war. The U.S. must also be transparent and accountable in its use of drone strikes.

**Question to Candidates:**

- How would you seek to avoid civilian casualties and prevent unlawful killings from U.S. operations around the world?

**ENSURING POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY**

Under international law, all people have the rights to due process, to equality before the law and to peacefully protest, all of which are in jeopardy because local governments are failing to ensure police are not placing people’s lives in danger. The UN has developed a code of conduct for law enforcement officials that sets out strict human rights safeguards for the use of force. These standards provide that law enforcement should only use force as a last resort and that the amount of force used must be proportionate to the threat encountered and designed to minimize damage and injury. The shooting deaths of unarmed individuals and African American men, and the heavy-handed policing tactics used in response to the largely peaceful protests that followed some of those incidents, have brought forward a long overdue national conversation on race, policing, and justice.

**Questions to Candidates:**

- If elected how would you address the policies and practices on the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers in the U.S. in relation to international standards?
- How would you improve transparency and accountability to address the use of deadly force by police and the deaths of civilians in police custody?
- What is your position on the creation of a National Crime and Justice Task Force to examine and produce recommendations on policing, including a nationwide review of police use of lethal force laws, policies, training and practices, as well as a thorough review and reform of oversight and accountability mechanisms?
ENDING MASS INCARCERATION AND PROLONGED SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

International human rights law requires all penal systems to allow, encourage, and facilitate rehabilitation. The U.S. prison population has quadrupled since 1980, an increase largely driven by heavier penalties for nonviolent offenses. As prison building costs escalate, many states have cut funding for rehabilitation, education and other programs. The United States accounts for only 5% of the world’s population, but has nearly 22% of the world’s prison population. More than 2 million people are incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails. If current trends continue, one in three black men in the United States will go to prison or jail. Racial disparities are apparent at multiple stages in the U.S. criminal justice system, including sentencing disparities, resulting in the overrepresentation of individuals belonging to racial and ethnic minorities in prisons and jails. These issues point to the failure of the United States to respect, protect and fulfill its obligations in regard to the rights to be free from discrimination, to be equal before the law and to equal protection of the law.

Questions to Candidates:

• What is your position on the reduction of discrimination and ill-treatment in the U.S. criminal justice system, including the use of prolonged solitary confinement, discriminatory profiling, and the treatment of juveniles as adults?

• How would you address the practice of mass incarceration in the United States?

SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS GLOBALLY

All human beings have the right to live in freedom and dignity, and to have the full range of their human rights respected, protected and fulfilled. At the same time, governments must be held accountable for their actions that undermine or violate those rights. This belief is at the heart of the international system of protection for human rights that the United States helped create. That system is now under great pressure as governments around the world, including the USA, are increasingly flouting their human rights obligations in the name of national security.

In many countries, people continue to be jailed solely for the peaceful expression of their beliefs or identity. These “prisoners of conscience” must be released. For example, Raif Badawi, jailed and sentenced to 1,000 lashes in Saudi Arabia for his writings, is a prisoner of conscience.

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) are often targeted and attacked, including through restrictive national laws, policies and practices, instead of being supported and seen as critical interlocutors in the struggle for human dignity, fairness, equality, respect and autonomy – all bedrocks of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). HRDs are also critical indicators of the health of a country’s political space. The work of HRDs is essential to building human rights-respecting communities and ensuring that States respect, protect and fulfill human rights, and where this is not the case, holding States accountable for their actions.

Questions to Candidates:

• What role should the U.S. play in promoting respect for human rights globally?

• What is your position on freeing prisoners of conscience around the world — people jailed solely for the peaceful expression of their beliefs or identity?

• How would you address the issue of harassment, threats and imprisonment of human rights defenders around the world?
Armed conflicts and persecution have forced a record 60 million people to flee their homes in search of safety. According to the UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees), one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum, and that number is steadily increasing.

This is the largest refugee crisis since WWII, with more than 19.5 million refugees worldwide—and 51% of all refugees are children. Of the total refugee population, the UNHCR has designated 1.15 million of the most vulnerable refugees — including torture survivors, people with serious medical conditions and disabilities, unaccompanied children and children at risk, people persecuted for their sexuality or gender, and women at risk — as being in need of immediate resettlement. Currently, 86% of all refugees are hosted by developing countries.

The refugee crisis affects people all around the globe, leaving people at extreme risk and destabilizing regions. Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic have forced an estimated 3 million refugees to leave their homes. A growing number of people, including tens of thousands of unaccompanied children, are fleeing rampant gang violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, seeking asylum in the United States. 25,000 refugees and migrants attempted to cross the Bay of Bengal in the first quarter of 2015, almost double the number in the same period in 2014. Over 7,000 people have drowned in the Mediterranean since 2013, and 166,000 people were rescued at sea by the Italian authorities in 2014.

The refugee crisis in Syria, specifically, highlights the need for U.S. leadership. Over 12 million Syrians—that’s over half the population — are currently displaced. There are currently over 4.8 million registered Syrian refugees who have fled government bombs and attacks by the armed group calling itself the Islamic State — and who now face incredible hardship, even poverty, as they wait for resettlement. Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan hold almost four million Syrian refugees, and the most vulnerable Syrian refugees receive $19 per month, or less than a dollar a day, for food assistance. Those considered “moderately vulnerable” will receive only $10 per month. Syrian refugees who fled for their lives are now facing extreme poverty: more than 80% of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the local poverty line. The UN has set a goal of resettling 400,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees promptly, yet only just over 162,000 resettlement places have been offered so far worldwide.

The Obama administration’s recent commitment to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees and to raise the total refugee acceptance rate in the United States to 85,000 in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017 is commendable. But for the millions of refugees at risk today, these numbers are far from enough. Only 1% of the global refugee population is even considered for candidacy for resettlement in the U.S. Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States, and refugees entering the United States go through an arduous and extensive screening process. The U.S. has the capacity and the responsibility to do more. The United States must accept more refugees for resettlement and increase support for refugee assistance.
Issue Brief: NATIONAL SECURITY

It seems like every day, media and public figures are telling us that we should be on high alert; we’re in crisis, emergency, and under threat. Fifteen years after the attacks of September 11, 2001, it’s starting to seem like fear and anxiety are permanent fixtures of the news cycle.

Exploiting our genuine need for security and our grief over terror attacks, some media and public figures are peddling fear and prejudice. They are asking us to give up our privacy and dignity, our sense of fairness and commitment to equality and human rights, on the dubious promise that it will make use safer. What was only a short time ago seen as shocking and unacceptable has slowly become woven into the fabric of everyday life.

Some individuals are trying to ramp up an anti-human rights agenda on national security, including bringing back torture in the name of national security, keeping Guantanamo open and bringing new detainees to fill it, and targeting Muslim communities for registration, travel bans and unlawful surveillance.

We have an alternative vision: the security that comes from ensuring human rights and accountability for human rights violations. Instead of giving in to the cycle of fear, we must urge the next administration to commit to putting human rights at the heart of its national security policy:

- Closing Guantanamo and ending unlawful indefinite detention
- Protecting detainees against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment
- Investigating and being transparent about the use of lethal force globally, and ensuring accountability for unlawful killings
- Rejecting discriminatory and unlawful surveillance of American Muslims and other minorities
- Publicly countering messages of hate and fear—and supporting human rights as the best way to counter terrorism

Media and public figures can distort the truth about terrorism. Here are key facts you should know:

1. **Guantanamo:** Many members of Congress have said they want to keep it open—until the last detainee there dies, or perhaps even to take new detainees—and they claim everyone who is there is dangerous. But of the detainees who remain at Guantanamo, only 10 are facing any charges (before the unfair military commissions system), and the rest have either been cleared for transfer by U.S. national security agencies, or are awaiting review before a board. Nearly all of these individuals have been held without charge for more than a decade—in other words, they’re being effectively sentenced to die behind bars without even getting a trial.

2. **Torture:** Many public figures are trying to downplay the inhumanity and horror of torture. But the world rejected the idea that torture can be justified “in special cases” a long time ago.

3. **Religious Profiling and Surveillance:** Proposals to ban Muslims suggest that Muslim communities pose a major threat to U.S. security. To treat an entire community as suspect and deprive people of rights based on nonviolent beliefs is wrong and antithetical to human rights and the U.S. Constitution.
HUMAN RIGHTS

• Human rights are essential to a free society.
• The U.S. government must stand for human rights, not against them.
• Why aren’t the candidates talking about human rights?
• The next U.S. President must uphold human rights, not oppose them.

REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RIGHTS

• We can’t turn our back on #refugees. We stand with those fleeing war & persecution
• Many #refugees are themselves fleeing attacks by armed groups and terrorism
• 12.2 million Syrians need urgent humanitarian assistance. We MUST do more
• This is the largest #refugee crisis since WW2. We must do more to make #refugeeswelcome

TORTURE

• Waterboarding is torture & NO circumstances whatsoever can justify its use.
• The America I believe in would close Guantanamo and never use torture.
• #DearFuturePOTUS, waterboarding is torture & NO ONE should get away with it.
• Muslim bodies are tortured, unlawfully killed & treated as disposable in the War on Terror.

GUANTANAMO

• The America I believe in doesn’t hold people without fair trials, without hope, and without end
• Dozens at #Guantanamo face prospect of dying behind locked doors without ever being charged with a crime
• Not in my name: Don’t make #Guantanamo a permanent offshore prison for an endless global war

SECURITY

• The America we believe in stands up for diversity, tolerance & human rights
• The America I believe in celebrates peaceful dissent, diversity & human rights
• We all want security, but fear-mongering does NOT make us any safer.

HASHTAGS

• #HumanRights
• #DearFuturePOTUS
• #Waterboarding
• #Guantanamo
• #RefugeesWelcome
RESOURCES

TIPS FOR UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA:

REFUGEE TOOLKIT:
www.amnestyusa.org/refugeetoolkit

AMERICA I BELIEVE IN - TOOLKIT AND RESOURCES:
www.amnestyusa.org/ibelieve

INDIVIDUALS AT RISK:
http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/individuals-at-risk

STOPPING TORTURE:
http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/torture

AMERICAN TORTURE STORY TOOLKIT:
www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/AmericanTortureStoryToolkitFall2015.pdf

SECURITY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM:

ENSURING POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY:
http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/lethal-force

ENDING MASS INCARCERATION AND PROLONGED SOLITARY CONFINEMENT:

ABOLISHING THE DEATH PENALTY
http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/death-penalty

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