

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



#DEADLYFORCE

CONVERSATION TOOLKIT



50
STATES

FAIL TO COMPLY
WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS
ON DEADLY FORCE BY POLICE

Dear Amnesty Activists,

On June 18, Amnesty International USA released Deadly Force, a state-by-state analysis of laws governing the use of lethal force by law enforcement officials. The results are staggering.

Even though I've fought for human rights for most of my life, even though I know the names and stories of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray and Eric Garner and Rekia Boyd and more, and even though I've spent time with friends and families of loved ones who died at the hands of police, it's still a shock to see so plainly that the US falls so far short of human rights standards designed to prevent unlawful killings by police.

Deadly Force tells us that every single state Washington, DC, fails to meet international standards. All of them. It tells us that no state statute includes accountability mechanisms, reminds us that African American people are disproportionately affected the use of lethal force by law enforcement, and that governments from the city to the state to the national level have failed to accurately even track when and how police officers kill people. It tells us far more than that. **This report gives all of us who care about dignity, justice, and human rights a clear picture of how systemic these issues are; it also gives us vital tools for reforming those systems.**

For decades, Amnesty International USA members have worked to hold police accountable for respecting human rights, and we've taken on that work with renewed energy since the protests in Ferguson began last summer. When Michael Brown was killed, young people rose up in protest and sparked an international conversation about racial justice and militarized policing in the United States. That conversation has ignited a movement, showing us all the power of communities coming together for justice and accountability.

Conversations matter, and that's why we made this toolkit. The best conversations are those in which we learn from each other, we build and strategize together, and we are moved to action. Inside this toolkit there is more background about the Deadly Force report, as well as tips and tools for hosting a community Conversation about the human rights issues at stake, about state-specific challenges, and about solutions.

Whether you have been in the streets for over 300 days, writing letters for over 30 years, or are looking for a way to get involved, we hope this toolkit helps you develop new ideas, build community, and organize. Let us know what you talk about by posting highlights, questions, and photos using #DeadlyForce, and take your activism to the next level at www.amnestyusa.org/DeadlyForceActivistResources.

In solidarity,
Jamira Burley
Senior Campaigner, Gun Violence and Criminal Justice

CONTENTS

THE ISSUE: POLICE MUST BE ACCOUNTABLE TO HUMAN RIGHTS	3
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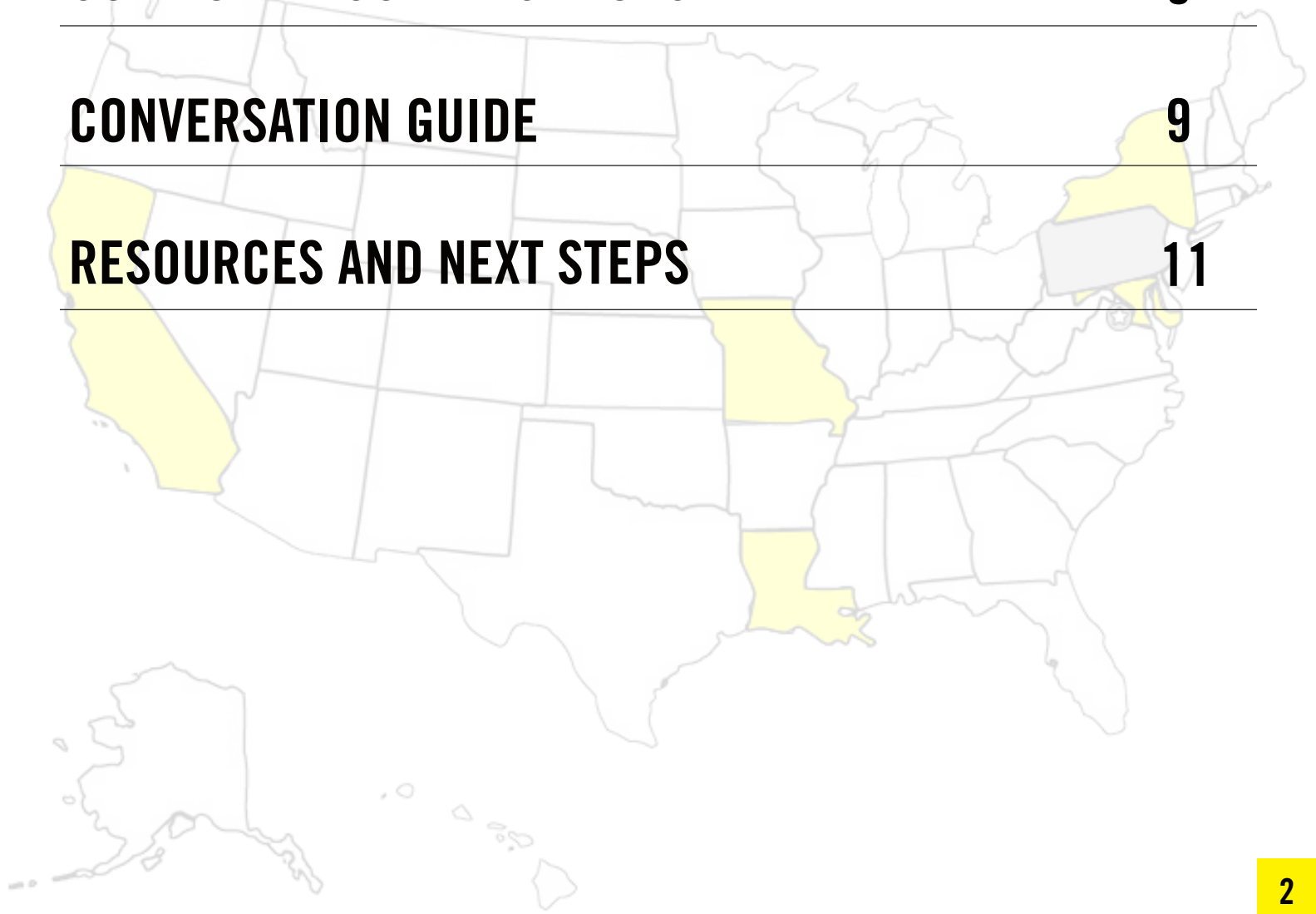
DEADLY FORCE	4
---------------------	----------

THE FACTS	5
------------------	----------

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS	6
--------------------------------	----------

CONVERSATION GUIDE	9
---------------------------	----------

RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS	11
---------------------------------	-----------



THE ISSUE

POLICE USE OF FORCE MUST COMPLY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

Every year, police officers in the United States kill hundreds of people. African American men and women are disproportionately victims of police use of deadly force in this country. Michael Brown. Freddie Gray. Shereese Francis. Rekia Boyd. Eric Garner. John Crawford. Akai Gurley. Tamir Rice.

The reports of unnecessary or excessive force by police continue to mount, captured by body cameras, dashboard cameras, cell phones and eye-witnesses. Throughout the country, we are forced to confront the lack of accountability and the lack of adequate state laws that restrict the use of lethal force under international standards. State laws are either non-existent or law the international alignment to protect the lives of individuals, regardless of their race, socio-economic status or other aspects of their identity.

Each time someone is killed, a community is torn apart, mourning the loss of loved ones and searching for answers. And communities from Ferguson to New York City, from Atlanta to Los Angeles, from Oakland to Madison to Baltimore and beyond are responding by standing up and demanding justice.

Young people of color have been at the forefront of protests that have ignited a national dialogue about race and policing in the United States, and brought international attention to issues of law enforcement and criminal justice in the United States. Their resilience in the face of [aggressive policing of protests](#) has sparked a movement, as people have poured into the streets of towns and cities, and into the hallways of state capitols throughout the country. Though neither the violence communities are experiencing at the hands of police, nor the struggle to end it is new, emerging leaders have made sure that these issues will not be ignored.

When young activists in Ferguson, Missouri took to the streets following the shooting of Michael Brown, Jr., they were met by teargas, sound cannons, and other forms of aggressive policing. Within days, Amnesty International USA sent a team of human rights observers to monitor protests and the police response, producing a report, [On the Streets of America: Human Rights Abuses in Ferguson](#). While that report was a continuation of work that has happened for decades, it reignited Amnesty International USA's commitment to police accountability in the US. It became a new beginning to research, advocacy, and action that has continued with a new report, Deadly Force.



DEADLY FORCE

Amnesty International's report, Deadly Force is a state-by-state legislative survey on police use of lethal force statutes in the United States. The report highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive national 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. This report demonstrates serious concerns regarding the lack of compliance of state laws with either US constitutional law or international standards on the use of force. As a result, we have witnessed what happens when no statutes are in place or the standards are so broad that they open the door for misinterpretation and human rights violations.

Some of the concerns highlighted in the report include legislation that allows for the use of lethal force “to suppress opposition to an arrest,” to arrest someone for a “suspected felony,” to “suppress a riot or mutiny,” or for certain crimes such as burglary. The report notes that a number of states allow for police officers to kill someone who is attempting to escape from a prison or jail. Others allow private citizens to use lethal force if they are carrying out law enforcement activities, but what is also startling is that no states require specific accountability mechanisms for the use of lethal force by officers, within their use of deadly force statutes.

Deadly Force outlines a number of recommendations for every level of government, including but are not limited to the creation of a **National Crime and Justice Task Force to implement much needed reforms to the criminal justice system, including the use of deadly force by police, in addition to** calling on the Department of Justice to require, collect and publish data on police killings. During the United States' 2015 Universal Periodic Review in Geneva last month, more than half of the 117 countries represented raised concerns and made recommendations based on recent incidents of police killings. So while Amnesty International USA and other organizations across the country will continue to monitor and raise awareness about the unlawful use of lethal force by police, the international community also joins us trying to hold the U.S. government accountable.

To read the report, go to www.amnestyusa.org/lethalforcereport

For more resources, go to www.amnestyusa.org/lethalforce



DEADLY FORCE: THE FACTS

One of a state's most fundamental duties is to protect life. Hundreds of lives are lost at the hands of police every year in the United States, a disproportionate number of these lives belonging to African American men and women. In the United States, there is a pattern of racially discriminatory conduct by law enforcement officers, and an alarming use of lethal force. These practices raise serious human rights concerns. Here's a snapshot of the facts:

DEADLY FORCE AT A GLANCE

- The United States has failed to track how many people are killed by law enforcement officers; estimates range from 400 to 1,000.
- African Americans represent a disproportionate number of the deaths involving lethal force by law enforcement.
- While African Americans represent 13.2 percent of the US population, they represent 27.6 percent of the total deaths at the hands of police (6,338) between 1999 to 2013.

STATE LAWS BY THE NUMBERS

- 9 states and Washington, DC currently have no laws on the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers.
- 9 states allow for the use of lethal force to be used to suppress a riot.
- 13 states have laws on the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers that do not even comply with the lower standards set by US constitutional law.
- 22 states allow for law enforcement officers to kill someone trying to escape from a prison or jail.
- 20 states allow private citizens to use lethal force if they carry out law enforcement activities.
- 42 states do not require a warning before lethal force is used.
- All 50 states and Washington, DC fail to comply with international law and standards governing the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers.
- 0 states require the use of lethal force as a last resort, even though that is the international standard.
- 0 states limit the use of lethal force to situations of imminent threat to life or serious injury to the officer or others, as required by international standards.
- 0 state "use of lethal force" statutes include accountability mechanisms, including, for example, the requirement of obligatory reporting for the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officers.
- The United States has failed to respect and protect the right to life by failing to ensure that domestic legislation meets international human rights law and standards on the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers.
- The United States has ratified the international covenant on civil and political rights and the international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, and therefore has an obligation to respect and protect these rights. No state currently complies with the standards set by these conventions.

POLICE LETHAL FORCE LAWS IN THE USA



42 STATES AND WASHINGTON DC DO NOT REQUIRE A WARNING BE GIVEN BEFORE LETHAL FORCE IS USED



22 STATES ALLOW FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS TO KILL SOMEONE TRYING TO ESCAPE FROM A PRISON OR JAIL WHETHER OR NOT THEY POSE A THREAT



20 STATES ALLOW PRIVATE CITIZENS TO USE LETHAL FORCE IF THEY CARRY OUT LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES



9 STATES ALLOW FOR LETHAL FORCE TO BE USED TO SUPPRESS A RIOT



0 STATES' "USE OF LETHAL FORCE" STATUTES INCLUDE ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS



9 STATES AND WASHINGTON DC HAVE NO LAWS ON USE OF LETHAL FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS



13 STATES HAVE LAWS THAT DO NOT EVEN COMPLY WITH THE LOWER STANDARDS SET BY US CONSTITUTIONAL LAW ON THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS



ALL 50 STATES AND WASHINGTON DC FAIL TO COMPLY WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW ON THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

AFRICAN AMERICANS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED BY POLICE KILLINGS

AFRICAN AMERICANS REPRESENT **13.2%** OF THE US POPULATION...



...BUT THEY REPRESENT **27.6%** OF THE TOTAL DEATHS AT THE HANDS OF POLICE

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DEADLY FORCE

The contents of the Deadly Force report are meant to engage with the broader national and international dialogue about the US criminal justice system, race, mass incarceration, and police accountability. These Conversations have been happening in classrooms, auditoriums, coffee shops, libraries, and living rooms, on street corners, around dining room tables, online, and at conferences. They are challenging all of us to look deeper at ourselves and the movements we've been a part of, pushing us to be both active and accountable, and driving strategic organizing that has led to tangible change already.

Conversations matter. Communities have proven that when we come together to share knowledge and experience, and learn from each other, we can build power. Engaging Conversations spark new ideas and ignite collaboration. By educating ourselves, we can build collective power and implement change.

TIPS FOR HOSTING A CONVERSATION

As a host, your responsibility is to gather a group of people to talk about Deadly Force, to share experiences, and to develop ideas for action. Hosting this Conversation is integral to sparking action and strengthening the voice of your community. Host a Conversation and help create change.

- **Recruit people to join the Conversation:** Flyers and Facebook events are great ways to promote your Conversation. But remember, the best way to recruit is the simplest: ask them! Think about the first time you decided to get involved with human rights or social justice activism. For many of us, we went to that first meeting because someone asked us directly.
- **Choose a time and place:** Work with the people you know want to be a part of the Conversation to find a time and place that will work. This might be your next (or your first!) Amnesty Group meeting, or it might be a special event you are hosting. If you're hosting somewhere other than your home, dorm room, or apartment, make sure to reserve space. Remember, these are challenging and personal issues, so it is important that the space you choose, and the space you facilitate is safe, caring, and creative for the participants.
- **Set Goals and Create an Agenda:** How many people do you want to participate in the Conversation? What do you want to come out of the Conversation? You want to find a good balance between structure that will support the flow of the Conversation, and space so that the Conversation can be dynamic and challenging. It is key to contextualize this Conversation in your own community. It is also important to draw from both the knowledge of everyone in the Conversation, as well as from the huge body of knowledge within the global human rights movement.
- **Read and share the report:** A primary purpose of these discussions is to help understand and share the Deadly Force report, and to think together about ways to challenge and change the laws in your state. Keeping the report at the center of the Conversation will help keep the focus of this discussion on lethal use of force by police in the United States, as well as move you toward solutions. Make sure to share the report with everyone before the
- **Follow up:** Whether the Conversations you are hosting are the beginning of or the continuation of your organizing efforts, remember to follow up with notes and next steps. Keep a sign in sheet that gathers names, email addresses, and phone numbers (at least!), and ask people to commit to next steps before they leave.

FORMAL & INFORMAL SPACES TO HAVE A CONVERSATION

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| • Amnesty International Group meeting | • Picnic |
| • Poetry slam/reading | • Photography exhibit |
| • Student panel | • Town hall meeting |
| • Film Screening | • Writing workshop |
| • Local community center | • Google Hangout |
| • Book group | • Tabling at your school, community events, |
| • Neighborhood block party | street fairs, shopping centers, etc. |

TIPS TO ENSURE A GOOD CONVERSATION

Facilitation is the most important part of being a host. Keeping Conversation safe and participatory for all of your guests will contribute to its success. Here are a few tips to help the Conversation flow.

- **Be Encouraging:** Participation can often be daunting, especially when the topic feels personal or emotional. The discussion questions provided are to help begin the Conversation, not limit the Conversation's potential. If your participants propose questions to the group, or look to channel the Conversation in an unexplored direction, be encouraging and supportive. Make sure everyone who wants to speak has the opportunity to do so.
- **Safe Space:** The most important, and often the most difficult thing a facilitator can do for a discussion is create a safe space for participants. That means establishing group norms and making sure everyone follows them. Group norms could include: step up/step back, one mic, and confidentiality, assume best intentions, take responsibility for impact, etc. Also think through the following questions:
 - How can space be created for people in this group to tell their stories? How can we seek to validate the experiences of others? And use this Conversation to begin to recognize experiences we may have had ourselves?
 - The topic of police brutality is painful and personal for many participating in these Conversations, so how can we show up to each other to support everyone to participate fully?
- **Remain Respectful:** Be kind, considerate, thoughtful, and understanding of other people's feelings during the Conversation. Different members of the group will have different relationships to the subject matter. We can learn from various lived experiences by being respectful and genuinely listening.

Your Conversation Should Be Local, National and International in Scope

As you identify the goals for your Conversation keep in mind that the discussion should be focused on the local, connected to the national level, and bring in components of the international. Integrate examples from your own community into your Conversation. You can point to examples of police abuses, including racially discriminatory policing, and unnecessary or excessive use of force. You may also ask your guests to share experiences of their own. Police abuses infringe on a range of human rights, from the right to be free from discrimination, to the right to be free from torture or other ill-treatment, to the right to a fair trial, to the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, to the right to life. Across the country and internationally communities face discriminatory and violent policing. It is important to discuss the issues, as well as build collective power within local communities to enact change.



CONVERSATION GUIDE

A human rights framework pushes us to understand the connections between local experiences and global issues, and also drives us to take action. A human rights framework always starts and ends with the dignity of every human being, and respect between people. There are many topics and themes that are on peoples' minds, and many questions that can help build connections and develop concrete ideas that can drive change. Here are just a few suggested questions that will help guide the discussion. Pick and choose what would best work with your group.

YOUR COMMUNITY

- Do you feel a police presence in your community? How do they treat you and other members of the community? Why?
- Does having law enforcement officials in your community make you feel safe? If so, why? If not, why not?
- In your community, do you feel that local law enforcement officials respect and protect the right to freedom from discrimination and the right to equal protection under the law? What examples are there in the room?
- Can you or other community members identify specific instances where police used unnecessary or excessive force? How did the community respond? How did the police respond?
- If your community has responded to police abuses, did your community receive support or solidarity from any organizations or locally organized groups? If so, what happened? How did it feel?
- How can you create safe space to support and care for members of your community who have faced police abuses?

RACE, RACISM, AND THE POLICE

- The use of deadly force by police officers disproportionately impacts communities of color, particularly African American men and women. How do you think racism affects police presence in your community? In your neighborhood? Your school? Your family? (p. 12 for more info)
- When it comes to police use of lethal force, how does race and racism intersect with gender? With sexuality? With disability? Can you think of examples of women who have been killed by the police? What about Trans* people or people with disabilities who have been killed by the police?
- Do you regularly see the police in your neighborhood? Do you feel comfortable interacting with law enforcement? Considering this, how do you personally feel the impacts of policing in your community?
- If you feel like you have had mostly positive interactions with the police, what personal privileges can you identify that may have minimized your interactions with law enforcement? Or changed the nature of these interactions?

HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLICING

- Where do human rights come from? What are the human rights that are at stake when we're talking about policing in our community?
- Do your state's laws governing the use of lethal force by police officers meet international standards (Hint: the answer is No!)? Do your state's laws meet constitutional standards? Does your state have laws governing the use of lethal force at all?
- Do you know if your state has legislation that regulates the use of lethal force by law enforcement officials? If so, is it adequate in your opinion? (p. 7 for more info)
- Why is it important for states to reform their legislation related to the use of lethal force? (see p. 28 for more information on state laws on the use of lethal force)
- Should human rights education be a requirement for all law enforcement officials?
- How can we assert a demand for the recognition of human rights within our local police departments?

HOLDING POLICE ACCOUNTABLE

- What would it take to organize your community to confront police abuses? What resources would be necessary?
- What resources do you have to organize in your community? What actions can you take now?
- How can members of a community hold local police departments accountable for the unlawful use of force by their police officers? (see p. 19 for more info on accountability)
- What should civilian oversight of law enforcement look like? (for more information on civilian involvement see p. 27)

TAKING ACTION

- The report states that one of the state's main duties is to protect the right to life. How can we as a community demand that this duty be upheld with consistency and without discrimination?
- The report concludes with a series of recommendations (**see page 35**) to address the issues presented. As a group, can we draft a series of preliminary recommendations particular to our community's experiences with law enforcement officials?



**THE U.S. MUST
REFORM
ITS LAWS ON
THE USE OF DEADLY
FORCE BY POLICE**

RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS

Human rights demand action. That's why it's crucial that you take the energy and ideas you've built through dialogue and do something. Now is the time to organize, to continue the work that many of you have been doing, to join in solidarity with efforts that are already making a difference, and to build more power so that when police commit abuses they are held accountable for their actions, and so that people in every neighborhood of the United States can walk free of fear of the police. Here are a few things you can do next.

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Tell us how your Conversations are going! Post photos, great ideas, challenging moments, and anything else about your Conversations on Twitter and Instagram using #DeadlyForce. Contact your Field Organizer to share highlights, challenges, and ideas: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/contact>.

ORGANIZE!

Check out the activist resources at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/> to begin your organizing process, but don't forget to contact your Field Organizer to directly engage with Amnesty International USA, to find out more about what's going on in your state, to find out about leadership opportunities, and to get more involved: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/contact>.

KEEP LEARNING!

There are a ton of great resources out there about race and privilege, policing, mass incarceration, and human rights. Without the tireless work of communities, activists, organizers, and researchers across the country, we would not have been able to develop this report or this toolkit. Contact your Field Organizer for more about organizations and communities leading the way, and for more resources to learn about all of these topics. Here are a few resources that will help you keep the Conversation going:

AMNESTY REPORTS ON RACE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND POLICE BRUTALITY

- AIUSA Blog Posts About Ferguson: <http://blog.amnestyusa.org/tag/ferguson/>
- AIUSA Blog Posts About Police and Human Rights: <http://blog.amnestyusa.org/category/arms-trade/police-and-human-rights/>
- USA: Race, Rights and Police Brutality: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/147/1999/en/6e339ef0-e038-11dd-865a-d728958ca30a/amr511471999en.html>
- USA: Rights for All: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/035/1998/en/0440cd04-da99-11dd-80bc-797022e51902/amr510351998en.pdf>
- Stonewalled: Police Abuse and Misconduct Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in the US: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/122/2005/en/2200113d-d4bd-11dd-8a23-d58a49c0d652/amr511222005en.pdf>
- Threat and Humiliation: Racial Profiling, Domestic Security and Human Rights in the USA: http://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/rp_report.pdf
- USA: "Less than Lethal?" The Use of Stun Weapons in US Law Enforcement: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/010/2008/en/530be6d6-437e-4c77-851b-9e581197ccf6/amr510102008en.pdf>
- USA: Torture, Ill-treatment and Excessive Force by Police in Los Angeles, California: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/076/1992/en/d2ae229d-f6f3-458a-ab03-666a103e7382/amr510761992en.pdf>
- California: Update on Police Brutality: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/150/1999/en/2955b76e-e033-11dd-865a-d728958ca30a/amr511501999en.pdf>
- Summary of Amnesty International's Concerns on Police Abuse in the Chicago, Illinois: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/168/1999/en/6911d657-e013-11dd-adf6-a1bae6c1ea26/amr511681999en.pdf>
- Rights for All: Program for Action on Human Rights in the USA: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/051/1998/en/76174de8-d9cb-11dd-af2b-b1f6023af0c5/amr510511998en.pdf>
- Rights for All: Human Rights in the USA: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/054/1998/en/4d5e67b6-d9c5-11dd-af2b-b1f6023af0c5/amr510541998en.pdf>



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#DeadlyForce

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