

# PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE WORLDWIDE

**Senators should cosponsor and pass a resolution on human rights defenders and Representatives should cosponsor and pass a resolution on prisoners of conscience to provide vital recognition and support for these courageous individuals.**

Human rights defenders (HRDs) are persons who, individually or in association with others, act to defend universal human rights and fundamental freedoms without advocating hatred, discrimination or violence. HRDs come from all walks of life; they can be anyone, for example journalists, elected officials, lawyers, Indigenous leaders, teachers, or women's or LGBTQ rights activists. Prisoners of conscience (POCs) are persons imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their political, religious, or other conscientiously held beliefs, or for their identity, even though they have neither used nor advocated violence.

HRDs and POCs play a key role in defending the principles of freedom, justice and dignity, which underpin the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Their work contributes directly to the realization of human rights, the strengthening of the rule of law, and fostering security and well-being in countries around the world and here in the U.S. It is also in the interest of the U.S. to ensure that these peaceful activists can do their work safely.

Every day, HRDs endure intimidation, torture, imprisonment, stigmatization, and restrictions on their critical work. In 2017 alone, over 312 HRDs were killed globally. Since the adoption of the UN Declaration on HRDs in 1998, it is estimated that over 3,500 HRDs have been killed worldwide. These numbers alone are shocking, but they also implicate the incalculable loss sustained by a country or community when it is deprived of the progress towards fundamental rights and freedoms that could have been enjoyed if these brave individuals had lived to continue their work. Similarly, prisoners of conscience are imprisoned, often tortured and sometimes executed, because their governments view as unacceptable who they are, what they believe, and how they have chosen to express their convictions.

Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) is asking members of the U.S. Senate to co-sponsor and pass a bipartisan Human Rights Defenders resolution, introduced by the Senate Human Rights Caucus Co-Chairs, Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC) and Chris Coons (D-DE), in February 2018. The Human Rights Defenders resolution would provide vital public recognition for HRDs' work, promote their protection, and encourage accountability for those who persecute them. AIUSA further calls on Representatives to co-sponsor and pass a prisoners of conscience resolution introduced by Representatives Jim McGovern (D-MA-2) and Randy Hultgren (R-IL-14). The resolution calls for the designation of a "Prisoners of Conscience Day" and encourages Members of Congress to support individual prisoners of conscience through their official duties and their work with the executive branch, constituents, and foreign governments.

AIUSA works tirelessly to support and protect HRDs and POCs, but without strong declarations of public recognition and support by governments like the U.S., they will continue to risk torture, imprisonment, and even death.

## **AIUSA Recommendations to Congress:**

- Senators should co-sponsor and swiftly pass the Human Rights Defenders resolution in recognition of HRDs under attack for their peaceful work around the world.
- Representatives should co-sponsor and swiftly pass the Prisoners of Conscience resolution encouraging the U.S. to protect POCs.