



Human Rights on Capitol Hill

published by Amnesty International USA (“AIUSA”)

March 22, 2018

In this edition of *Human Rights on Capitol Hill*:

- (1) **AIUSA’s First National Lobby Day in a Decade**: On February 26 over 300 activists from nearly 40 states descend onto Capitol Hill to urge Congress to protect refugees, fund humanitarian aid, and defend human rights activists worldwide.
- (2) **Congress introduces two resolutions in support of human rights defenders (“HRDs”) and prisoners of conscience (“POCs”)**: In February two major resolutions in support of HRDs (S.Res.407) and POCs (H.Res.450) were introduced. AIUSA testified before the Lantos Human Rights Commission in support of H.Res.450.
- (3) **Administration Cuts Funding by More than Half for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (“UNRWA”)**: AIUSA expresses alarm over drastic cuts to U.S. funding for UNRWA.
- (4) **AIUSA Urges Congress to Stem Gun Violence**: In the wake of the Parkland tragedy, [AIUSA calls on Congress](#) to pass legislation to prevent deaths related to gun violence, including universal background checks and funding research on gun violence prevention.

RECENT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

- (5) **Amnesty International Launches 2018 Human Rights Report in Washington, DC**: In February, Amnesty International launched our [annual report](#) about the state of human rights in the world at a briefing in the Capitol Visitors Center.
- (6) **Amnesty International Documents Rapid Re-building in Myanmar Villages That Were Previously Inhabited by Rohingya**: Amnesty International releases [new report](#) revealing how Myanmar authorities are rapidly rebuilding and militarizing northern Rakhine State, just months after pushing 700,000 Rohingya out of Rakhine State through a scorched-earth campaign.

WHAT’S COMING DOWN THE PIKE ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS FRONT?

- (7) **AIUSA Opposes CIA Director Nominee**: [AIUSA calls on the President](#) to withdraw Gina Haspel’s nomination for CIA Director, pending a full investigation of her alleged links to torture and enforced disappearances.
- (8) **AIUSA Calls on Senate to Closely Scrutinize Mike Pompeo’s Human Rights Record**: [AIUSA calls on the Senate](#) to closely scrutinize Secretary of State nominee Mike Pompeo’s record on torture and other human rights issues.
- (9) **AIUSA Alarm Over Changes to Treatment of Reproductive Rights and Discrimination Issues in 2018 State Department Human Rights Report**: AIUSA speaks out against reported changes to



the 2018 State Department Human Rights Report that could weaken the integrity and power of the Report.

Amnesty International USA Updates

(1) AIUSA's First Capitol Hill Lobby Day in a Decade: On February 26 hundreds of AIUSA activists traveled to Washington, DC to join [AIUSA's first Capitol Hill lobby day in a decade](#). Over 300 people from nearly 40 states participated. Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) and Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) addressed the AIUSA activists, who attended 145 House meetings and 78 Senate meetings. AIUSA activists pressed Congress to:

- [Maintain Robust Funding for Humanitarian Aid for Refugees and Displaced Peoples Worldwide](#)
 - Over 65 million people have fled their homes, escaping persecution, torture, and violence. The U.S. has long been the single largest donor of international humanitarian aid. Now more than ever, the U.S. must maintain robust funding for humanitarian and refugee assistance in line with current appropriations and maintain funding and support for U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.
- [Protect Human Rights Defenders \(“HRDs”\) and Prisoners of Conscience \(“POCs”\) Worldwide](#)
 - Across the world human rights defenders fight for fundamental rights. Many are jailed, tortured, even killed. In February, Senators Tillis (R-NC) and Coons (D-DE) introduced a bipartisan resolution (S.Res. 407) in support of HRDs. In the House, Representatives Hultgren (R-IL-14) and McGovern (D-MA-2) introduced a resolution (H.Res. 750) in support of POCs. Congress should swiftly pass both resolutions
- [Halt Myanmar Military's Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya](#)
 - Since August 2017 about 700,000 Rohingya – roughly the population of Washington, DC -- have fled Myanmar in terror as security forces have waged a campaign of ethnic cleansing, systematic murder, rape, and mass burnings. Congress should swiftly pass the Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2017 (S. 2060) and the BURMA Act of 2017 (H.R. 4223) to ensure that the U.S. brings all pressure to bear against the Myanmar military to halt the atrocities against the Rohingya.

Since AIUSA's Lobby Day on February 26, over 20 Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have signed on as co-sponsors to the four bills we support!

*For more information on AIUSA's Lobby Day, read The Hill Op-Ed by Joanne Lin, AIUSA National Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs, on why now more than ever, Congress must stand up for human right [here](#).



(2) Congress Introduces Resolutions in Support of HRDs and POCs:

In February, Congress introduced two major resolutions highlighting the importance of HRDs and committing to fight for the release of POCs. The co-chairs of the bipartisan Senate Human Rights Caucus, Sens. Tillis (R-NC) and Coons (D-DE) introduced [S. Res. 407](#). The resolution recognizes the critical work of HRDs in promoting human rights, the rule of law, democracy, and good governance.



In the House, Reps. Hultgren (R-IL) and McGovern (D-MA), co-chairs of the bipartisan Lantos Human Rights Commission introduced [H. Res. 750](#) following a hearing focused on the Defending Freedoms Project, which pairs Members of Congress with a POC. The resolution calls for the President to take concrete steps to oppose restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly, and encourages Congress to raise individual POC cases with the executive branch, foreign governments, and multilateral organizations.

On February 15 Andrew Fandino, AIUSA Senior Program Officer for the Individuals at Risk Program, [testified](#) before the Lantos Commission about the state of POCs around the world and what Congress can do to release them. Andrew urged Members of Congress to join the [Defending Freedoms Project](#) in order to advocate on behalf of a POC.

(3) Administration Cuts Funding for UNRWA by More than Half: In January the administration held back \$65 million of a planned \$125 million package for UNRWA, which will have devastating effects on Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Territories, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. This population is highly vulnerable and dependent upon the international community: one million Palestinians in Gaza alone survive on food provided by UNRWA. AIUSA is calling on the administration to provide the full \$125 million package for UNRWA, to ensure that Palestinian refugees receive critical food, medicine, and education.

*For more information, read this blog by Raed Jarrar, AIUSA Advocacy Director for the Mid East, [here](#).

(4) AIUSA Renews Calls for Congress to Stem Gun Violence: In the wake of the Parkland tragedy, [AIUSA renewed our calls on Congress and the President](#) to enact legislation that will prevent deaths related to gun violence, which on average kills 92 people, including six children, in the U.S. each



day. Congress should pass legislation requiring universal background checks for all gun sales and transfers, not just those by licensed dealers, and sufficiently fund research and gun violence prevention programs.

Recent Amnesty International Reports

(5) Amnesty International Launches 2018 Annual Human Rights Report in D.C.: In February, Amnesty International launched our annual State of the World's Human Rights, providing a comprehensive overview of human rights in the world today. At the launch event in the Capitol Visitors Center, Salil Shetty, Amnesty's Secretary General, discussed how 2017 proved to be one of the most devastating years for human rights in recent history, with some world leaders permitting ethnic cleansing and overseeing crimes against humanity. [TIME Magazine](#) called the Amnesty report a "scathing assessment of the world's human rights today." For more information, read the full report [here](#).

(6) Amnesty International Documents Rapid Re-building in Myanmar Villages That Were Previously Inhabited by Rohingya: Through eyewitness testimony and expert analysis of satellite images, Amnesty International's new report *Remaking Rakhine State* documents how Myanmar authorities in northern Rakhine State, since January 2018, have flattened villages and intensified new construction in areas previously inhabited by Rohingya. Since August 2017 over 700,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar authorities engaged in ethnic cleansing, and have poured into neighboring Bangladesh. Just months later, in 2018 Myanmar authorities in Rakhine State are building new roads and structures over Rohingya villages that were scorched by Myanmar security forces in fall 2017. Myanmar's ethnic cleansing campaign against the Rohingya has continued into 2018 and has taken on new forms. For more information, read the full report [here](#).

In October 2017 the international community pledged \$345 million to address the immediate needs of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. In March 2018 the UN made a fresh appeal for an additional \$950 million in support -- urgently needed to aid the Rohingya. Read Amnesty International's statement [here](#).

What's Coming Down the Pike on the Human Rights Front?

(7) AIUSA Opposes CIA Director Nominee: In light of reports that CIA deputy director Gina Haspel may have been involved in torture and enforced disappearances at a "black site," [AIUSA is calling on the President](#) to withdraw her nomination for CIA Director, pending a full investigation of the allegations. AIUSA is also calling upon the Justice Department ("DOJ") to initiate investigations into Haspel's alleged activities in the context of the CIA secret detention program -- a program in which the crimes of torture and enforced disappearance were committed. Any DOJ investigation should examine any role she may have had in the destruction of evidence of such crimes. Finally, AIUSA urges the Senate not to hold a confirmation hearing unless and until the necessary declassification of materials relevant to any such hearing is completed. In the event the confirmation hearing were to go ahead without the necessary prerequisites for establishing facts, the Senate should vote against Haspel's appointment as CIA Director.

*Read AIUSA's full statement on the Haspel nomination [here](#).



(8) AIUSA Calls on Senate to Closely Scrutinize Secretary of State Nominee’s Human Rights

Record: [AIUSA calls on the Senate](#) to closely scrutinize Mike Pompeo’s alarming record on torture and human rights issues. The Secretary of State is charged with advancing U.S. foreign policy in a manner that protects and upholds human rights around the world. The State Department is responsible for resettling and welcoming refugees to the U.S., investigating and prosecuting war crimes, and holding other countries accountable for human rights violations.

Prior to becoming CIA Director, Pompeo voiced support for waterboarding. AIUSA’s board of directors [urged](#) the Senate to seek an explicit commitment from then-Representative Pompeo to uphold U.S. and international law on torture.

AIUSA now calls on the Senate to zealously probe Pompeo’s record and vigorously question him on torture and other human rights issues. There is simply too much at stake to entrust the Secretary of State job to anyone who treats human rights as callously as Pompeo has in the past.

(9) AIUSA Alarm Over Changes to Treatment of Reproductive Rights and Discrimination in 2018

State Department Human Rights Report: In February, AIUSA [raised serious concerns](#) regarding reports that the State Department human rights bureau has received a directive to remove passages on reproductive rights and discrimination from its annual report on global human rights. AIUSA met with senior State Department officials to discuss these proposed changes, and joined [170 other](#) civil society organizations in calling on the Secretary of State to maintain the integrity of the report and not limit reporting or data on women’s rights or sexual and reproductive rights.



**[AIUSA](#) is pleased to welcome Francisco Bencosme as our new Asia-Pacific Advocacy Manager! Prior to joining AIUSA, Francisco worked for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations for several years. Learn more about Francisco in *The Beat DC*’s tip-sheet [here](#).*

For more information, please contact:

Africa: Adotei Akwei aakwei@aiusa.org

Mid East: Raed Jarrar rjarrar@aiusa.org

Gender: Tarah Demant tdemant@aiusa.org

Nat Security: Daphne Eviatar deviatar@aiusa.org

Americas: Marselha Margerin marselha@aiusa.org

Asia: Francisco Bencosme fbencosme@aiusa.org

Refugees: Ryan Mace rmace@aiusa.org

Eurasia: Daniel Balson dbalson@aiusa.org

Crim Justice: Krissy Roth krroth@aiusa.org

Guns: Zeke Johnson zjohnson@aiusa.org

Prisoners: Andrew Fandino afandino@aiusa.org

Other issues: Joanne Lin jlin@aiusa.org