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Human Rights on Capitol Hill

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In this edition of Human Rights on Capitol Hill:

- (1) USA - Trump Administration Must Not Swap Family Separation – a Human Rights Travesty – for Mass Family Detention, Another Human Rights Travesty.**
- (2) Myanmar - Amnesty International Testifies at Hearing on Military’s Persecution of Religious and Ethnic Minorities**
- (3) Amnesty International Fights Religious Persecution**
- (4) Yemen – Amnesty International Report Details War Crimes by Emirati and Yemeni Authorities**
- (5) Syria - US-led Combined Joint Task Force Recognizes Documented Civilian Deaths**
- (6) Cameroon - Human Rights Crisis Deepens as Elections Loom**
- (7) Ethiopia – Ahead of Elections, Government Must Ensure Reparations for Human Rights Violations**
- (8) Chad – Amnesty International Report Finds Government’s Austerity Measures Contribute to Protests and Instability**
- (9) China – Amnesty International Celebrates the Release of Liu Xia**
- (10) USA – Over 270 State and Local Leaders Urge the President to Resettle at Least 75,000 Refugees**



Human Rights Updates

(1) USA - Trump Administration Must Not Swap Family Separation – a Human Rights Travesty – for Mass Family Detention, Another Human Rights Travesty. Following a multi-week research mission along the U.S.-Mexico border in which Amnesty interviewed detained parents and guardians, Amnesty International held a July 30 Congressional briefing to educate Congress on the dangers and harms of family detention. The American Academy of Pediatrics addressed the health harms that persist through a child’s lifetime when they are detained or separated from their families.

In a [statement](#) for a July 31 [Senate Judiciary](#) Committee hearing on “Oversight of Immigration Enforcement and Family Reunification Efforts,” Amnesty International urged the Administration to end family separation and mass family detention, stop coercive tactics aimed at forcing deportations, and ensure a fair asylum process for all parents and children.

Amnesty International submitted a [statement](#) to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security to reject all funding increases for Customs and Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the FY19 Homeland Security appropriations bill. Congress should reject any funding increases for border security and immigration detention beds. Instead, Congress should fund community-based alternative to detention programs, which are humane and cost-effective.

(2) Myanmar – Amnesty International Testifies at Hearing on Military’s Persecution of Religious and Ethnic Minorities. In a July 25 Lantos Human Rights Commission [hearing](#) Asia Pacific Advocacy manager Francisco Bencosme [testified](#) about the military’s atrocities against multiple ethnic and religious minorities. Amnesty International has documented wide-ranging human rights [violations](#) against ethnic minorities living in Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan States. These atrocities include unlawful killings, sexual violence, torture, scorched villages, and forced starvation. Amnesty International calls on Congress to pass the BURMA Act (H.R. 5819) and Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act (S. 2060), and to press the Administration to call on the United Nations Security Council to refer the Myanmar situation to the International Criminal Court.

(3) Amnesty International Fights Religious Persecution. Sam Brownback, the Ambassador for International Religious Freedom, recently [invited](#) Matthew Wells, Amnesty International’s Senior Crisis Advisor, to speak about the mass atrocities committed by the Myanmar military against Rohingya Muslims. Ambassador Brownback referenced a 2018 Amnesty [report](#) in which new satellite footage showed Myanmar security forces bulldozing and remaking the northern Rakhine State six months after a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign.



During the State Department's first Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom on July 24-25, Amnesty International [urged](#) the Administration to examine its own policies of religious discrimination. Joanne Lin, National Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs said, "Religious freedom is under attack in all corners of the world, which is why it's more important than ever that the U.S. government lead by example. We recognize the significance of the State Department promoting religious freedom abroad. However, any genuine commitment to religious freedom requires this administration to look at itself in the mirror. From the beginning, this administration has shown disdain for inclusive policies by singling out visitors and refugees from Muslim-majority countries for exclusion."

(4) Yemen – Amnesty International Report Details War Crimes by Emirati and Yemeni Authorities. Amidst Yemen's ongoing civil war, an Amnesty International researcher traveled to Aden in spring 2018 to document ongoing human rights abuses. A July 2018 report entitled "[God Only Knows if He's Alive](#)," investigated 51 people who were detained by Emirati and Yemeni authorities. Civilians reported horrific torture and starvation while in detention. Amnesty International supports the call on the Pentagon to review whether U.S. military personnel or their coalition partners have violated U.S. or international law while operating in Yemen, as authorized in the [2019 National Defense Authorization Act](#) which has been sent to the President for signature.

(5) Syria - US-led Combined Joint Task Force Recognizes Documented Civilian Deaths. On July 26 the US-led Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve [officially acknowledged](#) that its aerial bombardments in 2017 killed 77 civilians, including 24 children and 25 women in Raqqa. Amnesty International documented each of these fatalities in a June 2018 [report](#). The Task Force had previously brushed off these cases as "[non-credible](#)." The Task Force has now agreed to re-investigate the cases highlighted by Amnesty International. In addition, the U.S. government should provide compensation and assistance for all acknowledged victims, hold accountable anyone who violated the laws of war, and use a more realistic assessment of civilian deaths to avoid harm to civilians in future military operations.

(6) Cameroon - Human Rights Crisis Deepens as Elections Loom. Adotei Akwei, Africa Advocacy Director, [testified](#) at a June 27 House Foreign Affairs hearing on Cameroon. [Cameroon](#) is facing an armed insurgency by the extremist group Boko Haram, which is seeking to establish a caliphate and impose Sharia law in the Lake Chad basin region. This is mired by massive violence and unrest from protests by Cameroonians against political and economic marginalization. There are growing fears that human rights violations by Cameroonian security forces will build support for Boko Haram and escalate unrest. With Cameroon scheduled to hold elections in October, Congress should press the Biya government to end the practice of torture and allow unrestricted access for human rights organizations.



(7) Ethiopia – Ahead of Elections, Government Must Ensure Reparations for Human Rights Violations. In June the Ethiopian parliament lifted its [state of emergency](#) two months earlier than originally planned. However, the current political space remains fragile with local elections next year and national elections in 2020. Over two million people remain internally displaced, civil society is fragmented, the judicial system remains biased, and the state lacks institutionalized accountability. In June, Amnesty International [reported](#) abuse by the Liyu police unit. More action is needed to resolve existing tensions and implement key reforms. The U.S. Congress should pass a resolution conveying its unwavering support for key [reforms, including](#) ensuring justice and reparations for human rights violations and providing conducive environments for human rights and civil society.

(8) Chad – Amnesty International Report Finds Government’s Austerity Measures Contribute to Protests and Instability. On July 16 Amnesty International [reported](#) that the Chad government had cut national education spending by 21 percent from 2014 to 2016, and public health spending by over 50 percent from 2013 to 2017 due to an ongoing economic crisis. [New austerity measures](#) are severely undercutting necessary health and education services. Individuals and organizations protesting these austerity measures have been subject to excessive force, arrests, and prosecutions. that the U.S. Congress should call upon the Chadian authorities to conduct credible investigations into these human rights violations.

(9) China – Amnesty International Celebrates the Release of Liu Xia. On July 10 Chinese authorities finally [released](#) Liu Xia to Germany. Subject to nearly eight years of house arrest, Liu Xia is the ailing widow of Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo who died in 2017. Amnesty International co-hosted a July 12 Capitol Hill rally entitled “Change Not Chains” to thank Congressional offices who have fought for Liu Xia’s freedom and to call on China to release all prisoners of conscience, including Qin Yongmin, a democracy campaigner and [Wang Quanzhang](#), a human rights lawyer. Amnesty International [estimates](#)

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that at least 500,000 people are currently enduring punitive detention without charge or trial.



(10) USA – Over 270 State and Local Leaders Urge the President to Resettle at Least 75,000 Refugees. As the President prepares to announce the annual refugee numbers for 2019, over 270 local and state elected officials from 42 states expressed their support for resettling refugees in their communities in an August 9 [bipartisan letter](#) sent to the President. Last year, President Trump lowered the refugee admissions quota to 45,000, marking the lowest refugee cap since the Refugee Act was enacted in 1980. The letter, [supported by refugee advocacy organizations and resettlement agencies](#), urges the President to resettle at least 75,000 refugees in FY 2019.

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