



Amnesty International USA • January edition

# HUMAN RIGHTS ON CAPITOL HILL

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# 1) Amnesty International USA Urges Congress to Protect the Human Rights of Refugees by Declining Funding for the President's Border Wall

Amnesty International USA strongly urges Congress not to appropriate any funds for the President's border wall or any additional border militarization that will make it [more difficult for asylum seekers to access protection](#). To provide a fair asylum process, Congress must press the U.S. government to end Remain in Mexico and ensure that asylum seekers are able to promptly and safely request protection in the U.S. without unnecessary delay.

*The [Remain in Mexico deal](#) violates international law and endangers thousands of families and children seeking protection. Instead of entering the U.S., thousands of asylum seekers are being forced to wait in Mexico while their asylum claims are processed. [Mexico is not a safe country for all people seeking protection](#). Many asylum seekers face exploitation, sexual assault, or murder [while being forced to wait for extraordinarily long times](#) in northern Mexico.*



*Above: On January 8 Amnesty International protested the President's border wall and called on him to create policies that treat families and children with dignity, fairness and respect.*

# 2) During Trip to the Middle East, Secretary Pompeo Condones the Murder of Jamal Khashoggi and Human Rights Abuses Committed by the Sisi Regime

On January 9 Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gave a [major address](#) in Cairo outlining the administration's Middle Eastern foreign policy. Amnesty International USA sent a [letter](#) ahead of Secretary Pompeo's trip calling on him to raise the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and the imprisonment of thou-

sands of other human rights defenders in the Middle East. Amnesty International has called Egypt an “[Open-Air Prison for Critics](#),” as people are [criminalized for peacefully expressing their opinions](#). The measures undertaken by Egyptian President Sisi are harsher than anything seen during former President Mubarak’s repressive 30-year rule.

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### 3) Saudi Arabia and Yemen - Congress Must Halt Weapons Sales to Saudi Arabia

Amnesty International USA urges the Senate to pass [The Saudi Arabia Accountability and Yemen Act of 2018](#) and halt any future weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. On December 7 members of Amnesty International USA’s Board of Directors came to Capitol Hill to lobby Congress to halt weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and to call for a U.N. investigation into the killing of Jamal Khashoggi.



*Above: On December 7 Amnesty International USA board member Terry Rockefeller met with Senator Markey (D-MA).*

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### 4) Amnesty International USA’s National Security Priorities for 2019

Amnesty International USA is [calling on Congress](#) to 1) cut off assistance to the Saudi coalition that has [killed civilians in Yemen](#); 2) press the Department of Defense to [acknowledge civilian casualties](#) caused by its military operations in Syria and demand more oversight over its lethal actions in Yemen, Somalia and Libya; and 3) hold hearings highlighting the problems of indefinite detention in Guantanamo and lift restrictions on transfer for trial and medical treatment.

## 5) United Nations - Human Rights Groups Condemn the Trump Administration Refusal to Cooperate with U.N. Investigators

Responding to a [report in \*The Guardian\*](#) indicating that the State Department has ceased responding to formal queries from United Nations' human rights investigators, Amnesty International USA joined eight other prominent human rights NGOs to [urge Secretary Pompeo](#) to cooperate with the Special Rapporteurs. In a [separate statement](#), Amnesty International USA highlighted the important work of the U.N. Special Procedures system and said that the Trump administration's decision would risk providing human rights abusers with an excuse to ignore U.N. investigations into human rights violations throughout the world.

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## 6) China - Google's Project Dragonfly Raises Serious Human Rights Concerns

On December 17 Amnesty International USA celebrated [reports](#) that Google [ended Project Dragonfly](#). The prototype search engine would have blacklisted search terms like "human rights" and facilitated Chinese authorities in targeting dissidents online. Amnesty led over nine different protests at Google headquarters around the world, joined over [700 Google employees](#) to call on Google to publicly drop Dragonfly, and [penned multiple letters](#) with human rights NGOs demanding answers and transparency on the app being developed with China. Amnesty International USA thanks those Members of Congress who raised concerns at the House Judiciary hearing and signed Congressional letters to help achieve this important victory. However, Congress should continue to press Google to publicly commit to never restarting developments on Project Dragonfly.

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## 7) Mauritania - Asylum Seekers Face Possible Enslavement If Deported

Despite the backlog in immigration courts amidst the government shutdown, ICE agents [continue to detain immigrants](#), including [four Mauritians](#) who had been allowed to remain in the U.S. with work permits. A 2018 Amnesty International [report](#) found that slavery and racial discrimination remain rife in Mauritania. If ICE deports these asylum seekers, they could [face possible enslavement](#) back in Mauritania.

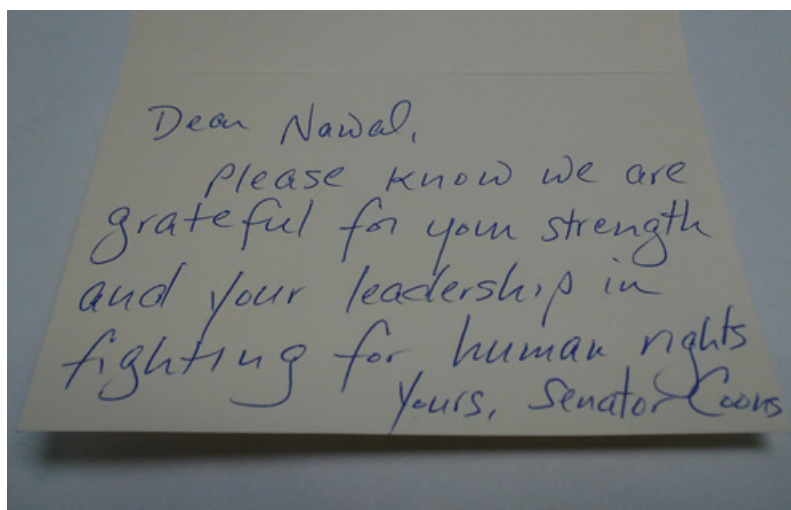
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## 8) Rwanda - Amnesty International Celebrates Acquittal of Diane Rwigara As Victory for Human Rights

On December 4 the [Lantos Commission](#) held a briefing on human rights and political prisoners in Rwanda. Adotei Akwei, Amnesty International USA Africa Advocacy Director, [testified about Diane Rwigara's case](#). Just two days after this briefing, Rwigara was acquitted by the High Court in Kigali. After announcing her intention to run for President against incumbent Paul Kagame in 2017, Rwigara faced an online shame and smear campaign before being disqualified. Rwigara and her mother were detained for a year on charges of fraud and inciting insurrection.

## 9) Human Rights Groups Celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 20th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights Defenders on Capitol Hill

On December 10 Amnesty International USA co-hosted a briefing and reception commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The panel featured the Former UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders; and human rights leaders from Myanmar, Yemen, Russia and Columbia. At the reception Senator Coons (D-DE) announced a [resolution to establish the John S. McCain III Human Rights Commission](#).



*Above: On December 10 Senator Coons (D-DE) wrote a solidarity card for an Amnesty International Human Rights Defender at the celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 20th Anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.*



*Above: On December 10 Representative Jackson Lee (TX-18) gave remarks on how Congress can support human rights at home and abroad (Amnesty International USA Executive Director Margaret Huang in the background).*

Senator Coons, Representative Ros-Lehtinen, Representative Jackson-Lee and Representative Levin all attended the reception to support [Amnesty International human rights defenders](#).



Above: On December 10 Representative Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27) promoted a Ukrainian human rights defender at the celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## 10) *The Hill* Names Amnesty International USA As Top Lobbyists of 2018

On December 13 the Hill named members of Amnesty International USA's Advocacy and Government Affairs team to [its list of top lobbyists of 2018](#). The list included Joanne Lin, National Director of Government Affairs, Francisco Bencosme, Asia Advocacy Manager and Ryan Mace, Grassroots and Refugee Specialist. The list honors "the most distinguished and accomplished professionals from the influence world who are on the front lines of the nation's most consequential political and policy battles."

### *What's Coming Down the Pike?*

- On February 12 Amnesty International USA will host a briefing on human rights issues for the new Congress from 3:30-4:30 pm in Cannon House Office Building room 121. Saudi arms sales, Central American asylum seekers, and much more will be covered. For more information and to RSVP, please email [mcullen@aiusa.org](mailto:mcullen@aiusa.org).

*For more information, please contact:*

Africa: Adotei Akwei [aakwei@aiusa.org](mailto:aakwei@aiusa.org)

Asia: Francisco Bencosme [fbencosme@aiusa.org](mailto:fbencosme@aiusa.org)

Eurasia: Daniel Balson [dbalson@aiusa.org](mailto:dbalson@aiusa.org)

Mid East: Philippe Nassif [pnassif@aiusa.org](mailto:pnassif@aiusa.org)

Refugees: Ryan Mace [rmace@aiusa.org](mailto:rmace@aiusa.org)

Gender: Tarah Demant [tdemant@aiusa.org](mailto:tdemant@aiusa.org)

Gun Violence: Jasmeet Sidhu [jsidhu@aiusa.org](mailto:jsidhu@aiusa.org)

National Security: Daphne Eviatar [deviatar@aiusa.org](mailto:deviatar@aiusa.org)

Criminal justice: Krissy Roth [kroth@aiusa.org](mailto:kroth@aiusa.org)

Human rights defenders: Andrew Fandino [afandino@aiusa.org](mailto:afandino@aiusa.org)

All other issues: Joanne Lin [jlin@aiusa.org](mailto:jlin@aiusa.org)