



Amnesty International USA • April edition

HUMAN RIGHTS ON CAPITOL HILL

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In this edition:

- 1) **Africa** - Congress Must Investigate Civilian Casualties from U.S. Airstrikes in Somalia
 - 2) **Mid-East**
 - a) **Golan Heights** - Trump Administration's Decision to Recognize Israel Sovereignty over Golan Heights Violates International Law
 - b) **Saudi Arabia** - United Nations ("UN") Must Conduct Investigation into Murder of Washington Post Journalist Jamal Khashoggi
 - 3) **South Asia and Central Asia**
 - a) **Afghanistan** - Amnesty International USA Condemns Trump Administration's Visa Ban on International Criminal Court ("ICC") Investigators
 - b) **India** - Amnesty International Protests Crackdown on Civil Society by Indian Authorities
 - c) **Kyrgyzstan** - Ratifies Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ("CRPD")
 - 4) **U.S.** - Amnesty International Visits Florida Detention Facility Housing Several Thousand Unaccompanied Children from Central America
 - 5) Amnesty International USA Testifies Before Congress on **Oversight of Arms Transfers**
 - 6) **LGBTI Rights**
 - a) **Brunei** - New Penal Code Allows Stoning for Adultery or Same-Sex Acts
 - b) **Ukraine** - Amnesty International USA Joins LGBTI Protest on International Women's Day
 - 7) Amnesty International USA Calls on Congress to Reject **Proposed Trump Administration Cuts** to Refugee Protection and Human Rights
 - 8) Amnesty International USA **Media Awards** Event Honors Khashoggi and Excellence in Human Rights Reporting
 - 9) Charanya Krishnaswami - New AIUSA **Americas Advocacy Director**
- What's Coming Down the Pike? May 6 Amnesty International USA **Capitol Hill Lobby Day**

1) Africa – Congress Must Investigate Civilian Casualties from U.S. Airstrikes in Somalia

On March 20 Amnesty International released a [comprehensive report](#) on civilian casualties resulting from U.S. drone strikes in Somalia. The report documents 14 civilians killed and eight injured from five U.S. strikes in Somalia – just five of the 110 that the Department of Defense (“DOD”) has acknowledged conducting there in just the past two years. Although the DOD originally claimed to have killed zero civilians, Amnesty’s report reveals that is not true. In early April 2019 the [U.S. Africa Command](#) admitted that Somalia airstrikes in 2018 [killed at least two civilians](#).

2) Mid-East

a) Golan Heights - Trump Administration’s Decision to Recognize Israel Sovereignty Over Golan Heights Violates International Law

The Trump Administration’s [decision](#) to recognize the Syrian Golan Heights as Israeli territory condones an illegal annexation and thus [violates international law](#). The UN Security Council has condemned the annexation of Golan Heights. The Trump administration announcement will only exacerbate the [human rights crisis](#) in the region.

b) Saudi Arabia – United Nations (“UN”) Must Investigate Murder of Washington Post Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Secretary Pompeo’s April 2019 [announcement](#) barring 16 Saudis from entering the U.S. is an insufficient response to the brutal murder of Khashoggi. Six months after the murder, the U.S. has yet to call for an independent UN investigation – an indispensable step towards truth and accountability.

3) South Asia and Central Asia

a) Afghanistan - Amnesty International USA Condemns Trump Administration’s Visa Ban on International Criminal Court (“ICC”) Investigators

On March 15 Secretary Pompeo announced the imposition of visa restrictions on ICC officials investigating war crimes in Afghanistan. [This move](#) is a [blatant attack](#) on international justice and a retaliatory measure against officials working for justice and accountability for Afghani civilians.

b) India – Amnesty International Protests Crackdown on Civil Society by Indian Authorities

In March, Amnesty International USA delivered over 15,000 petitions to the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C. urging India’s Prime Minister to end intimidation, harassment and [repressive laws](#) against human rights defenders and civil society. In October 2018 Indian authorities [raided](#) Amnesty India’s office and froze its bank accounts, effectively stopping vital human rights work. Congress must pressure the Indian government to stop its crackdown on civil society.

c) Kyrgyzstan – Ratifies Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (“CRPD”).

In March the President of Kyrgyzstan [ratified](#) the CRPD. In 2018 thousands of Amnesty International activists wrote letters on behalf of [Gulzar Duishenova](#), a disability rights activist who faced discrimination in Kyrgyzstan. The U.S. has yet to ratify the CRPD.

4) U.S. - Amnesty International Visits Florida Detention Facility Housing Thousands of Unaccompanied Youth from Central America

In early April a team of five Amnesty experts visited the Homestead temporary detention facility, the only [temporary influx shelter for unaccompanied youth](#). Amnesty staff observed that Homestead is already over capacity, and yet the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (“DHHS”) plans to send more youth to Homestead. In April, DHHS [denied access to Homestead](#) for Representatives DeLauro, Shalala, Wasserman Schultz, and Mucarsel-Powell.

5) Amnesty International USA Testifies Before Congress on Oversight of Arms Transfers

Susan Waltz, Amnesty International expert in military security policy and professor at the University of Michigan, testified at a March 26 House Foreign Affairs Oversight Subcommittee [hearing](#) on the Trump administration’s plans to switch oversight of U.S. arms exports from the State Department to the Commerce Department. The U.S. is the world’s largest arms exporter including weapons used to [commit human rights violations](#). The change in classification will make semi-automatic firearms and associated ammunition harder to track after leaving the U.S., increasing the chances they will be used to commit human rights abuses.



Above: Professor Susan Waltz, Amnesty International Military Security expert, testified before the House Foreign Affairs Oversight Subcommittee on arms transfers.

6) LGBTI Rights

a) Brunei – New Penal Code Allows Stoning for Adultery or Same-Sex Acts

In early April a [new penal code](#) went into effect in Brunei that would allow [stoning](#) for adultery or same-sex acts. Congress and the Trump administration must demand that the Sultan of Brunei stop these barbaric changes that threaten the safety and lives of Brunei citizens.

b) Ukraine - Amnesty International USA Joins LGBTI Protest on International Women’s Day

On March 8 [Vitalina Koval](#), a gender equality and LGBTI rights advocate, led a protest in Uzhgorod in support of LGBTI rights. Amnesty International USA joined the Ukraine protest in solidarity. In 2017 and 2018 Koval had organized women’s equality demonstrations and was attacked by extremist hate groups. In order to pressure [Ukrainian officials](#) to investigate the attacks against her, Amnesty International launched a world-wide [letter writing campaign](#) to Ukraine’s Interior Minister, in which over 51,000 Americans sent letters on Koval’s behalf.



Above: Vitalina Koval, a Ukrainian gender equality and LGBTI activist, spoke during a protest on International Women’s Day.

7) Amnesty International USA Calls on Congress to Reject Proposed Trump Administration Cuts to Refugee Protection and Human Rights

Amnesty International USA submitted a [statement](#) for the March 27 House Foreign Affairs Committee and the April 10 Senate Foreign Relations Committee [hearing](#) on the State Department’s foreign policy strategy. The [FY20 budget request](#) calls for drastic cuts to the International Affairs budget with the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (“PRM”) targeted for the steepest cuts. Congress must reject these draconian cuts and robustly fund the Migration and Refugee Assistance (“MRA”), International Disaster Assistance (“IDA”), Emergency Refugee and Migration Account (“ERMA”), and U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (“USRAP”) to support the admission of at least 75,000 refugees in FY20.

8) Amnesty International USA (“AIUSA”) Media Awards Event Honors Khashoggi and Excellence in Human Rights Reporting

On April 3 AIUSA honored Jamal Khashoggi with the first Press Freedom Award. AIUSA also announced the winners of excellence in human rights reporting: WBEZ Chicago/Chicago Tribune episode “[16 Shots](#)” covering the shooting of Laquan McDonald (domestic reporting); Jeffrey Stern, New York Times Magazine “[From Arizona to Yemen](#)” the Journey of an American Bomb” (international reporting); and Claire Tighe and Lauren Kaori Gurley, “[Official Reports of Violence Against Women in Puerto Rico Unreliable After Hurricane Maria](#)” (student journalism).



Above: Aasif Mandvi, a correspondent on “The Daily Show,” hosted the AIUSA Media Awards on April 3.

9) Charanya Krishnaswami - New AIUSA Americas Advocacy Director

In February, Charanya joined AIUSA as the Americas Advocacy Director. She previously worked for the U.N. refugee agency where she managed refugee status determination work in the Caribbean. She also worked as an immigration lawyer for Central American children and families facing deportation from the U.S. Charanya’s work will focus on the protection of refugees, asylum seekers, and human rights defenders in Central America, Mexico, and Venezuela.

What’s Coming Down the Pike? May 6 Amnesty International USA Capitol Hill Lobby Day

On May 6 about 150 activists will hit Capitol Hill for AIUSA’s Lobby Day. They will urge Congress to pass the Background Check Expansion Act ([S. 42](#)) requiring universal background checks for all gun sales, and the Saudi Arabia Accountability and Yemen Act ([S. 398](#)) to end the sale of U.S. arms to the Saudi-Emirati led coalition conducting human rights abuses in Yemen.

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