



Amnesty International USA • May edition

# HUMAN RIGHTS ON CAPITOL HILL

May 2, 2019

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## 1) May 6 Amnesty International USA Capitol Hill Lobby Day

140 Amnesty International USA activists will come to Capitol Hill to press Congress to require universal background checks on all gun sales ([S. 42](#)), and to end U.S. arms sales to the Saudi-Emirati coalition committing civilian casualties in Yemen ([S. 398](#)). For more information on Lobby Day, please contact Meredith Cullen at [mcullen@aiusa.org](mailto:mcullen@aiusa.org).



## 2) Sri Lanka – Following Easter Sunday Massacre, Sri Lanka Imposes Ban on Face Veils

On April 29 Sri Lanka's President instituted [emergency regulations](#) imposing a ban on clothing that conceals the face. The new ban will force many Muslim women to stay out of public places, preventing them from going to school, work or accessing basic services. The ban violates their rights to non-discrimination and freedom of expression and religion. On May 1 Amnesty's Francisco Bencosme spoke at the Congressional Caucus on Ethnic and Religious Freedom on the need for transparency and accountability for human rights in Sri Lanka.

## 3) President Trump's Decision to "Unsign" the Arms Trade Treaty ("ATT") Will Increase Illegal Sales of Conventional Weapons

On April 26 the President announced that the U.S. will [walk away](#) from the 2014 ATT, which was signed by President Obama but never ratified by the Senate. The ATT was the first global instrument to set [international standards](#) for the transfer of conventional arms and ammunition with the express purpose of [reducing human suffering](#). Trump's decision to abandon the ATT will increase the illegal sales of conventional weapons, thereby undermining international peace and security.

## 4) Afghanistan – Amnesty International Condemns International Criminal Court ("ICC")'s Refusal to Authorize Investigation into Crimes Committed in Afghanistan

In April, the U.S. [revoked](#) the ICC chief prosecutor's visa because of an investigation involving crimes committed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Days later, the ICC caved to U.S. threats by [announcing](#) it would not investigate these crimes. The ICC's decision is a devastating setback for Afghani civilians. The court has a moral and legal responsibility to investigate all crimes, regardless of who committed them.

## 5) Syria - U.S.-Led Coalition Killed More Than 1,600 Civilians in Raqqa

In April, Amnesty International [reported](#) that [between June and October 2017](#), the U.S.-led [coalition killed](#) more than [1,600 civilians](#) in [Raqqa](#). The coalition launched [thousands of air and artillery strikes](#) in support of the Syrian Democratic Forces, a local Kurdish-led militia fighting the IS in Raqqa. The coalition [claimed to have taken all necessary measures to spare civilians](#), but Amnesty International's [extensive investigations](#) revealed otherwise. Congress must press the [Pentagon](#) for [transparency and accountability](#) on these strikes.

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## 6) U.S.-Mexico

### a) Amnesty International USA Testifies on Immigration Detention Before U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (“USCCR”).

On April 12, Amnesty’s Americas Advocacy Director [testified](#) on the increasing use of detention to punish asylum-seekers including the blanket denials of parole. Since the 2015 publication of the [USCCR report](#) on immigration detention, the detention population has skyrocketed, with over 50,000 people detained daily.

### b) Amnesty International Visits Florida Detention Facility Housing Thousands of Unaccompanied Youth from Central America

In April, Amnesty International [visited](#) the detention facility housing unaccompanied children at Homestead, Florida. The Department of Health and Human Services [announced](#) that Homestead will house up to 3,200 children.

### c) Amnesty International Documents Trump Administration’s Attacks on Asylum Seekers

In April, Amnesty International conducted a three-week border mission, documenting the so-called “Migrant Protection Protocols,” informally known as “[Remain in Mexico](#).” Amnesty International attended multiple days of immigration court hearings in San Diego and El Paso, and observed serious problems including lack of access to counsel and lack of adequate notice of hearing times.

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## 7) Amnesty International Death Penalty Report Shows Increase in U.S. Executions

In April, Amnesty International published the annual [Global Report on Death Sentences and Executions report](#). China remains the world’s top executioner, followed by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Iraq. The U.S., Belarus, Japan, Singapore, and South Sudan all registered an increase in executions from 2017. In the U.S., people with mental or intellectual disabilities were executed or sentenced to death, which violates international law. Nebraska, South Dakota and Tennessee resumed executions after decades-long hiatuses.

## 8) Women Human Rights Defenders (“WHRDs”)

### a) Saudi Arabia – Amnesty International Urges Congress to [Pass Resolutions](#) in Support of Saudi Women Human Rights Defenders

Since May 2018, thirteen WHRDs have been [arbitrarily detained](#) in Saudi Arabia. At least 10 of them were tortured, sexually abused, and subjected to other forms of ill-treatment. Due to international pressure in March 2019, [three of these activists](#) were released [pending trial](#). Saudi authorities must immediately and unconditionally release all these WHRDs and drop all charges against them.

### b) Philippines - Amnesty International Urges Congress to [Pass Resolutions](#) that Call for the Immediate Release of Philippine Prisoner of Conscience Senator Leila de Lima

Senator de Lima has been in prison since [February 2017](#), because of her vocal criticism of President Duterte’s deadly “war on drugs,” which has resulted in the [extrajudicial executions of thousands](#). Philippine authorities must immediately and unconditionally release her and drop all charges against her.

### c) Iran – Iranian Authorities Must Release Prominent Human Rights Lawyer Who Faces Outrageous Prison Sentence

Amnesty International condemns the imprisonment of [Nasrin Sotoudeh](#), a prominent human rights lawyer who has long spoke out against the death penalty and fought for women’s rights. She was sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes, the harshest sentence documented against a human rights defender in Iran in recent years. Congress should work with their European counterparts to [pressure Iranian authorities](#) to release her.

### d) Egypt – Hanan Badr el-Din Finally Released After Almost Two Years in Pre-Trial Detention

El-Din, Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience, was released on April 25 after being detained at Qanatar prison. El-Din co-founded the Association of the Families of the Disappeared after her husband’s disappearance in 2013. Amnesty International USA [thanks Senator Menendez and Members of Congress](#) who advocated on behalf of her.

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## 9) Cameroon - Amnesty International Wins Peabody Award for Investigation into Abuses by Cameroonian Security Forces

BBC Africa Eye collaborated with Amnesty International and Bellingcat network on “[Anatomy of a Killing](#),” which sourced a viral video of two women and two young children who were murdered by men in military fatigues in July 2018. Despite the Cameroonian government’s claims that the video was “fake news,” the [BBC investigation](#) revealed the men to be Cameroonian army soldiers, who were eventually arrested and held accountable for the murders.

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