

# HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE 2020 ELECTION



Amnesty International USA is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3), international human rights organization registered in New York. AIUSA neither supports nor opposes any political party or any candidate for public office. Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections.

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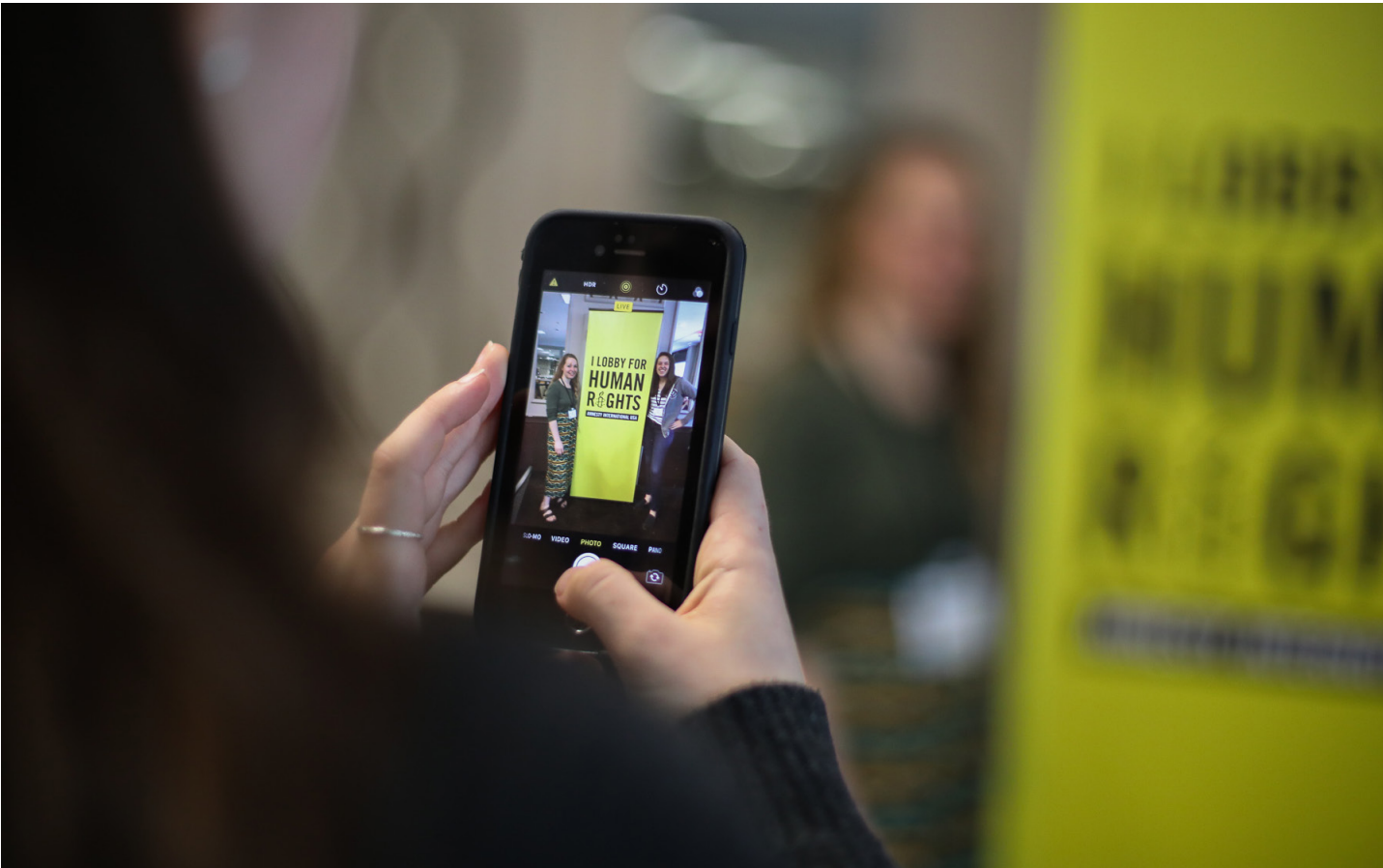
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Dear Amnesty Activist,

The charged atmosphere of a presidential election brings with it unique challenges and opportunities for human rights organizations like Amnesty International. The office of the President of the United States has the capacity for enormous human rights impact, both positive and negative.

Amnesty International does not take a position on which candidate should be the next President, but we do believe that the next U.S. President must protect and advance human rights here at home and around the world. Amnesty International believes that human rights are not a “Democratic thing” or a “Republican thing.” They are a universal, and binding obligations that we expect any administration to prioritize in its foreign and domestic policy.

Over the next 16 months, Amnesty activists can raise the profile of human rights in public discourse, while keeping out of the partisan politics of election campaigns.

The 2020 Elections Toolkit will provide:

- Clear guidelines on what Amnesty representatives (including AIUSA local and student groups) can and cannot do in relation to the 2020 elections.
- Resource materials
- Action ideas for raising human rights during this election season

Vienna Colucci  
Senior Director, Policy  
Amnesty International USA

## IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND THE 2020 ELECTIONS

Amnesty International is a non-partisan human rights organization that neither supports nor opposes any political party, candidate, government, or political ideology. As a matter of organization-wide policy, Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections.

Because Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) is classified as a “public charity” -- 501(c)(3) -- by the Internal Revenue Service, there are restrictions on the organization’s activities in relation to elections and partisan political activities. A 501(c)(3) may encourage civic participation and educate the

public and candidates about its issues but may not directly or indirectly tell people who to vote for and/or who to oppose or support.

Here are some guidelines to help you navigate these restrictions and carry out your Amnesty work during the 2020 election year. If you have any questions, please contact us at: [elections2020@aiusa.org](mailto:elections2020@aiusa.org).

- **Do not oppose or support candidates while acting in AIUSA's name.** This includes both explicit and implicit opposition or endorsement of candidates. If someone can potentially infer from your message, post, tweet, graphic, etc. that you support or oppose a candidate, this is problematic and harmful to our organization, as it violates our non-profit legal status in the United States. When representing Amnesty International, you cannot attack or approve of candidates’ positions.
- **Emphasize AIUSA's impartiality.** For 58 years, Amnesty International has worked to protect human rights in countries around the world in a nonpartisan way. When engaging with candidates or the public, be sure to clarify that AIUSA is a nonpartisan organization that does not support or oppose any political candidate or party.
- **Clarify our nonpartisan approach.** Use this disclaimer on any Amnesty International materials distributed in the context of elections: “Amnesty International USA is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3), international human rights organization registered in New York. AIUSA neither supports nor opposes any political party or any candidate for public office. Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections.”
- **Keep your personal political views separate from opinions or statements made in your official AIUSA capacity.** If you maintain an account on social media that identifies you as a representative of Amnesty International, that account should reflect the positions of the organization and should not contain partisan election-related information. If you wish to represent AIUSA on social media, then you should have a dedicated Amnesty-affiliated account that is distinct from your personal account. You should not post, tweet, retweet, or share anything through your AIUSA account that suggests the organization endorses or opposes candidates for public office. You are free to engage in political activities in your personal capacity, as long as these actions do not give the impression that they represent the organization’s views, and as long as you don’t use AIUSA resources to do so (e.g. an AIUSA computer, laptop, mobile device or phone, printer or from an AIUSA office). When attending AIUSA events, do not wear partisan political items that support or oppose



candidates currently running for office. For example, if a staff member/volunteer acting in their organizational capacity is attending an AIUSA rally or briefing, they should not wear buttons, t-shirts, hats or other items that demonstrate their support for a particular political party or candidate.

- **Don't use your AIUSA-branded social media pages to support or oppose a candidate, and don't act in the name of Amnesty in support of or opposition to candidates (i.e. campaigning, volunteering, partisan voter registration, etc.).** You are free, of course, to support a candidate or political party in your private capacity as an individual, but do not wear AIUSA branded identifiers while you volunteer for a candidate or engage in other partisan political activities. You should make it clear that you are speaking/acting in your personal capacity and not for the organization when participating in partisan activities outside of your Amnesty work.
- **All candidates in an election must be treated equally by a 501(c)(3) organization.** What you do for one candidate, you must do for all. We pose our questions to candidates of all political parties (and we don't evaluate, edit or comment on candidates' responses.) If we wish to invite a candidate to a public forum, we must invite all participating candidates in a specific election.

- **Maintain a wide scope of issues.** AIUSA is not a single-issue organization, and we have an interest in hearing candidates' views on a wide range of human rights issues. Spotlighting one issue or a narrow range of issues that distinguish candidates may be perceived as a partisan litmus test of support or opposition.
- **Don't seek pledges from candidates.** Regulations prohibit public charities, like Amnesty International, from asking candidates to promise to support a particular issue if elected. In other words, don't ask questions that can only be answered with yes/no or questions that imply a correct answer. Instead, ask open-ended questions that give candidates the ability to explain their position on an issue.
- **Ask, but don't debate.** Town halls and debates are a good opportunity to highlight the issues we care about. We can ask candidates at an open forum what their views are on a particular human rights issue, but don't comment on their response or seek to debate with them in your AIUSA capacity. Opposing or supporting a candidate's answers could be seen as intervening in an election.
- **Err on the side of caution.** If you draft a letter to the editor regarding a candidate's positions, endorse a candidate, post criticism or approval of a candidate via

social media, attend a candidate event/fundraiser, or otherwise engage in partisan political activity during an election, it should be clear that you are doing so in your personal capacity, not as a representative of AIUSA. This policy applies to members, volunteers, interns, staff and board members. Any bio, byline or identifying information should not include your role/capacity at AIUSA. High-profile, senior level staff and/or board members who may not be seen separately from their roles at Amnesty should refrain from partisan political activity that could be attributed to AIUSA.

## AIUSA GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS ON UPCOMING ELECTION-RELATED ACTIVITIES

### Live Tweeting During Debates

If tweeting from personal - non-AIUSA account, may live tweet about debate and candidate positions.

- *Permissible:* Chair of AIUSA Women's Co-Group tweets from personal account with AIUSA identifier in bio, but including disclaimer that views are my own: "Hoping that the roll back on women's rights in the US will be addressed in tonight's debates. The public has a right to be educated on what potential solutions might be put forward to address the issues of fair and equal wages and reproductive rights."
- *Not permissible:* AIUSA Country Specialist tweets from personal account with identifier: Country Specialist @AIUSA in bio: "Are none of the candidates going to address Trump's idiotic harassment of X country? Kamala Harris - I expected more. AIUSA has met with you to offer your advice on this issue."

### Posting commentary/criticism on social media

If tweeting/posting from personal - non-AIUSA account, may criticize or comment on candidates' positions.

- *Permissible:* Co-group member tweets from personal account that does not include AIUSA in bio: "When is Pete Buttigieg going to address the issues in his own backyard? How can we expect him to address criminal justice issues nationwide when he can't get a handle on his own city?"
- *Not permissible:* AIUSA Local Group 35 tweets from account that includes (Local Group @AIUSA) in bio: "AIUSA groups know that Kristen Gillibrand is the only qualified candidate for president. She stands for women's rights and agrees with AIUSA's stance on a woman's right to choose (insert link)"

### Using hashtags and/or links to other websites

If using hashtags and/or sharing links to other websites that include partisan election-related material, must be from personal, non-AIUSA account - with no AIUSA brand identifiers.

Permissible: MSP Co-Group member shares message/video statement from Cory Booker on importance of restrictions on export of guns abroad on Instagram from personal account.

Not permissible: AIUSA Student Group from UNC Chapel Hill uses AIUSA Student Group Facebook page to invite students to Seth Moulton rally on campus - links to Campaign event and fundraising page. #BeatTRUMP.

## 2020 ELECTIONS: ANSWERING POTENTIAL QUESTIONS

### **Which presidential candidate does Amnesty International support?**

Amnesty International is a non-partisan organization that neither supports nor opposes any candidate in any election.

### **Surely one candidate supports your organization's positions more strongly than the other. From that standpoint, which candidate is better suited to move forward Amnesty International's objectives?**

Regardless of who the next president is, Amnesty International will work with the new administration to move the human rights agenda forward in the U.S. and around the world.

### **Is it fair to say that one candidate is going to be easier for you to work with than the other? You will have a more sympathetic ear, right?**

Clearly, there are differences of opinion among the presidential candidates on a number of issues. But regardless of who leads the next administration, Amnesty International will continue to push the human rights agenda forward.

### **How about Amnesty International supporters and members? Clearly, they must support one candidate over another?**

Individual Amnesty International members, like all other private citizens, can support whomever they wish. Their views on the elections are their own, and not the position of Amnesty International, and Amnesty International neither supports nor opposes any candidate or political party.

# ACTIVITIES FOR RAISING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE ELECTION SEASON

## **Congressional Recess Town Halls**

During various weeks throughout the year, Congress goes “on recess,” meaning that Congress is out of session and Members of Congress (MOCs) go home to their districts. MOCs use this time to connect with their constituents. Many of them will hold local town halls or forums to discuss issues that concern their constituents. These events are important for organizations like Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) to show our policymakers that the people they represent are concerned about human rights issues. This is a critical moment in persuading Members of Congress to take action on the issues we all fight for every day.

**Engage the Media** by writing letters to the editor of your local news publications, submit an article to your community paper (including school papers and newsletters), using a recent news hook to draw attention to the human rights questions you want to focus on.

**Utilize Social Media** to send your questions directly to Members of Congress via their website, Facebook, or Twitter page. Organize a Twitterstorm by using an original hashtag and engage people to use this hashtag to spike activity around a specific question that is being asked of the candidate. Guidelines for social media can be found [here](#).

**Host a Debate Watch Party** and recruit new interest into your group. Whether you host this event at your house, residential halls, student lounge, auditorium, sports complex, dining halls, cafe, brewery, the idea is to bring together people to engage audiences in these debates and provide a forum for people to reflect, and/or hold follow up sessions. Make it social and solicit donations from restaurants for free food. Post-debate break participants into smaller groups for discussion. Additional tips that will help with recruitment are: Promote your event with flyers, posters, street chalk, social media, class announcements. You can also get faculty or teachers to provide extra credit to students who attend a Debate Watch party.

**Organize a Town Hall** on campus or in your community. Invite the Presidential candidates to attend and provide them with the opportunity to discuss some of the major human rights concerns that have been identified by Amnesty for the

2020 Elections. Be sure to invite all candidates as to reflect Amnesty’s non-partisans nature. Invite a student or faculty leader, or a local celebrity (who you can confirm will handle it impartially) to moderate.

**Classroom discussions** provide space for learning, discussion, and reflection. The goal is to get people involved and heighten self-awareness around the 2020 Elections.

As an AI Student Group you could serve as a non-partisan moderator and invite your school political affiliation groups to an “Human Rights 2020 Townhall Forum” and through this simulation you can ask groups to come prepared to represent how their party’s candidate would respond to human rights concerns that are asked of them.

**Table** at your school or in a public space in your community to educate people with information about the human rights concerns that have been identified by Amnesty for the 2020 Elections.

**Postcard Action** focused on sending questions about human rights concerns to all Presidential candidates. Be a human rights influencer and make sure candidates are forced to confront human rights concerns such as gun violence in America and ensure immigrant children are not locked up in detention centers. See AI’s list of questions for Presidential candidates and email [elections2020@aiusa.org](mailto:elections2020@aiusa.org) to receive postcards for this action.

## HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights must be a priority for all elected officials. Governments around the world should ensure that their policies and practices adhere to universally recognized human rights standards. . Whether refugees and asylum seekers, gun violence, criminal justice, reproductive rights, national security, or any other human rights issue, these standards clarify how governments must safeguard the rights of all people.

You will find below a summary of critical issues that Amnesty International USA is urging the U.S. presidential candidates to address. What are the candidates’ views on these important issues? If elected president, how would the candidate seek to protect and champion the human rights of people across the United States and around the world?

As a nonpartisan human rights organization, Amnesty International USA neither supports nor opposes any political





party or candidate for office. In keeping with its status as a 501(c)(3) organization, Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections. We do, however, call upon all candidates to make the protection and promotion of human rights a key priority and an integral part of their policies and practices.

## PROTECTING PEOPLE FORCED TO FLEE

**Asylum-seekers:** As growing numbers of people have sought asylum, the U.S. government has

responded by restricting access for those seeking asylum, including by turning back asylum-seekers at the U.S. southern border, indefinitely detaining them, and separating families and children.

- How should the U.S. respond to the growing number of asylum-seekers, including families and children, seeking protection at the U.S. southern border?
- What can the U.S. do to address the causes of migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America?

**Refugees:** Currently, there are 68.5 million people in the world displaced by violence, war, and conflict – the highest levels of displacement on record. Yet despite this level of need, governments around the globe have responded with

restrictive measures, including the U.S. government, which in 2018 resettled the lowest number of refugees in the history of the U.S. refugee admissions program.

- What role should U.S. refugee admissions play in our response to the global refugee crisis?

**Internally displaced people:** Over 40 million people were forcibly displaced within their home countries at the end of 2017. Africa has been hardest hit by this phenomenon: a combination of conflict, violence, and natural disasters (including drought and floods) has spurred displacement in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, as well as Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan. In the Middle East, armed conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen has impelled growing levels of internal flight.

- What kinds of support could the U.S. provide to countries and regions experiencing record levels of internal displacement induced by causes as wide-ranging as climate change and warfare?

## PREVENTING GUN VIOLENCE AND KILLINGS BY POLICE

**Gun violence:** The U.S. has both the highest absolute and highest per capita rates of gun ownership in the world, and

guns are easily accessible by those likely to misuse them. In 2017, gun violence killed an average of 109 people each day. Gun violence is the second leading cause of death among children, and firearm deaths disproportionately affect African American and Latino communities.

- What policies should the U.S. implement to reduce and prevent gun violence?

Police use of force: Hundreds of people are killed by law enforcement in the United States. Although no official government sources track this data, according to The Washington Post, 998 people in the U.S. were killed by police in 2018 alone. These killings disproportionately impact people of color: 25% of those killed by police in 2018 were black Americans, who make up only 13% of the population. None of the 50 states nor the District of Columbia currently have laws in place articulating a use of force standard for law enforcement officials that complies with human rights standards.

- How should the U.S. address police killings of civilians, including the lack of transparency and accountability?

## PROTECTING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Religious and ethnic persecution: Across the globe, individuals are being targeted on account of their religious beliefs and ethnic identities. In Asia, the Rohingya in Myanmar and the Uighurs in the Xinjiang region of China have experienced state-sponsored campaigns of violence, harassment, and surveillance. In the Middle East, Christian populations face persecution in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, while other religious minorities, such as the Yezidis and Mandaeans of Iraq, the Bahais and Zoroastrians of Iran, and Shi'a Muslim populations in Yemen, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia are under attack by state and non-state actors.

How should the U.S. address human rights abuses suffered by religious and ethnic minorities at the hands of government and non-government actors worldwide?

## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

LGBTI rights: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people face violence, discrimination, and inequality. The U.S. government has banned transgender individuals from serving in the military and has refused to defend vital protections for transgender children in schools. Abroad, from Malaysia's draconian laws permitting caning for same-sex acts to the

Russian government's complicity in the face of a homophobic crackdown in Chechnya to the life sentences under proposed Ugandan law for the "crime" of being gay, LGBTI individuals are under attack.

- How should the U.S. protect LGBTI rights at home and abroad?

Sexual and reproductive rights: Recent years have seen a regression in U.S. commitment to sexual and reproductive rights. Over the past two years, the State Department has erased mention of sexual and reproductive rights from its annual human rights reports. Furthermore, the government not only reinstated the "global gag rule," which withholds all assistance to organizations abroad who even mention abortion-related services, it has also created a U.S. version: the "domestic gag rule," which bars clinics performing or referring women for abortions from getting any federal family planning funds.

- How should the U.S. ensure that our foreign and domestic policies protect sexual and reproductive rights?

## GUARANTEEING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION, AND ASSEMBLY

Human rights defenders and journalists: Around the world, governments are targeting activists fighting for human rights, as well as journalists seeking to bring the truth to light. In 2018 alone, 321 human rights defenders in 27 countries were assassinated because of their work, including the Brazilian activist Marielle Franco, an outspoken critic of police brutality, and countless more have been arbitrarily detained, including a group of Saudi women fighting for equal rights. That same year, 34 journalists were murdered, including the Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

- How should the U.S. address the targeting, harassment, and killing of human rights defenders and journalists around the world?

Political repression: Across the world, authoritarian leaders seeking to retain power are repressing political dissent and quashing the right to free expression of political opinion. These forms of repression include deadly crackdowns on protesters in Venezuela and Nicaragua, widespread censorship in China, the shuttering of civil society organizations in Turkey, and extrajudicial executions and arbitrary arrests of dissidents in Syria, Egypt, and Cameroon.

- How should the U.S. respond to the increasing use of political repression by authoritarian regimes?



## RESPECTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Use of lethal force and indefinite detention: In the name of national security, the U.S. has engaged in torture and indefinite detention at Guantanamo Bay. It has also killed a quarter of a million civilians abroad since 9/11 and has increased its use of lethal force against civilians in multiple countries, including Somalia. Yet no one has been held accountable for these acts, and the U.S. government has taken numerous steps to forestall a possible International Criminal Court investigation into alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes, including attacks on civilians, committed during the war in Afghanistan.

- How can the U.S. ensure compliance with and accountability for its international human rights obligations in national security operations?

Arms sales: In 2019, the United States announced it would revoke its signature of the Arms Trade Treaty, a landmark instrument that ensures arms transfers are not used to fuel

conflicts, atrocities, and abuses. Two of the United States' largest weapons importers are Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which have used weapons to commit human rights violations against Yemeni children and civilians and to blockade ports of entry to restrict aid from entering Yemen, thereby placing 11 million Yemenis at risk of famine. Nonetheless, the U.S. continues to build the military capacity of the Saudi-Emirati coalition, making the U.S. complicit in creating the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

What can the U.S. do to ensure U.S. arms are not used to perpetuate human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law?

## PROMOTING CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Business and human rights: U.S. corporations frequently are involved in human rights abuses, harming Indigenous communities and exacerbating climate change through anti-environmental practices. The U.S. government's human rights





standards for corporations – including extractive industries, supply chains, and contractors engaged in trades from arms manufacture to for-profit incarceration – are inadequate and ill-enforced. Thus, businesses are often not required to identify and address human rights abuses in their operations.

- How should the U.S. government hold businesses accountable for respecting human rights?

In June 2019, we gave presidential candidates the opportunity to tell us how the United States should respond to some of the most pressing human rights issues at home and around the world - ranging from the global refugee crisis to the epidemic of gun violence in our communities.

Eleven candidates answered our questions. You can read their responses here: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/top-2020-presidential-candidates-respond-to-amnesty-international-usas-human-rights-questionnaire/>

## TWEETS & HASHTAGS

### REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RIGHTS

- The United States used to be a leader in providing refuge to those in need - but now we're resettling a historic low. We can't turn our back on refugees. We stand with those fleeing war, persecution, and violence.
- We all have a stake in making the world a safer place. That means making sure that America offers safety to those who need it most, and ending policies that deny people fleeing violence the chance to seek asylum in the U.S.
- Seeking asylum is a human right. No exceptions. #IWelcome
- Holding children and families in detention harms them, and violates their rights. Children belong together with their families, and free - not detained.

## NO MORE ENDLESS WAR

- The America I believe in would not conduct endless illegal wars that undermine security & violate human rights
- #DearFuturePOTUS, Endless War does not make us safer
- Stop wasting US taxpayer \$\$ on endless wars that violate human rights, destroy communities & hurt our national security

## GUANTÁNAMO

- The America I believe in doesn't hold people without fair trials, without hope, and without end
- Dozens at #Guantanamo face prospect of dying behind locked doors without ever being charged with a crime
- Not in my name: Don't make #Guantanamo a permanent offshore prison for an endless global war

## SECURITY

- The America we believe in stands up for diversity, tolerance & human rights
- The America I believe in celebrates peaceful dissent, diversity & human rights
- We all want security, but fear-mongering does NOT make us any safer.

## POLICE USE OF FORCE

- #DearFuturePotus, We all have #HumanRights when interacting w/ law enforcement: right to live, right to security of the person, right to freedom from discrimination, right to equal protection of the law

## BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- #CorporateAccountability is key to preventing human rights violations and providing justice for human rights defenders
- #CorporateAccountability key to protect Indigenous Peoples rights including #FreePriorandInformedConsent.
- #NoPrivatePrisons
- #CorporateAccountability to prevent and punish human rights abuses by U.S. businesses.
- Corporations must address #ClimateCrisis;

#CorporateAccountability

- #CorporateAccountability: Stop Exporting Human Rights Weapons
- #CorporateAccountability: Stop Financing Human Rights Violations

## RESOURCES

TIPS FOR UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA:

<http://bit.ly/28MWNyl>

**#IWELCOME REFUGEES:**

[refugees.amnestyusa.org](http://refugees.amnestyusa.org)

[longertable.amnestyusa.org](http://longertable.amnestyusa.org)

[www.amnestyusa.org/longertabletoolkit](http://www.amnestyusa.org/longertabletoolkit)

**END GUN VIOLENCE:**

<https://endgunviolence.amnestyusa.org/>

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/government-relations/end-gun-violence/>

**HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/campaigns/human-rights-defenders/>

**SECURITY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS:**

[www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/security-with-human-rights](http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/security-with-human-rights)

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/issues/national-security/>

**ENSURING POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY:**

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/lethal-force>

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/issues/deadly-force-police-accountability/>

**GENDER, SEXUALITY AND IDENTITY**

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/issues/gender-sexuality-identity/>

**BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/themes/business-human-rights/>

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