



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2020

HUMAN RIGHTS PRIORITIES

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INTERNATIONAL





←  **COVER PHOTO:** A young girl reaches for the hand of an unseen person through an opening at the U.S./ Mexico border.
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INTRODUCTION: HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE 2020 U.S. ELECTIONS

2020 is a crossroads year for human rights, both in the U.S. and abroad. Around the world, authoritarian forces are gaining traction and strength, cracking down on peaceful dissent and free expression. Governments are failing to address existential threats to our human rights – including civil war, climate change, political corruption, and rising inequality. The world is confronted with the highest displaced population in history, at a time when governments are increasingly closing their doors to migrants and refugees seeking safety. These human rights crises are rocking every region of the globe, at a time when the international community's resolve to tackle these crises are on the decline.

No matter the outcome of the 2020 presidential election, U.S. leaders will be critical in protecting – or weakening – human rights both at home and abroad.

What choices should U.S. national leaders make to defend and advance human rights? Amnesty International strives to answer this question each and every day. Amnesty International is the world's largest grassroots human rights organization, with millions of members and supporters worldwide. We engage in policy advocacy, public education, and activism to demand human rights protections for all people – no matter who they are or where they come from. Our researchers document human rights violations in war zones and hot spots across the globe.

Ahead of the 2020 elections, **Amnesty International is pleased to present these policy recommendations, which will serve as a blueprint for foreign and domestic policies that protect human rights.** Our recommendations span domestic and global spheres, ranging from regulating U.S. gun sales, to ending U.S. arms sales that fuel war crimes abroad, to building a humanitarian protection system that addresses the needs of people at the U.S. border as well as those seeking safety across the globe. Our policy recommendations are informed by firsthand documentation conducted by Amnesty researchers worldwide as well as the policy expertise of Amnesty's national advocates and specialists.

Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity to engage with you further on these recommendations. We look forward to working with you to protect and promote human rights, in this new decade and beyond.

Sincerely,



Joanne Lin

National Director of Advocacy and Government Relations

HUMAN RIGHTS PRIORITIES



ASYLUM ACCESS AT THE U.S./ MEXICO BORDER

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THE ISSUE:

Seeking asylum is a human right. But in recent years, people in search of safety at the U.S./ Mexico border, including families and children, have been punished for seeking protection. These include people fleeing levels of violence comparable to war zones in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala and widespread political repression in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba – as well as a growing number of people forcibly displaced from extra-continental countries due to persecution and violence.

Instead of offering refuge to people who need it, the United States has devised a series of policies to offshore them, criminalize them, and deny them protection. It has done this claiming it doesn't have adequate resources to respond, all while spending billions of dollars on border militarization.

Offshoring asylum. The United States has forced tens of thousands of people seeking safety at our border to wait in dangerous, precarious conditions in Mexico. Under a regime known as “metering,” asylum-seekers are forced to place their names on illegal waiting lists to apply for asylum at ports of entry. Under “Remain in Mexico,” the United States has forcibly returned close to 60,000 people to Mexico while they undergo U.S. asylum proceedings, where they are left to the mercy of cartels and criminal elements, which regularly extort, kidnap, and assault them. In 2019, the United States also strong-armed the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras into signing a series of unsafe third country agreements, which offload U.S. obligations to process asylum claims to third countries whose conditions are anything but safe for asylum-seekers. In July, it announced a blanket interim final rule that would wrongfully deny asylum to any national of any country who passed through a third country on the way to the United States – ignoring the grave dangers many asylum-seekers face in common countries of transit.

Criminalizing asylum. In 2018, thousands of parents seeking asylum were criminally charged under a “zero tolerance” policy that led to the forcible separation and irreversible traumatization of families. Thousands more families were separated by US authorities both before and after that policy. In addition, thousands of asylum-seekers, including families and unaccompanied children, have been locked up in detention facilities, including growing numbers of for-profit facilities. Policies of forcible separation and detention in jail-like conditions punish people for seeking safety in the United States. Even humanitarian aid workers and lawyers working with asylum-seekers have been criminalized, targeted, surveilled, and harassed for their lifesaving work.

Denying protection to people who need it. The administration has also sought to deny refuge to people who need it, including by radically rewriting asylum laws to prevent survivors of gender- and gang-based violence from accessing the protection they deserve and by banning people from seeking asylum based on how they entered the country.

TALKING POINTS:

Seeking asylum is a human right, and the protection of asylum-seekers is a U.S. value exemplified by the Statue of Liberty. By reestablishing a fair and just asylum system, the United States can reassert its leadership and restore its standing in the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Rescind disastrous policies restricting access to asylum at the border, including metering, Remain in Mexico, unsafe third country agreements, and bans on asylum based on manner of entry or previous transit through other countries. (DHS, DOJ/EOIR, U.S. Department of State)
- Issue guidance clarifying that the asylum definition should be broadly construed to protect individuals from persecution at the hands of non-state actors as well as state actors. (DOJ/EOIR, DHS)
- Reform the reception and adjudication process for asylum-seekers, including by adequately training and staffing the asylum officer and immigration judge corps, deploying child welfare experts to the border to manage cases of asylum-seeking families, and promoting access to government-appointed legal counsel for asylum-seekers. Law enforcement officials, including Customs and Border Protection officers, should under no circumstances be involved in the adjudication of any aspect of an asylum claim. (DHS, DOJ/EOIR)
- Cease the detention of asylum-seekers and families, including by
 - ◇ Issuing guidance clarifying that asylum-seekers generally should not be subject to detention absent an individualized determination that detention is necessary to prevent an immediate danger or potential flight risk (DHS, DOJ)
 - ◇ Restoring and prioritizing community-based alternatives to detention like the Family Case Management Program (DHS)
 - ◇ Eliminating for-profit immigration detention (DHS, HHS)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- “Saving Lives is Not a Crime” (July 2019), about the targeting of lawyers and advocates at the Mexico/ U.S. border (available [here](#))
- “No Home for Children” (June 2019), about unaccompanied children detained at the largest and only for-profit child detention facility in the country (available [here](#))
- “You Don’t Have Any Rights Here” (October 2018), about attacks on asylum at the U.S./ Mexico border (available [here](#))

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NORTHERN TRIANGLE

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THE ISSUE:

In Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, corruption, impunity, poverty, and violence – and, more recently, devastating impacts on livelihoods wrought by climate change – have impelled increasing numbers of families and children to flee. In fiscal year 2019, 91% of families and 83% of unaccompanied children apprehended at the southwest border were from these three countries.

The World Bank has estimated that 60% of households in rural Northern Triangle areas live in poverty. In Guatemala, which produced the largest number of individuals seeking safety in the United States in 2019, the devastating impact of climate change on crop production – particularly on Indigenous communities, already disadvantaged by decades of brutal violence and discrimination – has decimated traditional livelihoods and left families and children starving.

In the face of crushing poverty and unstable government institutions, organized criminal networks – some exported directly from the United States – have taken control, particularly over poorer areas in all three countries. Their reign has led to record levels of extortion, murder, and forcible recruitment and sexual assault of minors. In El Salvador – which had the highest murder rate in the world just four years ago and still experiences one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America – only 5% of crimes prosecuted ever lead to a conviction; in the words of one woman whose husband and two sons were killed by members of MS-13, “[talking] to the police is a death sentence.”

In Guatemala, the country’s highest authorities have significantly undermined anti-corruption efforts and access to justice by intimidating and expelling a successful anti-corruption body. Judges and prosecutors involved in high-profile prosecutions of illegal criminal networks face stigmatization, threats and legal proceedings as retaliation for their work on cases involving human rights abuses. The United States, which had initially backed anti-corruption efforts in Guatemala, ultimately helped undermine them.

Even though decades of U.S. policies and interventionism in these countries helped create the instability that continues to plague them today, the United States has in recent years failed to meaningfully address the root causes underpinning forced displacement, instead approaching policy in the region with the sole and explicit goal of halting northward migration. In 2019, the Trump administration announced it was slashing foreign assistance to the Northern Triangle and entered into a series of ill-conceived “safe third country” agreements with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

TALKING POINTS:

Displacement from Central America is a regional issue which requires regional solutions. The United States must meaningfully address the root causes of displacement, including rampant instability, corruption, and violence – many of which are legacies of U.S. intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Restore funding for evidence-based programs addressing poverty alleviation, climate change adaptation, community-based violence prevention (including preventing gender-based violence and anti-LGBTI violence) and anticorruption efforts, while halting arms exports and security assistance to forces engaged in human rights violations (U.S. Department of State)
- Renew U.S. support for anticorruption mechanisms led by regional and international actors (including the United Nations and the Organization of American States) (U.S. Department of State, U.S. Mission to the United Nations)
- Expand access to regional protection for those displaced by violence and persecution, including by:
 - ◇ Supporting the strengthening of regional neighbors' domestic asylum systems as a complement to – but not a replacement of – access to asylum in the United States (U.S. Department of State)
 - ◇ Establishing a multilateral resettlement initiative in collaboration with U.S. neighbors and other resettlement countries, which should include the creation of processing centers for the resettlement of refugees, restoration and expansion of the U.S. Central American Minors program, and evacuation mechanisms for individuals at risk of imminent harm (DHS/USCIS and U.S. Department of State)

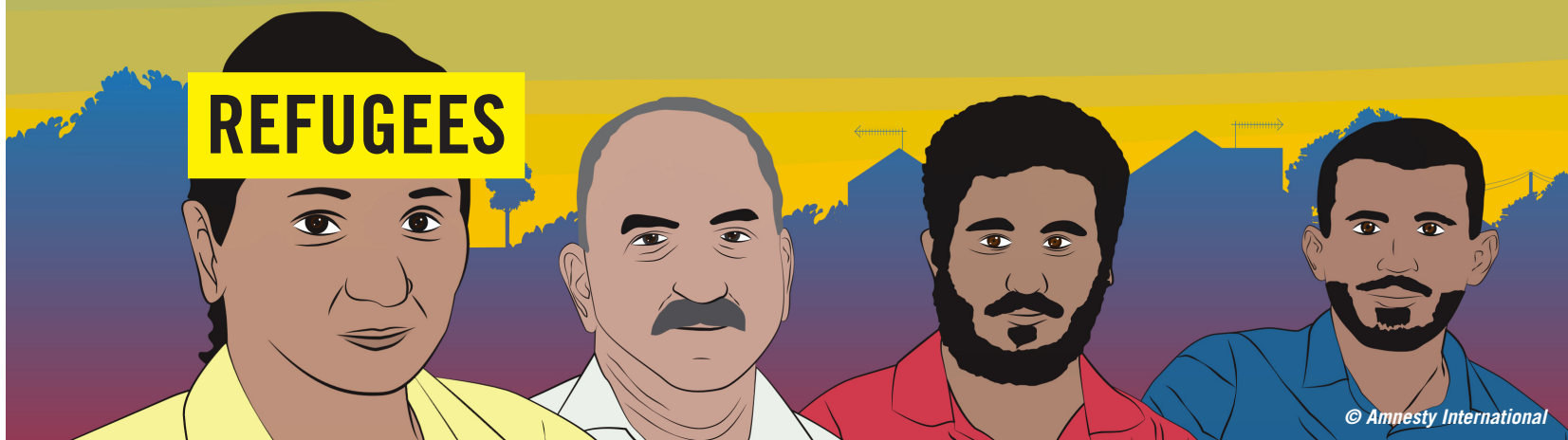
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Guatemala: Last Chance for Justice: Dangerous Setbacks for Human Rights and the Fight Against Impunity in Guatemala” (July 2019). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr34/0611/2019/en/>
- El Salvador: Memorandum to the President” (May 2019). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr29/0546/2019/en/>
- “Home Sweet Home?": [Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador's Role in a Deepening Refugee Crisis](https://www.amnestyusa.org/files/central_american_refugees_-_report_eng_1-min.pdf)” (2016). https://www.amnestyusa.org/files/central_american_refugees_-_report_eng_1-min.pdf

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REFUGEES



THE ISSUE:

The international community faces a displacement crisis of historic proportions that requires bold leadership, innovative solutions, and all countries to do their fair share. Currently, there are over 70 million people forcibly displaced because of war, violence, persecution, or the climate crisis – with the number only growing worse every year. Nearly 26 million of those displaced are refugees, having fled their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return voluntarily.

Unable to return home, most refugees stay in their host country where they try to build a new life. For a small minority facing specific protection risks, staying in their initial host country is not an option, making resettlement necessary. The U.N. Refugee Agency estimates that 1.44 million refugees need access to resettlement in 2020. Despite this, only a tiny fraction is afforded this chance.

THE HUMAN COST:

Malik is an Iraqi refugee stranded with his family in Beirut, Lebanon, after the U.S. government failed to keep its promise to resettle him, his wife Sana and their two sons.* After years of harassment and discrimination, fearing for their lives because they are Christian, they fled Iraq in 2013. Malik and his family thought their dream had come true when they were accepted for resettlement to the U.S. in 2016, however the current administration's first Muslim ban halted their resettlement process from moving forward. Since that time, their case has been stuck in limbo — in “security checks” – indefinitely. Malik should be able to enjoy his human rights as a refugee, and should not live in limbo, without hope.

*Pseudonyms used to protect their privacy and security

Resettlement is a lifeline for refugees and a key component of responsibility-sharing that allows states to support each other by agreeing to resettle refugees from host countries. Since the 1980 Refugee Act established the refugee program, the U.S. has historically resettled the largest number of refugees annually. From 1980 until 2017, U.S. administrations have, on average, set the ceiling for refugee resettlement at 95,000. The admissions ceiling for Fiscal Year 2020 is 18,000, the lowest goal ever set by any administration, and accompanied by drastic changes to the types of refugees prioritized.

Abandoning Responsibility: A fundamental principle of refugee protection is responsibility-sharing and international cooperation. Unfortunately, the U.S. government is abandoning its duty to share in its responsibility to protect refugees. Successive bans and policy changes have taken their toll, with many refugees who expected to be resettled to the U.S. stuck in a never-ending limbo of security vetting.

Instead of upholding its responsibilities, the U.S. is abdicating its duty for refugee protection, drastically cutting the number of refugees it will accept for resettlement. The U.S. Government has also sought to cut programs that offer life-saving and life-preserving humanitarian aid to displaced populations the world over. Responsibility-sharing of all states is critical to reduce the impact of large-scale refugee populations on host countries, and each state should contribute to the maximum of its capacity. The U.S. has not only reduced its commitment to offering protection to refugees in need of resettlement, it has all but abandoned global leadership in ensuring refugee's access to durable, lasting protection opportunities. While other governments have expressed increased interest in creating pathways for refugee protection, including community sponsorship programs for refugees, none of these programs could ever replace the capacity the U.S. refugee program once offered.

TALKING POINTS:

- The U.S. must be a robust participant in refugee protection and lead the way in investing in innovative solutions that protect the human rights of refugees.
- When a country invests a small amount in refugee protection, the dividends pay off for generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The U.S. should ease pressure on countries currently hosting the greatest number of refugees by participating in equitable and predictable pathways to protection for refugees, including by expanding access to traditional resettlement, and by facilitating the successful integration of refugees in their host countries or helping to facilitate the conditions for voluntary return to refugees' countries of origin.
- In addition to expanding resettlement, the U.S. should invest in other admission pathways, including humanitarian programs, family reunification, and co-sponsorship programs.
- For refugees who remain in displacement, the U.S. should increase its financial support of international humanitarian programs that enhance refugees' self-reliance through

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- 'The Mountain is in Front of Us and the Sea is Behind Us': The Impact of US Policies on Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MDE0205382019ENGLISH_09232019.pdf (2019)

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GUN VIOLENCE

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THE ISSUE:

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. Yet the U.S. has failed to implement even a basic system for the regulation of firearms – with no requirements for universal background checks, licensing, and training for gun purchasers or for registration of guns. Killing an average of 109 people each day, gun violence is the second leading cause of death among children and disproportionately affects communities of color. African Americans are ten times more likely to be the victims of gun homicides than white Americans, and gun violence is the leading cause of death among black men ages 15–34. Persistent firearm violence, high rates of gun ownership, and ease of access to firearms by individuals likely to misuse them demonstrate how the U.S. government is failing to meet its obligation to respect, protect and fulfill human rights pursuant to international law. Persistent gun violence in the U.S. is denying people their civil and political rights including the right to life, the right to security of person and the right to be free from discrimination.

The U.S. crisis of gun violence impacts a broad range of people domestically, including women, children, communities of color, and students. It also impacts foreign countries as the Trump administration relaxes arms export oversight to boost U.S. arms sales, making it easier for dangerous actors to access military-style weapons which are often used to commit human rights atrocities abroad.

THE HUMAN COST:

Hadiya Pendleton was an honors student and drum majorette who had just performed at President Obama's inauguration. In January 2013, gun violence claimed her life. Two members of a gang, driving past Harsh Park, Chicago, saw a group of teenagers gathered under a canopy, sheltering from the rain, and opened fire, mistaking the teenagers for rival gang members. Hadiya was just 15 years old when she was killed.

TALKING POINTS:

It is time for a change: the crisis of gun violence in the U.S. and failure of the U.S. government to take effective action has resulted in the death of thousands and injuries to even more. The U.S. has an obligation under international law to ensure the rights and individual safety of people living in the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create an Executive Task Force on Ending Gun Violence that includes representatives from impacted communities, direct service providers, health care professionals, law enforcement agencies, and researchers to investigate evidence-based gun violence prevention policies that holistically address gun violence, including school safety, gun violence in communities of color, access to mental and physical health care for gun violence survivors, requirements for universal background checks, licensing, and training for gun purchasers/registration of firearms, etc. Within its first 100 days, the Task Force should draft a report on effective policies that could be implemented to reduce gun violence.
- Issue directives to the Department of Justice, Attorney General, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), requiring:
 - ◊ Enforcement of existing gun violence prevention measures that fall within their jurisdictions, including interstate gun trafficking
 - ◊ Adoption of policies banning 3-D printed guns, ghost guns, and other dangerous accessories that increase firearm lethality.
- Mandate that the State Department and Department of Commerce reverse Trump administration policies transferring oversight of exports of semi-automatic weapons and ammunition and adopt policies preventing the import of foreign assault weapons into the U.S.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- In the Line of Fire: Human Rights and the U.S. Gun Violence Crisis (2018): https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Gun-Report-Full_16.pdf
- Scars of Survival: Gun Violence and Barriers to Reparation in the U.S. (2019): <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Scars-of-survival.pdf>
- Fragmented and Unequal: A Justice System that Fails Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in Louisiana (2019): <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMR5111602019ENGLISH.pdf>

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THE ISSUE:

China's growing economic and political influence around the world makes it one of the most consequential relationships the U.S. will have to manage. The next President should reframe the U.S.-China relationship to put human rights front and center of its policy. Whether the U.S. succeeds will have significant consequences not only for the human rights of people in China, but also for the global and international human rights agenda as China's government builds support for its efforts to reframe human rights and undermine its institutions.

In recent years, China's government has drafted and enacted a series of restrictive laws in the name of national security that present grave dangers to human rights and human rights defenders. Human rights defenders, including lawyers and activists, are increasingly subjected to monitoring, harassment, intimidation, detention and imprisonment. In Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang), an estimated one million predominantly Muslim people have been held in internment. Detainees have been subjected to political and cultural indoctrination, children have been separated from their parents, and there have been numerous allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in these camps.

On a broader scale, an increasingly assertive China has worrying implications for the human rights system as a whole. China's leaders are operating from within the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council to shrink the space available for the UN and civil society to hold states accountable for their human rights records, as well as making efforts to reframe human rights as a "cause," as opposed to a state's legal obligations to its people. As China has become more powerful, it has been able to shut down human rights dialogues and intimidate those that criticize its record. In 2013, Xi Jinping launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), steering much of this finance into infrastructure projects. Many of the projects that make up BRI are based in countries where there is much potential for exploitative labor practices, environmental degradation, and weak governance and accountability.

In July 2015, an unprecedented government crackdown on human rights lawyers and other activists began during which nearly 250 targeted individuals were questioned or detained by state security agents. Many other lawyers have been disbarred and thus are no longer able to use their legal expertise to seek justice for victims of human rights abuses. The effects of this crackdown are being felt throughout Chinese society.

The internment of predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in Xinjiang has intensified since March 2017, when a "Regulation on De-extremification" was adopted in the region. Open or even private displays of religious and cultural affiliation, including growing an "abnormal" beard, wearing a veil or headscarf, regular prayer can be considered "extremist" under the regulation. Since then there has been a growing government campaign of mass internment, intrusive surveillance, political indoctrination and forced cultural assimilation against Uyghurs, Kazakhs and others in Xinjiang. It is estimated that up to one million people have been held in internment camps.



TALKING POINTS:

- The deterioration of civil society and rule of law in China appears to signal a systematic effort by the Chinese government to tighten its controls on free expression and undermine the will of its own people, including the rights of its ethnic minorities, such as Uyghurs and Tibetans, guaranteed under China's own Constitution.
- As President, I plan to work with allies and partners to use all diplomatic and economic tools to push back on China's systematic attack on international human rights norms, whether they be inside China, globally or at the United Nations.
- Our values need to be front-and-center as we manage our relationship with China. A rights-respecting China is a U.S. national security imperative and would help the U.S. achieve our other political, economic, and security goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The U.S. should robustly fund and support human rights non-governmental organizations that support human rights defenders (HRDs) including by prison visits, legal representations, consultations with HRDs, provisions of visas, and trial monitoring in China.
- The U.S. should make the human rights crisis in Xinjiang a national security priority by calling for and supporting a U.N. Fact Finding Mission to Xinjiang, holding accountable the Chinese government officials who are responsible for abuses, providing protection opportunities to Uyghurs and other ethnic Muslims to ensure humanitarian pathways to the U.S., and banning surveillance exports that pose a substantial risk of violating human rights in their destination.
- The U.S. should aggressively push for international human rights norms vis-à-vis China in bilateral, regional, and multilateral forums through positive and negative diplomatic and economic incentives and disincentives.

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HONG KONG

THE ISSUE:

Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of China, maintains separate governing and economic systems from that of mainland China under the principle of “one country, two systems”. Chinese national law does not generally apply in the region and Hong Kong is treated as a separate jurisdiction. In March 2019, Hong Kong’s government introduced plans for legislative changes that would enable criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China. However, the bill faced widespread criticism from many sectors of society concerned that it would undermine Hong Kong’s legal freedoms and might be used to intimidate or silence dissidents.

Beginning in March, the people of Hong Kong repeatedly protested the proposed extradition bill. Over a million people flooded the main streets on June 9, June 16 and August 18. Countless protests of smaller scale took place in other parts of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong police used water cannons, tear gas and pepper spray, and, in some instances, guns firing bean bags, rubber bullets and live rounds to disperse the largely peaceful demonstrations.

On June 15, the Hong Kong government announced it would indefinitely suspend the bill. Then, on September 3, 2019, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced that the controversial extradition bill would be formally withdrawn. But the protesters demands have broadened to demand the authorities conduct an independent investigation into the police use of force, withdraw the “riot” label for the anti-extradition bill protests, release any arrested anti-extradition bill protesters, and not pursue any charges against them, as well as universal suffrage for all Legislative Council members and the Chief Executive. The protests further intensified in response to police inaction as violent counter-protesters attacked by-standers and protesters in the Yuen Long area of Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong police have used violent acts by a small group as a pretext to classify the largely peaceful protests as unlawful assemblies and, specifically, “riots”. Amnesty verified numerous incidents involving the dangerous use of rubber bullets, officers beating protesters who did not resist, aggressive tactics used by police to obstruct journalists on site, and the misuse of tear gas and pepper spray. By early August, police said they have fired 1,800 rounds of tear gas, 300 rubber bullets and 170 sponge grenades. As of December 16, more than 6000 people have been arrested, while 517 people have been charged with “rioting”, which carries a maximum prison sentence of 10 years.

On October 5, the Hong Kong government invoked a colonial-era law, the Emergency Regulations Ordinance (ERO), to bypass the legislative bodies and enact the Prohibition of Face Covering Regulation (also known as the “Mask Ban”). The ban has far-reaching repercussions for the human rights to privacy, health and protection against discrimination. On Dec 10, the Hong Kong Court ruled the Mask Ban unconstitutional. The court is now pending an appeal case from the Hong Kong government.

While the formal withdrawal of the extradition bill is welcome, the withdrawal cannot change the fact that the Hong Kong authorities have chosen to suppress protests in a grossly unlawful way that has seriously damaged the people's trust and sense of legitimacy of the government.

TALKING POINTS:

- The United States has an obligation to stand with the people of Hong Kong in their yearning for freedom and a government that respects international human rights.
- As President, I will ensure that Hong Kong remains a priority in our dialogues with China and call on them to fully conduct an independent investigation into unnecessary or excessive use of force, de-escalate the situation, and respect the rights of protestors.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The United States should, with allies and partners, use diplomatic and economic tools to urge the Chinese government and Hong Kong authorities to allow an independent investigation into unnecessary or excessive use of force by police at protests and to withdraw the present mask ban and bring the ERO in line with Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- The Executive Branch should fully implement the Hong Kong PROTECT Act, which prohibits the issuance of licenses to export covered munition items such as tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannons and other items to the Hong Kong Police Force.
- The United States should support the human rights of the people of Hong Kong in its bilateral and multilateral dialogues with China both publicly and privately.

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RUSSIA

THE ISSUE:

The government of Russia's human rights record is abysmal. Russian officials have leveraged the full power of the state's legislative, judicial, and carceral powers to suppress dissent. In doing so, they have suppressed peaceful demonstrations, targeted vulnerable communities, and jailed critics.

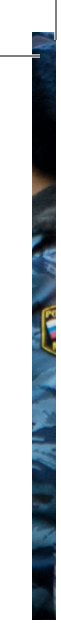
In 2017, Russians outraged at the Kremlin's proposals to cut social benefits and endemic corruption in government took to the streets. While demonstrations have frequently taken place in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the 2017 protests marked an escalation, as tens of thousands marched in cities across the country. Since that time, Russia's security services have responded to this new wave of mostly peaceful activism with ferocity. The government has used a raft of measures to stifle dissent: preemptively arresting opposition leaders, cordoning off city streets, denying permits to organizers, slapping participants with heavy fines, beating demonstrators with batons, and arresting people en masse.

These human rights abuses are buoyed by an array of legislation that empowers the government to silence dissent. In 2012, President Vladimir Putin signed a law requiring any NGO receiving foreign funding and engaging in "political activity" to register as a "foreign agent," broadly interpreted by many Russians to signify a spy. In 2017, the bill's scope was expanded to cover foreign-funded media and in 2019, the "foreign agents" status was expanded to cover individuals. In 2015, a separate law allowed the Russian government to shutter organizations it deems "undesirable".

THE HUMAN COST:

Dedicated to chronicling abuses in the Soviet Union and spotlighting current human rights violations, Memorial is one of the most storied civic organizations operating across the former Soviet Union. In Russia, the organization is under sustained attack. In 2009, Natalia Estemirova, a researcher for the organization in the North Caucasus, was abducted by unknown assailants and subsequently shot. In 2018, her successor Oyub Titiev was arrested on fabricated drug charges. He was paroled after spending one and a half years in prison. Memorial's offices have repeatedly been subjected to raids by security personnel. As of December 2019, Memorial has been fined 19 times by the Russian government under the "foreign agents" law.

Members of the LGBTI community have faced particular violence at the hands of Russian government. In 2017, security services in Chechnya arrested 100 men who are gay or perceived to be gay. The men reported being beaten, tortured, and forced to disclose the names of other



LGBT individuals. Some of those detained were killed. Despite massive international condemnation, Chechen authorities resumed the crackdown in 2019. Over 40 individuals were arrested and at least two people are reported to have been tortured to death.

The Russian government has been meticulous in exporting its human rights abuses. Following a 2008 war with Georgia, Russia exercises effective control over the breakaway regions of South Ossetia/Tskhinvali. There, Russian border guards and de facto authorities have securitized the administrative boundary, eroding living standards, limiting freedom of movement, and cutting off Georgians from their livelihoods and places of worship. Between February and March 2014, the government of the Russian Federation occupied and illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Since the annexation, the Kremlin has targeted the Crimean Tatar community with a campaign of repression. Crimean Tatar activists have been arrested, media outlets shuttered, and elected representative bodies disbanded.

TALKING POINTS:

- The assault on the LGBTI community in Russia is horrific. We have a choice: we can choose to live in a world where people are tortured and killed for who they love. Where those in power turn a blind eye to abuses. Or we can live in a world of justice, decency, and respect for international law. It must be the policy of the United States to pursue this other, better world.
- The government of Russia calls activists, protestors, and NGOs foreign agents and undesirables. None of these slurs can change the truth: what they truly are is brave.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The United States should provide additional opportunities for young Russian reformers in civic society, government, and business to strengthen their skills by investing heavily in people to people and cultural exchanges. These programs have benefited from decades of bipartisan support. They can empower Russian activists and reformers, frequently isolated and denied opportunities by the Kremlin, to gain a broader perspective on issues that impact their communities.
- The United States should provide safe sanctuary to individuals targeted for repression by Russia's government, including members of the LGBTI community in Chechnya fleeing torture and killing at the hands of their government.

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SAUDI ARABIA

THE ISSUE:

The U.S. must end its complicity in the Saudi-UAE led coalitions violations in Yemen, some of which amount to war crimes, by banning arms sales to the coalition.

The discovery of U.S. munitions amongst the rubble of civilian markets, homes, hospitals and hotels has been a constant throughout Yemen's devastating war. Amnesty International has repeatedly found evidence that U.S.-made munitions have been used by coalition forces to target civilians. The evidence is overwhelming: investigations by United Nations bodies, media outlets and numerous other human rights organizations have reached similar conclusions. In one example from August 2017, a U.S. manufactured bomb was dropped in a residential area, leading to 16 civilian deaths in Yemen's largest city, Sana'a. As a result of the airstrike, five-year-old Buthaina was the sole survivor in her family; the bomb killed her parents and five siblings.

Although a host of European countries have suspended arms transfers to the coalition, the U.S. government continues to provide it with military support and arms sales. U.S. manufactured arms have also been diverted into the hands of Huthi and other armed groups fighting in Yemen. U.S. military support has included:

- Mid-air refueling support that facilitated airstrikes, including on civilian infrastructure
- Logistical support and assistance identifying targets for aerial bombardment
- Sale of 30 F-15 fourth-generation fighter jets, 84 combat helicopters, 110 air-to-surface cruise missiles and nearly 20,000 guided bombs.

All warring parties have openly flaunted international law, causing massive civilian casualties. Amnesty International has documented 36 airstrikes across six different governorates by the coalition that appear to have violated international law. These airstrikes have claimed more than 500 civilian lives and appear to have deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, markets, and mosques.

TALKING POINTS

- In 2015, Saudi Arabia and eight other states - backed by the U.S., U.K., and France - began airstrikes against a rebel group known as the Huthis in Yemen. The fighting has resulted in a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions.
- 22 million Yemenis must rely on humanitarian assistance to survive and half that number are at risk of famine.
- 400,000 children are at risk of starving to death.
- According to the World Health Organization, Yemen is struggling to contain the worst cholera outbreak in the world.
- A blockade of Yemen's ports of entry by the Saudi-U.A.E. led coalition has restricted aid from entering the country, triggering a famine which threatens the lives of 12 million people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The United States must immediately suspend weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
- The President must call on the State Department to produce a report on violations of international law by all actors in the Yemen conflict and a separate report on human rights in Saudi Arabia.

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BACK COVER PHOTO: Kaden* and his family outside their home in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. They would like to be resettled anywhere, and are unable to return to Syria.
*Name changed. © Amnesty International





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