

# HUMAN RIGHTS ON CAPITOL HILL



MAY 5, 2020

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## 1) THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

**World Health Organization – Amnesty International USA Calls on Trump Administration to Reverse its Decision to Halt Funding for the World Health Organization (“WHO”).** In an April 20 letter to Congress, Amnesty International USA [expressed serious concerns](#) about the Trump Administration’s decision to freeze funding to the WHO, pending a two-month review. Congress must press the White House to reverse the decision to suspend payments. The WHO plays a key role in coordinating the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The White House decision to suspend financial support to the WHO imperils the lives of people around the world.

## 2) MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS NEWS

**a) RightsNow! – Amnesty International USA Launches New Campaign to Center Human Rights in the COVID-19 Response and Recovery.** On May 11 Amnesty International USA will launch a new campaign to put human rights at the center of the U.S. government’s COVID-19 response and recovery. The campaign, called RightsNow!, includes a 10-Point Plan on COVID-19 and human rights; a new call on Homeland Security (“DHS”) to free all families from immigration detention and protect them from COVID-19; and a new call on Congress to fund community gun violence prevention programs and pass the Break the Cycle of Violence Act ([S. 2671, H.R. 4836](#)).

**Gun Violence - Congress Should Fund Community Gun Violence Prevention and Pass the Break the Cycle of Violence Act ([S. 2671, H.R. 4836](#)).** Communities of color that are already disproportionately impacted by gun violence are also hit the hardest by COVID-19. Community organizations designed to prevent gun violence have had to cut staff, programming, and outreach, drastically affecting their ability to curb gun violence. [Congress should commit at least \\$150 million annually for 10 years](#) to community gun violence prevention programs and establish a national strategy to address the disproportionate impact of this public health crisis on communities of color by passing the Break the Cycle of Violence Act ([S. 2671, H.R. 4836](#)).

**Immigration Detention – Homeland Security Should Release Immigration Detainees.** DHS is locking up around 250 families in arbitrary and prolonged detention at three U.S. facilities in Pennsylvania and Texas. Although children are supposed to be held in these facilities for no more than 20 days under the long-standing Flores Settlement Agreement, that limit is regularly ignored. These children and parents came here seeking safety from violence and persecution and were instead thrown behind bars. Now, during a global pandemic, they are exposed to a deadly virus and increased risk of COVID-19 infection while in crowded conditions with inadequate hygiene and negligent medical care. Congress should [press DHS/ICE to free all families now](#).

**PROTECT IMMIGRANTS  
FROM COVID-19.  
RELEASE THEM  
FROM DETENTION NOW.**



**Amnesty International USA Publishes 10-Point Plan to Center Human Rights in the COVID-19 Response and Recovery.** Governments and communities across the world are grappling with the immediate and longer-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone in the U.S. is impacted by this, and many are experiencing hardship, sacrifice, illness or devastating loss as a result of this virus. Yet some of us are affected much more deeply as our country's long-standing inequalities — including by gender, by race and by class — shape everything, from who performs the “essential” functions of the economy to which communities suffer the greatest loss of life. How we respond now to COVID-19 will determine not only our ability to survive — but whether we all can finally thrive. The U.S. government's response to COVID-19 must center human rights at all stages of the crisis — prevention, preparedness, containment, treatment and recovery — in order to best protect public health and support people who are most at risk; [Amnesty International's new 10-Point Plan shows how.](#)

**b) Immigration - President Trump's Ban on Immigration Will Not Stop the Spread of COVID-19.**

On April 22 President Trump signed an [executive order](#) temporarily halting immigration for 60 days. The President must not manipulate the pandemic to further his xenophobic agenda. The U.S. cannot address the spread of COVID-19 without the unending efforts of immigrants providing healthcare and home aid, staffing grocery stores, and producing food, whose work has been deemed essential while they are simultaneously struggle to access to care, support, and services.

**c) Detainees/Prisoners - Congress Must Press for Release of Prisoners of Conscience Worldwide.**

As prisoners of conscience around the world languish in prisons, Amnesty International calls on Congress to help get them released now. The tragic news of the passing of prominent Saudi human rights defender [Dr Abdullah al-Hamid](#) while in detention last week highlights the even more urgent need for authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience. On May 4 Amnesty International launched a global [campaign](#) calling for the release of all prisoners of conscience worldwide, highlighting 150 emblematic cases. Members of Congress can select a case from the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's [Defending Freedoms Project](#), and advocate on behalf of that prisoner of conscience and help to get them released.

**d) Gender - In Response to Increase in Domestic Violence During Time of COVID-19, Congress Must Prioritize Ending Gender-Based Violence (“GBV”) Globally.** Levels of gender-based violence (“GBV”) globally are rising due to COVID-19. Amnesty International USA joined the Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally to [call on Congress](#) to ensure adequate funding to address GBV; support program measures that integrate GBV prevention and mitigation; ensure U.S. Government programs are based on a gender analysis and that sex- and age-disaggregated data is collected.

**Senate Must Pass Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”) Reauthorization (S. 2843).** During COVID-19 reports of domestic violence have increased, and yet the Senate has since allowed VAWA to lapse, leaving shelters and services in even more chaos as funding streams dry up. The House has passed a reauthorization that further [closes the legal loophole](#) that has contributed to high rates of violence against Native women, expands tribal jurisdiction over crimes such as rape, and closes the “boyfriend loophole” that has allowed stalkers and abusers to keep guns. The Senate should pass the version introduced by Senator Feinstein (S.2843), which includes these stronger protections for Native women and closes the “[boyfriend loophole](#).”

**Commission on Unalienable Rights Must Protect Human Rights of Women and Girls.** On May 1 Amnesty International joined [167 signatories](#) in raising grave concerns about the work of the State Department’s Commission on Unalienable Rights and any potential report or output that undermines the international human rights system and purports to reinterpret its respective treaties and monitoring bodies.

#### **e) Asia**

**Rohingya – Humanitarian Response to COVID-19 Must Address Heightened Risks to Older Refugees.** In an April report Amnesty International [documented](#) how older Rohingya refugees in overcrowded camps in Bangladesh are being left out in the humanitarian response to COVID-19. Since older people face higher health risks from COVID-19, the lack of adequate care could have deadly consequences. Older people have been [disproportionately impacted](#) by the conflict and displacement in Myanmar. Any humanitarian response must prioritize older peoples’ access to health, food, water and sanitation.

**India – Indian Authorities’ Harassment of Journalists Violates Freedom of Expression.** Since the onset of COVID-19, Indian authorities have been [harassing journalists](#). Authorities accused Masrat Zahra, an award-winning photojournalist, on April 20 of “uploading anti-national posts [on Facebook] with criminal intentions to induce the youth.” Indian authorities [must stop](#) the harassment and intimidation of journalists through draconian laws that threaten the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and [create an atmosphere of fear and reprisal](#).

**Hong Kong - Authorities Must Not Use the Pandemic to Further Restrict Freedom of Assembly.**

On April 18 Hong Kong authorities [arrested](#) 15 prominent pro-democracy leaders and activists for their role in organizing and joining “unauthorized assemblies” that took place six months earlier. The Chinese government is taking further action to crack down on protesters in Hong Kong.

#### **f) Africa – Congress Should Press AFRICOM for Details of New Reporting on Civilian Casualties.**

On April 1, the [U.S. Africa Command](#) (“AFRICOM”) announced it would begin regular reporting on [civilian casualties](#) resulting from its military operations in Africa. Although it has taken more than a decade, this is an important step towards providing [truth and accountability](#) for the African victims of U.S. air strikes and their families. Congress must press AFRICOM to share substantive information about how it distinguishes civilians from combatants, both when planning lethal strikes and when investigating their impacts.

### **3) WHAT’S COMING DOWN THE PIKE?**

June 16, 1 p.m. (ET): In conjunction with World Refugee Day (June 20), Amnesty International will present a teleconference briefing on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Displaced Peoples in 2020. To register, contact [mcullen@aiusa.org](mailto:mcullen@aiusa.org).

### **4) CONNECT WITH US**

Follow breaking human rights news, follow Amnesty International USA on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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