

HUMAN RIGHTS ON CAPITOL HILL

AMNESTY
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1) **THIS MONTH'S FEATURE**

Amnesty International USA (“AIUSA”) Condemns Police Killings of African-Americans and Calls on Law Enforcement Nationwide to Stop Using Excessive Force. Amnesty International USA (“AIUSA”) condemns the brutal killings of George Floyd, [Dreasjean “Sean” Reed](#), Breonna Taylor, and so many others. Police are more than twice as likely to kill black people than white people. In 2019 police shot and killed [1,004 people](#).

Congress should pass the Police Exercising Absolute Care with Everyone (“PEACE”) Act ([H.R. 4359](#)) which would limit the use of deadly force by federal law enforcement officers to be used only as last resort and require officers to employ de-escalation techniques. AIUSA joined 368 organizations in a [letter](#) to Congressional leadership outlining urgent reforms needed to stop police use of excessive force.

In addition, in the wake of recent protests across the country, AIUSA calls for an [immediate end to any force against peaceful protesters](#) and for law enforcement to [ensure and protect the legal right to protest](#).



2) MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS NEWS

a) COVID-19 and Human Rights

World Health Organization - Amnesty International Condemns President Trump's Decision to Terminate Relationship with World Health Organization ("WHO"). On May 29 President Trump announced that the U.S. would be ending its relationship with the WHO. Amnesty International released a [statement](#) condemning this callous decision that will undercut the global effort to eradicate COVID-19. A once-in-a-century pandemic is not the time to play politics. As the world bands together to fight this pandemic, some countries have increased their financial contributions to the WHO. The U.S. stands alone in severing ties with the WHO. In April, AIUSA sent a [letter](#) calling on Congress to speak out against the President's plans to defund the WHO.

Congress Must Provide Oversight on Palantir Tech Firm's Role in Collecting Health Data for U.S. COVID-19 Response. On April 21 the Trump administration awarded a contract to collect COVID-related health data to the tech firm Palantir. This contract with the Department of Health and Human Services ("HHS") raises serious human rights concerns. In a May 21 [Washington Post op-ed](#), Amnesty International describes Palantir's history of facilitating immigration abuses, and urges Congress to ensure that HHS's data collection does not violate privacy and human rights.

Detainees/Prisoners – Congress Should Press Immigration & Customs Enforcement ("ICE") and the Bureau of Prisons ("BOP") to Release Eligible Detainees in Order to Curb Spread of COVID-19. AIUSA submitted a [statement](#) for a June 2 Senate Judiciary hearing on "Incarceration and Detention During COVID-19." Congress should mandate that: (1) ICE release all eligible detainees and (2) BOP release all eligible prisoners. In addition, Congress should pass the Federal Immigration Release for Safety and Security Together ("FIRST") Act ([S. 3645](#), [H.R. 6537](#)) to provide urgent and critical restrictions on ICE to limit immigration detention.

Family Separation 2.0 – Stop ICE from Forcing Families to Choose Either Separation from Their Children or Remaining Indefinitely Detained at Risk of Exposure to COVID-19. In May, reports broke that Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") officials were [offering detained families a so-called "choice"](#) between continued indefinite detention with their children, or separation from their children where the child would be released but the parent would remain indefinitely detained. Although ICE initially denied offering parents this "choice," it conceded at a May 22 congressional [hearing](#) that it had. ICE must immediately release children and parents together, to preserve family unity as enshrined in the Flores settlement and international law and to protect them from COVID-19.



b) U.S.

Gun Violence – Congress Should Pass Break the Cycle of Violence Act (S. 2671, H.R. 4836).

Violence intervention and prevention projects achieve significant reductions in firearm violence. However, because of COVID-19, community-based gun violence prevention programs are endangered at a time when they are needed most. Congress should commit at least \$150 million annually for 10 years, and Congress should [pass the Break the Cycle of Violence Act \(S. 2671, H.R. 4836\)](#) which would provide renewable grants to these evidence-driven programs. Members of Congress are also encouraged to mark National Gun Violence Awareness Day (June 5) including on their social media channels by using the hashtag #WearOrange.

Social Media - Executive Order Targeting Social Platforms Is Dangerous and Irresponsible. On May 28 the President signed an [executive order](#) designating that social media companies are shielded from liability for user-generated content. He issued the executive order after Twitter implemented a new policy of fact-checking tweets. AIUSA released a [statement](#) denouncing the executive order. Everyone should have access to information, especially during a pandemic, where accurate information could mean the difference between life and death.

b) Asia

Hong Kong - Chinese Government Introduces New “National Security” Legislation to Intensify Crackdown on Hong Kong Protests. On May 22 China’s parliament, National People’s Congress (“NPC”), proposed new [“national security” legislation](#) that poses a serious threat to human rights in Hong Kong. In late May 2020 Amnesty International published a new briefing documenting how police have met [protestors](#) with [tear gas, batons, and water cannons](#) in protests over the national security and anti-sedition law introduced by the NPC in Beijing. The draft proposal bypasses Hong Kong’s legislature and would outlaw “subversion” against the central government. The proposed law would allow China’s security officials to operate in Hong Kong, increasing the risks of persecution of dissidents and activists. A May 30 Amnesty International oped explains how Chinese authorities have used a [broad definition of “national security” to target journalists, activists and critics](#). Further, authorities have banned the June 4 vigil marking the Tiananmen Square massacre anniversary, citing COVID-19 concerns. On June 1 Amnesty International released a [statement](#) calling on authorities to help facilitate a socially distant vigil as opposed to banning it. The pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to silence free expression.



China – AIUSA Applauds Passage of Uyghur Human Rights and Policy Act (S. 3744). On May 27 the House [passed legislation](#) to hold Chinese government officials accountable for the arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims. Thanks to Senator Rubio (R-FL), Senator Menendez (D-NJ), Congressman Smith (R-NJ-4) and Congressman Suozzi (D-NY-3) for getting this bill passed through Congress. We urge the President to swiftly sign the legislation into law.

c) Mid East

Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories – Congress Should Pressure Israeli Authorities to Lift Travel Ban on Amnesty International Campaigner. Since October 2019 [Israeli authorities have barred Laith Abu Zeyad](#), Amnesty International Campaigner on Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories. Laith, a Palestinian living in the occupied West Bank, is barred from travelling abroad for undisclosed “security reasons.” Amnesty’s previous attempts to repeal the ban through administrative channels have been rejected. Congress should pressure Israeli authorities to lift Laith’s travel ban as it has impaired his ability to do critical human rights work.



Qatar - Contact Tracing App Security Flaw Exposed Sensitive Personal Details of More Than One Million. A recent [investigation](#) by Amnesty International’s Security Lab discovered a critical weakness in the configuration of Qatar’s EHTERAZ contact tracing app. Amnesty alerted the Qatari authorities to the vulnerability shortly after making the discovery on May 21. The authorities acted swiftly to fix the weakness. The vulnerability would have allowed cyber attackers to access highly sensitive personal information, including the name, national ID, health status and location data of more than one million users. Serious security vulnerabilities in Qatar’s mandatory contact tracing app is a wake-up call for all governments rolling-out COVID-19 apps to ensure privacy safeguards are central to the technology.

3) WHAT’S COMING DOWN THE PIKE?

June 9, 3 pm EDT: Congressional staff briefing on Halting Deportations During COVID-19. Amnesty's Americas Advocacy Director will be speaking at a briefing on the need to halt deportations and expulsions during COVID-19. The U.S. has deported COVID-positive people to eight different countries. The briefing, hosted in coordination with Rep. Escobar (D-TX), will feature public health and human rights experts on the importance of halting deportations. To RSVP, please contact ckrishna@aiusa.org.

4) LOOKING TO NOVEMBER 2020

Amnesty International Publishes Policy Recommendations for White House and Presidential Campaigns. On May 18 AIUSA published [77 policy recommendations for the White House and Presidential campaigns](#) including 16 recommendations on protecting human rights in the Age of COVID-19. These recommendations range from releasing immigration detainees, to funding community violence prevention programs, 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 around the world. AIUSA calls on U.S. leaders to adopt these policy recommendations to protect human rights, both at home and abroad.

5) CONNECT WITH US

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

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