



August 24, 2020

Dear Representative:

On behalf of Amnesty International USA, I am writing to share our top foreign policy and human rights policy recommendations.

The list of issues that follows is not meant to be exhaustive but should be high priorities for the next HFAC Chair and Ranking Member's agenda.

Amnesty International's experts stand ready to provide briefings on any issues outlined below. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202/281-0017 or Jlin@aiusa.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joanne Lin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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1. **Protect Persecuted Populations Around the World:**

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. 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 all refugees & displaced populations. Further, the U.S. must never fail to do all they can to ensure the protection of at risk, persecuted, populations such as the Uyghurs in China or the Rohingya.

Resources:

- Refugee Protection <https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/refugees/>;
- Turkic Muslims including Uyghurs
<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/china/>;

Rohingya <https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/myanmar/>

2. **Restore Asylum Access at the U.S./Mexico Border and Bring the United States in Line with International Obligations Towards People Seeking Safety**

Seeking asylum is a human right. But in recent years, people in search of safety at the Mexico/U.S. 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. It has also weaponized the COVID-19 crisis against asylum-seekers, sealing the border to adults, families, and children seeking safety, while continuing to engage in reckless

The United States has forced tens of thousands of people seeking safety at our border to wait in dangerous, precarious conditions in Mexico. Under "Remain in Mexico," the United States has forcibly returned over 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 offshore U.S. obligations to process asylum claims to third countries whose conditions are anything but safe for asylum-seekers.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee has a critical role to play in ensuring that the United States abides by its international obligations towards asylum-seekers and refugees – particularly given that the Trump administration has sought to externalize U.S. borders and place pressure on regional neighbors for the purpose of evading these obligations. The Committee must investigate how this architecture of unlawful policies has violated the right to seek asylum and put in place measures to ensure U.S. asylum practices comport with binding obligations under international law.

Resources:

- Asylum access: <https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/asylum-and-covid-19/>
- Immigration detainees: <https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/immigration-detention-and-covid-19/>

3. Safeguard Human Rights Amidst Continuing COVID-19 Global Pandemic:

Governments and communities across the world are grappling with the immediate and longer-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. People around the world are impacted by this and many are experiencing hardship, sacrifice, illness or devastating loss as a result of this virus. Some are affected much more deeply 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. These inequalities, which dictate so much of the fabric of everyday life, are magnified during this crisis. We need a people-centered response to COVID-19 that protects us all, and at the same time, also explicitly addresses our nation’s long-standing inequalities.

How we respond now to COVID-19 will determine not only our ability to survive—but whether or not we all can finally all thrive. The U.S. government’s response to COVID-19 - domestically and internationally - 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.

Resources:

- Exposed, Silenced, Attacked: Failures to Protect Health and Essential Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic
<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL4025722020ENGLISH.PDF>
- Surveillance [<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/surveillance-and-covid-19/>];
- <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/coronavirus-how-human-rights-help-protect-us/>
- <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/human-rights-activists-allies-covid19-under-attack/>
- Rejoin World Health Organization [<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/africa-and-covid-19/>];

- Debt relief for poorest nations [<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/g20-rich-powerful-states-must-ensure-covid19-recovery-measures-tackle-global-poverty-inequality-and-the-climate-crisis/>]

4. Promote Gender Equality:

Levels of gender-based violence globally are rising due to COVID-19. Communities are experiences increases in gender-based violence (GBV) while struggling with the loss of traditional safety networks, resources and services, yet the U.S. response to COVID-19 has lacked a coordinated or robust engagement in its global work, leaving women and girls especially at greater risk of GBV. Additionally, the impact of the U.S.'s Global Gag Rule, which prohibits U.S. funding to clinics or organizations that so much as educate their communities on safe abortion, has disrupted critical health services and put the lives of women and girls at further risk.

Resources:

End Gender-based Violence

<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/gender-based-violence-and-covid-19/>

Protect Sexual Reproductive Rights

<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/global-gag-rule/>

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5. Halt Civilian Deaths Committed by U.S. Arms and U.S. Lethal Operations:

The United States uses lethal force in conflicts around the world that has led to the deaths and injuries of thousands of civilians, in most cases without acknowledgement or accountability. The U.S. also provides equipment and training to militaries around the world that have been credibly linked to human rights violations and where impunity for those violations is reinforced by overt and implicit US support. These actions undermine efforts to promote human rights and accountable governments. This must change starting with ensuring that the US meaningfully investigate civilian harm caused by its use of lethal force, and make better efforts to prevent and respond to that harm; the U.S. should also end its complicity in the Saudi-UAE led coalition's human rights violations in Yemen, some of which amount to war crimes, by banning arms sales to the coalition.

Resources:

- Investigate and make stronger efforts to prevent civilian casualties from the use of U.S. lethal force [<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/us-killings-abroad/>].
- Halt Arms Sales to Saudi-UAE Coalition Committing War Crimes Against Yemeni Civilians [<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/saudi-arabia/>];
- Suspend arms sales to other governments committing human rights violations in the Middle East and Africa [<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/egypt/>];

6. Ensure U.S. Commitment to Universal Human Rights Advanced through Global/International Mechanisms:

For decades Republican and Democratic presidents have turned to the United Nations to resolve issues of war and peace, tackle human rights abuses around the world, and facilitate assistance to communities reeling from natural and human-made calamities. In doing so, the U.S. helped cobble together functioning coalitions that, however imperfectly, have managed to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges. The last 4 years have marked a departure from this multilateral approach. But it need not be this way. U. S. diplomacy has previously played a key role in condemning and opposing human rights violations around the world including through extending the mandates of special rapporteurs to countries whose governments have disastrous human rights records, such as Belarus and Eritrea. The U.S. must build on these achievements and reverse recent policies that have undermined multilateral progress on human rights.

Resources:

- Rejoin World Health Organization and Paris Climate Agreement <https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/return-to-multilateralism/>
- Withdraw all restrictions targeting International Criminal Court staff
- Dissolve Commission on Unalienable Rights <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/unalieablaerightscomissionreport/>

7. Defend Right to Protest and Free Expression:

The past year has seen a seemingly massive surge in protests globally. All around the world we have witnessed a huge wave of people taking to those streets to exercise their right to protest and demand change from those in power. These protests are diverse, multi-faceted, and re-orienting the political, economic and social orders that sustain them – requiring U.S. policy to be equally innovative and focused on principles that sustain them.

Peaceful protest is not a crime, it is a human right. The way governments have by and large chosen to respond to these protests has been disproportionate, unwarranted and a violation of human rights standards.

Resources:

- 2019-20 has been a year of unprecedented global protest movements. From Hong Kong to Lebanon to Chile to the U.S. – communities across the world have taken to the streets to demand an end to police killings, political corruption, and economic inequality. <https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/global-protests/>
- [Release prisoners of conscience around the world](#)
- <https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/prisoners-of-conscience-and-covid-19/>

8. Close the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp

More than 18 years ago, the U.S. government opened the Guantanamo Bay detention camp on a U.S. naval base in Cuba in order to imprison detainees indefinitely without charge and beyond the reach of the law. Today, 40 men still remain at Guantanamo, most without charge, many of whom were tortured by the U.S. government. The next administration will need the cooperation of Congress to close Guantanamo. Congress must lift restrictions on transferring Guantanamo detainees to the United States for trials that meet international human rights standards without resort to the death penalty. Congress should also lift restrictions on detainees being transferred to the United States for medical treatment, or to third countries where their rights will not be violated.

Resources: <https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/guantanamo/>

9. Address the Climate Crisis as a Human Rights Crisis

Millions of people are already suffering from the catastrophic effects of extreme disasters exacerbated by the climate crisis. While we largely understand the climate crisis through its impacts it will have on our natural world, it is the devastation that it is causing and will continue to cause for humanity that makes it an urgent human rights issue. Climate change will compound and magnify existing inequalities. And its effects will continue to grow and worsen over time, creating ruin for current and future generations. The failure of governments to act on the climate crisis in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence may well be the biggest generational human rights violation in history.

Resources:

<https://2020electionscovid.amnestyusa.org/climate-crisis/>