

## Faith in Action Network: Ramadan 2021 Human Rights Education Webinar

This webinar will provide an overview of the human rights issues and context for each of AIUSA's featured cases during the month of Ramadan. If you have any questions about the information here, please email [communitynetworks@aiusa.org](mailto:communitynetworks@aiusa.org). We hope you will join us in taking action for human rights! Sign up, learn more and take action here: [www.amnestyusa.org/ramadan](http://www.amnestyusa.org/ramadan)

### Introduction

Welcome to Amnesty International USA's Faith in Action Network Human Rights Education Webinar for Ramadan 2021.

Amnesty International is a global movement of millions of people demanding human rights for all – no matter who they are or where they are. Amnesty International's movement of activists work to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth, and dignity are denied.

Throughout the year, faith-based groups across the country and around the world come together to strengthen their neighborhoods and serve the needs of their wider communities.

As Muslims around the world are celebrating Ramadan, AIUSA invites faith-based groups, and all communities, to join us in taking action to protect the human rights of Muslims. Each week of Ramadan, AIUSA will feature cases of human rights abuses experienced by Muslim individuals and communities around the world. You can join us as a faith-based group, or as an individual, and take action for human rights this month!

AIUSA's Faith in Action Network is open to all faith communities that are interested in grassroots activism for human rights. We hope you will join us!

### April 11-17: Human Rights Defenders in the United Arab Emirates

The 2011 "Arab Spring" has turned into a long winter for advocates of change – political and human rights activists, including prisoners of conscience. Scores who peacefully expressed their opinions, who struggled for fundamental human rights, are now serving long prison terms in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Prisoners of conscience behind bars, are imprisoned solely for exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression, association and assembly. They are sacrificing years of their lives for having advocated for change and reform.

Since at least 2011, the UAE has slapped peaceful critics and activists with arbitrary arrests, torture or other ill-treatment, trials that fell short of fair trial standards, and lengthy sentences. There are numbers of prisoners of conscience in UAE jail.

Among these activists and prisoner of consciences there are two prominent human rights defenders Dr. Mohammed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor who are serving 10-year prison sentences.

Let's listen what they said. In 2015 While filmed for the Martin Ennals Award, Ahmed Mansoor said: "There is no way that we can measure the public opinion here [the UAE] because there is no free will. People are afraid to talk. At the same time, people are not going to stop. We are not going to stop, we have to continue [...] Removing one stone from the mountain is better than keeping the mountain as it is..."

In 2007, speaking about the life of political activists in the UAE, Mohammed al-Roken said: "An activist might be praised, might be congratulated for his work, might be clandestinely supported, but there will be no uproar if something happens to him."

In this holy month of Ramadan, let's show them that they are not forgotten, we are with them and we will not stop until they are free. Please take action on their behalf.

### **April 18-24: Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh**

The Rohingya are an ethnic Muslim minority who had for decades made their home in Rakhine State in Myanmar. Their citizenship rights were taken away in the 1980s, and they have been essentially stateless since then. The Myanmar government refers to them as "Bengali" and says they are citizens of Bangladesh, but Bangladesh does not recognize them as citizens of that country. Basic rights of the Rohingya – like freedom of movement and access to healthcare and education – have been significantly restricted.

In August 2017, an armed group attacked Myanmar security forces, killing 12. The Myanmar military responded with a disproportionate attack against the general Rohingya population. Over the next 10 months, in a campaign that Amnesty International recognizes as ethnic cleansing, over 700,000 Rohingya were driven out of Myanmar and into neighboring Bangladesh. Thousands of Rohingya were killed, or suffered rape and sexual violence, and torture. Their villages and farms were burned. Landmines were placed in the paths of the refugees.

Of the over 900,000 Rohingya refugees, many have been living in the camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. In 2020, the Bangladeshi government began forcibly moving some of these refugees to Bhashan Char – separating them from their families and communities.

Bhashan Char is a silt island developed by the Bangladeshi Navy for the purpose of relocating these refugees. Neither the United Nations nor human rights and humanitarian organizations have been allowed to assess the habitability of this island. And no one should be relocated without their full and informed consent. Please take action to help these refugees.

### **April 25-May 1: Detention of Muslims in Sri Lanka**

Over the past decade in Sri Lanka, extremists from the Sinhalese majority community have targeted the island's Muslim minority. Anti-Muslim riots occurred in 2014, 2017 and 2018. The army and police (which are mostly Sinhalese) stood by and did nothing. The Muslim community did not retaliate but stayed peaceful. While some rioters were arrested following the riots, there have been no convictions so far.

On Easter Sunday in 2019, a small group of Islamic extremists killed over 250 people in suicide bombings. Prior to the bombings, Muslim community leaders learned that Islamic extremists were planning something and tried to warn the authorities, but the government failed to act on the warnings they received. In the weeks following the Easter Sunday bombings, Sinhalese mobs targeted Muslim houses and businesses. Riots in mid-May in 2019 resulted in one death and massive property damage. Again, no one has been held accountable.

The government swiftly passed severe emergency regulations, including a ban on clothing which conceals the face, a ban which effectively stigmatized some Muslim women. Those emergency regulations expired later that year. But the government recently announced that it is considering renewing the ban.

When COVID-19 reached Sri Lanka last year, the government mandated cremations of all COVID-19 victims, despite W.H.O. guidelines which allow burial or cremation. This violated freedom of religion for the Muslim minority, since Muslim religious practice does not permit cremation. The Sri Lankan government only began allowing burials again in March of this year. However, the sites earmarked for burials were in remote parts of the country, inaccessible to many.

Two Muslim human rights defenders who have criticized the government have been targeted. Hejaaz Hizbullah and Ramzy Razeek. They are featured in our Ramadan action. Please take action on their behalf.

### **May 2-8: Close Guantanamo Bay**

The US government opened the detention center at Guantanamo Bay almost 20 years ago and has since imprisoned hundreds of Muslim men and boys outside the reach of the law. It is an egregious violation of international human rights. Since January 2002, 780 Muslim men and boys have been imprisoned at Guantanamo. Forty men remain there today. Most have never been charged with a crime. None have received a fair trial. Many have been tortured.

There has been no accountability for the torture the US inflicted on Muslim men after 9/11, or for the ongoing indefinite detention without trial. Six Muslim men imprisoned at Guantanamo today have been cleared by all relevant US national security agencies to leave the prison. Some have been cleared to leave the prison for more than a decade. There is no justification for their continued detention.

Indefinite detention of Muslims at the Guantanamo Bay detention center is based on a glaring set of human rights violations. It undermines US standing in the world and US credibility on human rights everywhere. The Guantanamo Bay detention center costs US taxpayers more than half a billion dollars a year to maintain -- \$13 million per detainee per year. The US could transfer and safely re-settle the remaining detainees not charged with crimes for a tiny fraction of that cost.

President Biden has committed to a US foreign policy centered on human rights and equality. The continued existence of the Guantanamo Bay detention center flies in the face of that commitment. President Biden said Guantanamo should be closed when he was vice president. He has the power to follow through on that now. Guantanamo continues to operate as a symbol of Islamophobia, torture, and indefinite detention, embodying fear-mongering and xenophobia. The Biden administration must close it now.

### **May 9-15: Detention of Uyghurs in China**

For many centuries, the area that now constitutes Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, located in northwest China, was a flourishing conduit of trade and culture between China and the rest of the world. It is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in China. More than half of Xinjiang's population belong to mostly Turkic and predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, including Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other populations whose languages, cultures and ways of life are very different from those of the Han people who are the majority in China.

For decades, many Uyghurs have experienced systematic ethnic and religious discrimination. Since 2014, the region has witnessed a greatly expanded police presence and fallen under a heavy blanket of surveillance as part of China's publicly declared "People's War on Terror" and its efforts to combat what it calls "religious extremism" and "separatism." In 2017, things began taking an even more terrible turn. Since that time, an estimated one million or more people have been arbitrarily detained in so-called "transformation-through-education" or "vocational training" centers in Xinjiang.

People may be taken into detention because they are suspected of support for an independence movement in Xinjiang, but open or even private displays of religious affiliation can also land you in one of Xinjiang's internment camps. These so-called "signs of extremism" include growing an "abnormal" beard, wearing a veil or headscarf, regular prayer, avoidance of alcohol, and fasting, an important observance during Ramadan.

According to those who have spent time in detention centers, detainees are subject to harsh discipline. They are lectured about the dangers of “religious radicalism,” made to study Chinese language, and forced to memorize legal provisions and patriotic songs and write “self-criticisms.” Those who resist or fail to show progress reportedly face punishments ranging from verbal abuse to food deprivation, solitary confinement, beatings and use of restraints and stress positions. There have been reports of deaths inside the facilities, including suicides of those unable to bear the mistreatment.

In many cases, people have been taken into custody, and subsequently their families have not been able to obtain any information about them. The secretive and undocumented way people are going missing in Xinjiang makes it nearly impossible to trace or confirm the whereabouts of any particular individual. Many family members are left asking, “Where are They?”

### **Call to Action**

We hope you will join us and take action now! You can learn more and take action on all of our Ramadan cases at [www.amnestyusa.org/ramadan](http://www.amnestyusa.org/ramadan). Or you can learn more about the Faith in Action Network by emailing [communitynetworks@aiusa.org](mailto:communitynetworks@aiusa.org).

Thank you for joining us!