



Amnesty International

Group 524

April 2021



No April Meeting Virginia Abolishes Death Penalty Gun Violence Updates

Virginia Abolishes the Death Penalty

Last month Virginia Governor Northam signed legislation ending capital punishment in the state. Please see Amnesty's statement on page 2.

President Biden's Actions on Gun Violence

President Biden announced a number of actions designed to curb the epidemic of gun violence in our country. These are detailed in a statement made by Amnesty on page 3. Amnesty is calling on the Senate to pass the *Break the Cycle of Violence Act*. A model letter to Senator Toomey is on page 4.

Biden Administration Upholds Deal To Sell Arms To UAE

A statement from Amnesty concerning the new Administration's support of the arms sale to UAE which is implicated in the war in Yemen is on page 5.

Interior Secretary Haaland Acts On Crimes Against Native Women

We have written letters on behalf of missing and murdered indigenous women. New efforts to combat this problem are detailed on page 6.

Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Providence Heights

9000 Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, PA 15101



Contact John Belch (joheb@aol.com or 412-766-1894) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA web site (www.amnestyusa.org) and Group 39's Amnesty Pittsburgh web site (www.amnestypgh.org).



Virginia Ends Capital Punishment

Reacting to news that Virginia Governor Ralph Northam has signed a bill to abolish the death penalty in the Commonwealth, Kristina Roth, Senior Advocate for Criminal Justice Programs at Amnesty International USA, released the following statement:

“We welcome this news. The death penalty is irreversible, it is ineffective, and it does not deter crime. The way the death penalty is carried out is painful, violent, and inhumane, and it is targeted in this country disproportionately against communities of color. The use of the death penalty as a punishment is outdated, fundamentally broken and must end once and for all.

“With Governor Northam’s signature today, Virginia has now joined 22 other states, including Washington, D.C., that have abandoned the death penalty. Virginia, once a stronghold of the confederacy, now becomes the first Southern state to end the ultimate denial of human rights that is the death penalty. Virginia has the record for most executions in U.S. history, and a sordid past with the use of the death penalty against Black people, applied arbitrarily. A Black defendant in Virginia is three times more likely to be sentenced to death if the victim is white rather than Black.

“Beginning in 2020, the Trump administration carried out 13 federal executions, breaking a 17-year hiatus from the ultimate punishment. These federal executions raised the specter of the same irreparable problems we know the death penalty has at all levels, including racial bias, the executions of people with intellectual disabilities and arbitrariness of defendants sentenced to death. This step from Virginia is a welcome unintended consequence of the Trump execution spree. We hope to see more states work to retire this most extreme punishment to where it belongs — as a relic of the past, not a part of our future.”



Reducing Gun Violence

Amnesty International USA released the following statements to support President Joe Biden’s plan to announce several actions geared towards reducing gun violence. The actions include:

- Increasing available federal funding for community gun violence intervention programs through the American Jobs Plan, Medicaid funding, as well as through agencies such as the Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Labor;
- A proposed rule from the Department of Justice to help stop the proliferation of ghost guns;
- Model red flag legislation for the states from the Department of Justice;
- Comprehensive, annual reports from the Department of Justice on the trafficking of firearms;
- Having the Department of Justice issue a rule making clear that any stabilizing device effectively turning a pistol into a short-barreled rifle is subject to the requirements of the National Firearm Act;
- The nomination of David Chipman to be the director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF).

“Today’s actions from President Biden represent a resounding victory for communities, front-line organizations, gun violence survivors and all Americans. For too long, the way the U.S. government has addressed the issue of gun violence has been negligent at best, and disastrous, at worst,” said Bob Goodfellow, Acting Executive Director of Amnesty International USA. “Gun violence remains one of the primary issues threatening the human rights of communities across this country. These actions are a crucial first step in ensuring that U.S. government agencies are truly prepared to prioritize people over guns. Amnesty International USA applauds the Biden-Harris Administration for this much-needed leadership”

“Today, many Americans will feel genuine hope for the possibility of ending gun violence in the United States, said Ernest Coverson, the End Gun Violence Campaign Manager at Amnesty International USA. “We welcome President Biden’s renewed efforts to ensure the right to live free from gun violence by funding vital community intervention programs. These actions will save many lives, especially those in Black and brown communities. We stand with the president and urge lawmakers in Congress to work with us to do more to make gun safety a reality for all.“It’s been 25 years since the federal government has passed a gun safety law. These actions are in line with the demands of Amnesty International USA, gun safety activists and survivors, especially those who have repeatedly called for more funding for violence interruption programs. Earlier this year, Amnesty International USA submitted a statement to the Senate Judiciary Committee, calling on the Senate to pass the Break the Cycle Act, which would support on-the-ground groups working to keep communities safe from gun violence.”

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Senator Patrick Toomey
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Toomey

As your constituent, I'm asking Congress to commit at least \$5 billion over the next 8 years to community gun violence prevention programs now, and establish a national strategy to address the disproportionate impact this public health crisis has had on communities of color by re-introducing and passing the Break the Cycle of Violence Act and other appropriations.

Community-level firearm violence in the USA disproportionately impacts communities of color. Firearm homicide was the leading cause of death for black men and boys aged 15-34 in 2018, and it was the third leading cause of death for Latino men and boys in the same age range. The flood of gun sales in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to make the pandemic of gun violence even worse.

Research indicates that long-term, adequately funded, evidence-based projects tailored towards specific social, economic and cultural contexts, and working in partnership with the affected communities, can achieve sustained reductions in firearm violence. Congress must support and prioritize programs working to address this urgent human rights and public health crisis.

These programs save lives and make our communities safer and stronger. That is why I support the Break the Cycle of Violence Act as an important step toward addressing this urgent public health and human rights crisis. The Break the Cycle of Violence Act would fund these critical, evidence-driven programs led by community members that are proven to be effective at preventing gun violence.

Persistent gun violence in the United States is denying people their civil and political rights including their right to live, the right to security of person, and the right to be free from discrimination. Gun violence also undermines the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to health and the right to education.

In addition to the unimaginable human toll of gun violence across the country, the economic cost is stunning. Estimates place the annual cost of gun violence at hundreds of billions of dollars every year, including medical and criminal justice expenses. Accordingly, it is not only in the interest of our fundamental human rights, but also your constituents as taxpayers, to robustly fund these programs.

You can make a difference on the crisis of gun violence. As your constituent, I am asking for you to support the Break the Cycle of Violence Act and support Congress allocating at least \$5 billion over the next 8 years to community gun violence prevention and intervention programs.

Sincerely,



Biden Administration Upholds Trump Deal To Sell Weapons That Risk Injuring And Killing Civilians In Yemen

Responding to reports that the Biden administration plans to move forth on a Trump administration plan to sell weaponry worth approximately \$23 billion to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Philippe Nassif, the advocacy director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International USA said:

“These are not the actions of a President committed to upholding human rights in the United States and abroad. The startling fact that the Biden administration continues the previous administration’s unflinching support of providing weapons that risk adding to the devastating toll of Yemeni civilians unlawfully killed and injured by United States-made weapons should shake to the core every person who supports human rights.

“United States drones could be responsible for UAE attacks that violate international humanitarian law and kill, as well as injure, thousands of Yemeni civilians. The Biden administration must resolutely refrain from supplying weapons that could be used in the conflict and not transfer weaponry to the UAE, or risk complicity in likely war crimes across the region, including Yemen.”

Background

Since Saudi Arabia and UAE-led coalition air strikes began in March 2015, Amnesty International has visited and investigated dozens of air strike sites in eight governorates and repeatedly found remnants of munitions manufactured in the United States. U.S.-manufactured Raytheon Paveway bombs examined by Amnesty International that have struck hospitals, schools, and civilian homes, killing healthcare providers, teachers, and entire families, including children as young as two years old.

The sale to the UAE is particularly worrying as Amnesty International has acquired extensive evidence that the UAE used armed drones in Libya, to break the long-standing UN arms embargo, by operating these drones on behalf of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, an armed group controlling large swaths of Eastern Libya, in the conflict against the internationally backed Government of National Accord. The UAE has used these drones to target civilian houses and health facilities, including field hospitals and ambulances which is especially concerning as medics, medical transport and medical facilities, including those treating wounded or sick fighters, are specially protected under international humanitarian law.

Amnesty International USA is calling for the United States to immediately halt transfers of all arms, equipment, and military assistance to all parties to the conflict for use in Yemen; and to enforce the United Nations arms embargo on Libya by prohibiting the transfer of arms and equipment that may be used in the armed conflict there.



New MMU For Bureau of Indian Affairs

Interior Secretary [Deb Haaland](#) on Thursday announced the creation of a new Missing and Murdered Unit within the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) Office of Justice Services, which will investigate missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The unit builds on Operation Lady Justice, a task force established in 2019 to resolve unsolved cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and aims to increase collaboration across federal agencies.

Haaland's action essentially staffs up and puts real power behind the MMU created back in 2019. The unit will now be led by special agents who will provide day-to-day supervision of people working in the field with tribes and other governmental agencies. Haaland is also adding new positions to the unit, including program analysts to collect and make sense of data they receive, program specialists to coordinate administrative responsibilities, and victim specialists to work with families of victims of violence.

"It's elevating stature of leadership and decision-making, interagency and cross-government coordination, and adding new folks," Haaland spokeswoman Melissa Schwartz said of the secretary's latest action.

The National Crime Information Center's missing persons database contains 1,500 American Indian and Alaska Natives, and roughly 2,700 cases of murder and non-negligent homicide have been reported to the federal Uniform Crime Reporting program.

"Violence against Indigenous peoples is a crisis that has been underfunded for decades. Far too often, murders and missing persons cases in Indian country go unsolved and unaddressed, leaving families and communities devastated," Haaland said Thursday in a release. "The new MMU unit will provide the resources and leadership to prioritize these cases and coordinate resources to hold people accountable, keep our communities safe, and provide closure for families."

The problem is particularly acute for Native women.

About 84% of Native women experience violence in their lifetimes, and 56% experience sexual violence, [according to the National Institute of Justice](#). Murder is the [third leading cause of death](#) of Indigenous women between the ages of 10 and 24.

More than 330 Indigenous women and girls have gone missing or been murdered since 2010 in 71 U.S. cities, according to [a 2018 report by the Urban Indian Health Institute](#). The number swells to at least 506 if earlier missing persons are tallied, with the oldest cold case dating back to 1943 — still, that figure is surely a gross undercount due to limited data collection by law enforcement.

"It is a shame that previous administrations couldn't do what Deb Haaland has done here in just two weeks," Abigail Echo-Hawk, director of the Urban Indian Health Institute and co-author of three reports highlighting data collection issues around the crisis, told HuffPost in an email.

"We are lucky to have an Indigenous woman who truly understands the missing and murdered crisis in Indian Country taking immediate action to protect the lives of Native peoples," Echo-Hawk said.