



# Amnesty International

## Group 524

### September 2021



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## No September Meeting Welcoming Afghan Refugees Death Penalty Urgent Action Banned Books Week

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### **Welcome**

September brings a much needed change of season but our work continues. This month features actions concerning Afghan refugees, a death penalty urgent action and writers in peril as part of Banned Books Week.

### **AIUSA Joins Welcome.US Initiative**

A new national effort to empower Americans to welcome home and support Afghan families as they build new lives in the US is detailed on page 2 and a related appeal to President Biden is on page 3.

### **Urgent Action: Ernest Johnson to be executed**

Ernest Johnson faces execution on October 5, 2021. He was convicted and sentenced to death in 1995 for the 1994 murders of three employees of a convenience store in Missouri. A jury sentenced him to death despite a claim of intellectual disability in violation to international law. Further information is found on page 4 and a model letter on page 5.

### **Banned Books Week September 26- October 2 2021**

Each year during Banned Books Week, Amnesty International draws attention to people around the world who have been imprisoned, threatened, or murdered because of their writing, art, or other published work. In solidarity with the American Library Association (ALA) and organizations across the U.S. and around the world, Amnesty activists work to fight challenges to freedom of expression. Amnesty is highlighting six online action cases at <https://www.amnestyusa.org/banned-books-2021/>

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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](mailto: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](http://www.amnestyusa.org)) and Group 39's Amnesty Pittsburgh web site ([www.amnestypgh.org](http://www.amnestypgh.org)).

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## **AIUSA Joins Welcome.US**

Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) is pleased to join Welcome.US, a new national initiative, built across sectors, political parties and all walks of life, to empower Americans to welcome and support our new Afghan neighbors.

Refugees leave their homes because they have no other choice. They want the same safety that any of us would want if we were in their shoes. They just want to be part of a safe community again.

Within this context and in partnership with resettlement agencies, community leaders, refugees, nonprofits, businesses, faith-based organizations, veterans, universities, governors and mayors, and many others, Welcome.US will create a single point of entry for Americans who want to get involved and support our Afghan neighbors starting new lives in the United States.

As part of the effort to engage Americans and welcome our Afghan neighbors seeking safety, Welcome.US is creating the Welcome Fund to give emergency grants to local and regional nonprofits working directly to address the most urgent needs facing Afghans rebuilding their lives in communities across the country.

## **AMNESTY'S ROLE**

In response to the ongoing human rights crisis in Afghanistan that was further exacerbated by the takeover of the country by the Taliban in mid-August 2021, AIUSA launched a Crisis Response Campaign to press President Biden to welcome at-risk Afghans into the United States; halt any and all deportations of our Afghans neighbors; and support them through refugee resettlement and humanitarian response.

In partnership with Welcome.US Amnesty International is helping build a movement of welcome for people seeking safety. We all want to live in a world where we look after each other, and everyone is treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.

AIUSA believes that all of us are stronger advocates when we take powerful and personal actions connected to the issues we care about. How quickly and how comprehensively we are able to welcome our new neighbors will decide just how bright our future can be.

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President Joe Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden,

I'm writing on behalf of Amnesty International with deep disappointment that the Biden administration failed to put in place a successful plan for the evacuation of all Afghans at greatest risk.

I call on the Biden administration to do the following -- and I urge my U.S. Senators and Representative to hold the president accountable as well:

- Commit to admitting at least 200,000 refugees into the U.S. in fiscal year 2022, which starts on October 1, 2021
- Immediately halt any and all deportations to Afghanistan and designate Afghanistan for Temporary Protected Status, so that Afghans cannot be sent back to a dangerous situation
- Work with Congress to secure emergency funding from the U.S. government for humanitarian assistance for Afghans abroad and Afghans arriving to the United States, and ensure Afghans coming to the United States have a roadmap to citizenship and access to refugee resettlement benefits -- including food, shelter, transportation, medical assistance, English training, employment preparation, and job placement
- Promote and expand community sponsorship -- including a new private sponsorship program -- to empower people across the country to directly welcome and support our new Afghan neighbors
- Work with the United Nations to establish a fact-finding mission or similar investigative mechanism, with a multi-year mandate to investigate all crimes under international law, including human rights violations and abuses committed by all parties across Afghanistan.
- Ensure a credible and transparent investigation into the August 29, 2021 U.S. airstrike that reportedly killed children and other civilians; ensure remedy for U.S. torture and decades of civilian casualties as a result of U.S. operations, including compensation; and ensure the U.S. follows international human rights law moving forward, including an explicit commitment to do so in the administration's policy on strikes outside of armed conflict.

There is no time to waste -- you must take every necessary measure to ensure the safety of the Afghan people and welcome them with dignity.

Thank you,



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## **MAN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY SET TO DIE**

Ernest Johnson faces execution on October 5, 2021. He was convicted and sentenced to death in 1995 for the 1994 murders of three employees of a convenience store in Missouri. A jury sentenced him to death despite a claim of intellectual disability in violation to international law.

Johnson had surgery in 2008 to remove a brain tumor which has left him with seizures. Medical expert testified that the lethal injection drugs may trigger violent and painful seizures. State and federal courts have denied his claims for relief.

On June 21, 2021, Ernest Lee Johnson sought relief from the Missouri Supreme Court on the basis that he never received a reliable determination on his intellectual disability; that jury instructions during his re-sentencing unconstitutionally required that all jurors believe his intellectual disability – one juror could overrule the other eleven; and that the lethal injection protocols may cause extreme pain due to his seizures. On 31 August, the Missouri Supreme Court denied his request.

Amnesty International opposes the sentence in all circumstances as a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

- Please urge Governor Parson to halt the execution and commute his sentence.

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Michael Parson, Governor  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 720  
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Governor Parson,

**Ernest Johnson** is scheduled for execution on October 5, 2021 for the 1994 murder of three individuals despite evidence that he has an intellectual disability, in violation of the US Supreme Court Decision in *Atkins v. Virginia* and international law.

Ernest Johnson has an intellectual disability and has been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Improper jury instructions during his third re-sentencing rehearing incorrectly placed the burden on him to demonstrate his disability rather than on the state to prove he did not have one, as required under *Atkins*' Supreme Court decision.

Furthermore, Johnson had surgery to remove a brain tumor that left him with seizures which can be triggered by the lethal injection drugs used by Missouri during executions, these may cause great pain and potentially violate the US Constitution's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment.

I urge you to stay the October 5, 2021 execution of Ernest Johnson and grant him clemency.

Sincerely,



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### **BANNED BOOKS WEEK 2021**

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Banned Books Week 2021 is September 26 – October 2, but you can take online actions on the cases until October 31 at <https://www.amnestyusa.org/banned-books-2021/>

