



Amnesty International

Group 524

August 2022



No August Meeting Urgent Action – Ali Maziad Ukraine

Welcome

With the summer flying by, I hope you have made the most of this season. This month's focus is on Ali Maziad and the latest reports from Ukraine.

Detention and Asylum: Good News

The Inflation Reduction Act, recently passed, was successful in preventing new and continuing anti-refugee actions. See the details on pages 2.

Urgent Action – Ali Maziad

This Lebanese national was abducted and disappeared by Saudi Arabian State Security. Details are on page 3 and a sample letter on page 4.

Amnesty's Ukraine Crisis Campaign

Amnesty has set up a page on their website to coordinate actions and information concerning Ukraine. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/UkraineCrisis/>. A recent Amnesty press release concerning issues of the Ukrainian military has caused much public criticism and the International Secretariat's response is on page 5 and the AIUSA Director's is on page 6 and 7.

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).



ICE DETENTION AND ASYLUM - GOOD NEWS

Since the Biden Administration finally terminated Title 42 at the border – the Trump policy that uses the pandemic as a guise to summarily expel people exercising their right to seek safety – There have been continuing Congressional attacks against asylum. Republicans have used any legislative vehicle to try and attach legislative language that would basically end the human right to seek asylum.

As you all likely heard, the Senate passed the Inflation Reduction Act last week after a process that lasted over 15 hours. The Inflation Reduction Act is the big Dem reconciliation bill that provides sweeping climate, tax, and health reforms. During this process, Republicans submitted over 75 anti-immigrant amendments and about 6 of them ended up being voted on– including amendments that would build the border wall, significantly expand surveillance technologies at the border, vastly expand detention and deportation for people who are only charged – not convicted – of felonies, and of course, amendment that would legislatively end the right to asylum. The reconciliation passed the Senate with no anti-immigrant amendments and there weren't any amendments in the House.

Border and asylum issues are greatly under threat, and people are dying trying to seek safety in the US on an almost weekly basis. Since April, Amnesty has been mobilizing our supporters to contact their Members of Congress to vote against any anti-asylum amendments in whatever form they come. With this legislation passed, that effort truly paid off.



URGENT ACTION

LEBANESE MAN DISAPPEARED IN SAUDI ARABIA

On August 4, 2021, Ali Maziad, a Lebanese national residing in Saudi Arabia, was abducted from his house in the capital, Riyadh by a group of men in civilian clothes. The Lebanese Embassy informed his family three months after his disappearance that he is being detained by State Security. Since then, he has been forcibly disappeared and his family has no information about his fate and whereabouts. Amnesty International urges the Saudi Arabian authorities to immediately disclose the fate and whereabouts of Ali Maziad, release him and ensure he has access to medical treatment and legal representation.



TAKE ACTION:

Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.

His Majesty King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud

Office of His Majesty the King
Royal Court, Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 11 403 3125 (please keep trying)
Twitter: [@KingSalman](https://twitter.com/KingSalman)

Ambassador Princess Reema Bandar Al-Saud

Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
New Hampshire Ave., NW 601
Washington, DC 20037
Phone: 202 342 3800
Contact Form: <https://www.saudiembassy.net/node/2306>
Twitter: [@SaudiEmbassyUSA](https://twitter.com/SaudiEmbassyUSA) ; [@rbalsaud](https://twitter.com/rbalsaud)
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Group 524
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His Majesty King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
Office of His Majesty the King
Royal Court, Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Your Majesty King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud,

On August 4, 2021, **Ali Maziad**, a 58-year-old Lebanese Shia Muslim man, was abducted from his house in the Saudi capital, Riyadh by a group of seven men in civilian clothes. His fate and whereabouts have been unknown since then.

Ali Maziad's family told Amnesty International that they immediately contacted several police stations and government agencies in Saudi Arabia to seek information about his fate and whereabouts, but the authorities provided no information to the family. In November 2021, over three months after Ali Maziad's disappearance, the Lebanese Embassy in Riyadh informed the family that he was being detained by Saudi Arabia's State Security without having any further information. "We don't even know if he is alive. We haven't had any contact with him since they [group of men] took him away," Ali Maziad's relative told Amnesty International.

Ali Maziad has been living and working in Saudi Arabia intermittently since 2004. According to his family, he takes medications to treat several health illnesses. Ali Maziad's relative told Amnesty International: "His cancer recurrence requires proper health care and follow up. He also has diabetes, irregular heartbeats, and glaucoma—all of which requires medication."

I urge you to immediately disclose the fate and whereabouts of Ali Maziad and release him. In the meantime, I call on you to ensure that he has adequate access to health care, a lawyer of his choice and regular contact with his family.

Sincerely,

copy to:

Ambassador Princess Reema Bandar Al-Saud
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
New Hampshire Ave., NW 601
Washington, DC 20037



August 7, 2022

Statement on publication of press release on Ukrainian fighting tactics

Amnesty International deeply regrets the distress and anger that our press release on the Ukrainian military's fighting tactics has caused. Since Russia's invasion began in February 2022, Amnesty International has been rigorously documenting and reporting on war crimes and violations committed in Ukraine, speaking to hundreds of victims and survivors whose stories illuminate the brutal reality of Russia's war of aggression. We have challenged the world to demonstrate its solidarity with Ukrainians through concrete action, and we will continue to do so.

Amnesty International's priority in this and in any conflict is ensuring that civilians are protected; indeed, this was our sole objective when releasing this latest piece of research. While we fully stand by our findings, we regret the pain caused and wish to clarify a few crucial points.

In our press release, we documented how in all 19 of the towns and villages we visited, we found instances where Ukrainian forces had located themselves right next to where civilians were living, thereby potentially putting them at risk from incoming Russian fire. We made this assessment based on the rules of international humanitarian law (IHL), which require all parties to a conflict to avoid locating, to the maximum extent feasible, military objectives within or near densely populated areas. The laws of war exist in part to protect civilians, and it is for this reason that Amnesty International urges governments to comply with them.

This does not mean that Amnesty International holds Ukrainian forces responsible for violations committed by Russian forces, nor that the Ukrainian military is not taking adequate precautions elsewhere in the country.

We must be very clear: Nothing we documented Ukrainian forces doing in any way justifies Russian violations. Russia alone is responsible for the violations it has committed against Ukrainian civilians. Amnesty's work over the last six months and our multiple briefings and reports on Russia's violations and war crimes reflect their scale and the gravity of their impact on civilians.

Amnesty International wrote to the Ukrainian government detailing our findings on 29 July. In our letter, we included GPS coordinates and other sensitive information about the locations, including schools and hospitals, where we had documented Ukrainian forces basing themselves among civilians. We did not make this information public in our press release due to the security risks it would pose to both Ukrainian forces and to the civilians we interviewed.

Amnesty International is not attempting to give the Ukrainian military detailed instructions regarding how they should operate – but we call on the relevant authorities to abide by their international humanitarian obligations in full.

Amnesty International's priority will always be ensuring that civilians' lives and human rights are protected during conflict.



Dear Colleagues,

I'm reaching out in regards to the press release Amnesty International's Secretariat published last week documenting how some Ukrainian military tactics have endangered civilians. This press release was met with significant criticism, including from some within Amnesty's movement. Additionally, I am saddened to share that Oksana Pokalchuk, Amnesty Ukraine's Executive Director, as well as other staff within Amnesty Ukraine office, have since resigned.

On behalf of the AIUSA leadership team and the AIUSA Ukraine crisis team, I want to first convey that we understand that this is a particularly difficult time for our Ukrainian colleagues and members. The reality for our colleagues and other Ukrainians remains forefront in our minds. The rollout of this most recent research finding is a sensitive situation, and we hope to shed some light on questions you may have.

On the Findings:

We confidently stand by the findings of the research completed in Ukraine. Our approach to documenting violations in the aftermath of the invasion and in the ongoing context of the armed conflict in Ukraine is consistent with our approach to documentation in other armed conflicts. Our findings are supported by evidence gathered by our researchers on the ground, who witnessed these practices firsthand. Our investigative research relied on satellite imageries, GPS coordinates, testimonies from survivors, witnesses, and relatives of victims of attacks. The research team also inspected strike sites and carried out remote-sensing and weapons analysis. What's more, we are not the only organization to have documented such violations: Human Rights Watch documented similar findings in July, and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet noted in a July 5 statement that, "it appeared likely that Ukrainian armed forces were not fully complying with international humanitarian law in eastern parts of the country."

However, there is shared recognition across AIUSA, other Amnesty sections around the world, and the International Secretariat that many people, most importantly our Ukrainian colleagues, were very pained by the manner and timing through which these findings were rolled out to the public, and many fear the implications of this press release for the safety of Ukrainians.

On the Process:

Amnesty International's primary consideration at all times is to advance human rights and protect civilians. We recognize and have documented violations and war crimes committed by the Russian military following its invasion of Ukraine, which we condemn as an unlawful act of aggression, and which has forced Ukrainians to fight back in defense of their nation at grave personal risk and has forced families to flee their homes and country. Moreover, we have called on the Russian government's leadership - including those in senior positions and most responsible for war crimes committed in Ukraine - to face individual criminal accountability for their actions. We acknowledge that our release did not reflect the fullness of this context and that the Russian government and others have misrepresented our findings to justify the Russian military's actions. As part of our reporting responsibilities, we must consider local and global contexts, center those most impacted, identify risks and sensitivities as best as possible, and prioritize the safety of colleagues directly involved. In this instance, there appears to have been a failure of communication between the International Secretariat and the Ukrainian section before this research finding was released.



While it's our job to share our findings impartially, how and when we do that matters. It is clear that communication and coordination between the IS and our national offices must be improved to ensure that the voices of impacted people continue to be front and center, so that we can ensure their safety and do no harm.

What's Next:

As a next step, the International Board and Secretary General have announced plans to launch an in-depth review of the process connected to this Ukraine press release. AIUSA and many other sections called for this. We are deeply invested in identifying where and how the channels of communication fell short and to ensure we do not repeat mistakes, no matter the context or country. We will keep you apprised of the progress and next steps made on this front. I know these times are challenging. Amnesty International prides itself on its willingness to criticize decisions made by people in positions of power. With that mission comes the responsibility to hear and consider criticism from others.

I want to be clear: many of those who disagreed with our findings or the manner in which we presented them are, like our organization, motivated by genuine concern for the safety of people in Ukraine. In general, and on this matter specifically, we are committed to continuing to engage with alternative perspectives from governments, the public and, especially, our membership and staff. Please know that we deeply appreciate your partnership and the incredible work you do to advance human rights.

Sincerely,

Paul O'Brien Executive Director, Amnesty International-USA

