

USA Briefing

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Amnesty International is a worldwide voluntary activist movement working towards the observance of all human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards.

Amnesty International promotes respect for human rights, which it considers interdependent and indivisible, through campaigning and public awareness activities, as well as through human rights education and pushing for ratification and implementation of human rights treaties.

Amnesty International takes action against some of the gravest violations by governments of people's civil and political rights. The focus of its campaigning against human rights violations is to:

- free all prisoners of conscience. These are people detained for their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth or other status — who have not used or advocated violence;
- ensure fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners;
- abolish the death penalty, torture and other ill-treatment of prisoners;
- end political killings and "disappearances".

It seeks to support the protection of human rights by other activities, such as its work for refugees, on international military, security and police relations, and on economic and cultural relations.

Amnesty International also calls on armed political groups to respect human rights and to halt abuses such as the detention of prisoners of conscience, hostage-taking, torture and deliberate and arbitrary killings.

Amnesty International is independent of any government, political persuasion or religious creed. It does not support or oppose any government or political system, nor does it support or oppose the views of the victims whose rights it seeks to protect. It is concerned solely with the impartial protection of human rights.

Amnesty International is an international democratic, self-governing movement with around a million members and supporters in more than 150 countries spread over all regions of the world. It is funded largely by its worldwide membership and by donations from the public. No funds are sought or accepted from governments for Amnesty International's work in documenting and campaigning against human rights violations.

Amnesty International was founded in 1961 and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1977. It has monitored human rights in the USA since the early 1960s. Amnesty International published its first report on the USA in 1965: *Justice in the American South*. Since then Amnesty International has published hundreds of reports on human rights concerns in the USA. Amnesty International's 350,000 members in the USA campaign against human rights abuses in countries around the world, as well as pressing for greater human rights protection in the USA. Amnesty International bases its work on internationally recognized human rights standards. Guided by its

core principles of independence and impartiality, Amnesty International, with its worldwide membership, monitors and acts on human rights concerns in all countries of the world.

United States of America

The USA is a federal republic consisting of 50 states and the District of Columbia, where the city of Washington, seat of the US government, is situated. Each state exercises a significant degree of self-government: each has its own constitution and elected government. The federal government has jurisdiction over matters of national interest, including foreign affairs and internal security. Puerto Rico is a self-governing commonwealth associated with the USA.

Context

The USA was founded in the name of democracy, political and legal equality, and individual freedom. It has established many institutions to protect individual civil liberties and played a key role in the development of international human rights standards for the protection of all people. However, the USA is still failing to deliver the fundamental promise of rights for all.

The USA has the most powerful economy in the world. But it is beset by social problems. There are extreme disparities of wealth and power; an estimated nine per cent of the nation's children live in extreme poverty and many within US society are destitute. Drug and alcohol addiction are rife. Homicide is the leading cause of death among young black people; one contributory factor is the prevalence of firearms — more than 200 million handguns, rifles, shotguns and high-powered weapons are currently in circulation in the USA.

For more than a century the rights guaranteed by the US Constitution were denied to whole communities. Indigenous tribes were slaughtered, relocated and their cultural traditions destroyed. Slavery was not abolished until 1865 and racial segregation remained legal until the 1960s. Women were denied the right to vote until 1920.

Today federal and state laws protect a wide range of civil rights. Legislation bars race, gender or other discrimination.

However, despite serious attempts this century to overcome racism, the USA has not succeeded in eradicating the discriminatory treatment of African Americans, Latinos and other minority groups, including Native Americans, Asian Americans and Arab Americans. Black people are three times less likely to be employed than whites with similar qualifications.

Despite the strength and achievements of the women's movement, women in the USA continue to suffer discrimination and violence. Many are abused in custody by state officials, and many more suffer violence such as battering and rape at the hands of individual men in circumstances where local, state or federal authorities are insufficiently responsive.

Reports of violent attacks against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people have increased in recent years. In 39 US states gay men and lesbians can be legally dismissed from their jobs because of their sexual orientation and in some 20 states "anti-sodomy" laws criminalize consensual sexual acts between adults.

A vast and diverse network of human rights activists continues to defend the legacy of civil rights in the USA. The US human rights constituency represents and works for the rights of women, racial and ethnic minorities, religious communities, the poor, people with disabilities, gay men and lesbians, children, juvenile offenders, immigrants, refugees and others. Amnesty International's campaign against human rights violations in the USA seeks to complement this work.

Broken promises

The USA has long seen itself as the champion of the rights and freedoms of the individual. US political leaders have repeatedly professed their allegiance to the ideal of all human rights for all people.

But for many the USA has failed to deliver the promise of rights for all.

US law protects a wide range of civil rights. It promises freedom of speech, religion, association, and expression. It guarantees the right to a fair trial and to freedom from cruel and unusual punishments.

Yet across the USA people are being injured and killed by police using excessive force or deliberately brutal treatment. In many prisons and jails inmates are being tortured or ill-treated. Asylum-seekers are being detained indefinitely in conditions that are sometimes inhuman and degrading. More than 350 people have been executed since 1990, some for crimes committed when they were under 18 years old.

Human rights are universal and indivisible; all human rights should be enjoyed by everyone, whatever their position in society, their racial or ethnic origin, their sexual orientation or their level of income.

The need to sustain the legacy of civil and political rights in the USA and to demand the additional human rights protection enshrined in international human rights standards is pressing. Amnesty International calls on the US government to act now to bring its laws and practices into line with international standards.

Human rights standards

'As long as America is determined to stand for human rights, then free people all around the world will choose to stand with America'

Bill Clinton, US President, 1997

The international community of nations has adopted a wide range of human rights standards for the protection of all humankind. These articulate the criteria against which the human rights record of all states can be judged.

The USA helped to formulate many of them. It played a fundamental role in the adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims the right of every human being to life and to freedom from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The USA has repeatedly stressed the importance of international law and human rights while at the same time being reluctant to commit itself to those same standards. For example, it is one of only 10 countries that have not ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and one of only two countries which have not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The USA has not ratified any regional human rights treaties.

Even when the USA has ratified human rights treaties it has often done so only half-heartedly. For example, it has made numerous reservations to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including reserving the right to execute juvenile offenders. In 1995 the Human Rights Committee, the UN body of experts that monitors states' compliance with the ICCPR, recommended that the USA consider withdrawing its reservations, particularly those relating to the death penalty and to the right not to be tortured. The USA has also avoided scrutiny by UN and Inter-American bodies set up to protect human rights, by refusing to recognize their right to hear complaints from people in the USA.

The USA should take steps to reinforce respect for international standards by ratifying without reservations human rights treaties that it has not yet ratified; withdrawing reservations which limit the effect of international human rights standards; and ensuring that national legislation is consistent with international human rights standards.

Police brutality

'A black teenager pedalling rapidly is fleeing crime. A white teenager pedalling at the same speed is feeling the freedom of youth'

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People commenting on the case of a black teenager shot by police after falling off his bicycle in Indianapolis, Indiana, March 1993

William J. Whitfield 3rd, an unarmed African American man, was shot dead in a New York supermarket on 25 December 1997 by police who said they mistook the keys he was carrying for a gun. Although the officer who shot him was cleared of wrongdoing, it was revealed that he had been involved in eight prior shootings. The New York Police Department (NYPD) Police Commissioner subsequently set up a monitoring system for officers involved in three or more shootings.

Throughout the USA people are being injured and even killed by police using excessive force or deliberately brutal treatment. Police officers are punching, kicking, beating and shooting people who pose no threat, or are causing serious injuries, and sometimes death, by misusing restraints, chemical sprays or electro-shock weapons. Most reported incidents take place during arrest, searches, traffic stops or in street incidents.

Every year there are thousands of reports of assault and ill-treatment by police officers. Inquiries into some of the largest urban police departments have uncovered systematic brutality.

It is difficult to assess the true extent of police brutality because there is no reliable national data. Since 1994 the federal government has been legally required to collect national data on police excessive use of force, but Congress has failed to provide the necessary funding.

More than 17,000 police agencies operate in the USA, each with its own code of practice and methods of recording and investigating abuses.

Most US police departments have strict guidelines on the use of deadly force, and international standards state that force should be used only as a last resort, proportionate to the threat and designed to minimise injury.

However, it is clear that these standards are frequently breached and that too often the authorities have turned a blind eye to abuses.

Investigations into complaints of police brutality are often subject to delays and there are concerns about the quality and impartiality of in-ternal investigations. Disciplinary action is rare. Sanctions, when they are imposed, are often lenient.

Many police shootings raise serious doubts as to whether the victims posed an immediate threat. Amnesty International detailed more than 30 cases where NYPD officers had shot or injured suspects, including children, in disputed circumstances in its 1996 report. Nearly all the victims were black, Latino or from other minorities — a pattern seen across the country. Members of racial and ethnic minorities bear the brunt of police brutality in many areas. Black officers themselves have complained of the stereotyping of black men as criminal suspects.

Caroline Sue Botticher, an unarmed African American woman, died after police from West Charlotte, North Carolina, fired 22 rounds at the car in which she was a passenger when it failed to stop at a police check-point in April 1997. There was no evidence to suggest that anyone in the car was armed. Some police departments have introduced guidelines to bar police from firing at moving vehicles unless they are directly threatened with deadly force, but many have not.

There have been numerous deaths in custody after police used restraint procedures known to be dangerous. Hogtying — tying suspects' ankles to their wrists behind their backs — has been recognized as highly dangerous for at least the past decade. However, while many departments, including the NYPD, have banned the procedure, others continue to use it. Deaths in custody resulting from hogtying have been reported from various parts of the country, including Athens (Georgia), Jackson (Mississippi) and Memphis (Tennessee).

Police use of weapons intended to stun or temporarily disable suspects — such as chemical sprays and electro-shock weapons — have also led to serious injuries and deaths.

In July 1996, a 29-year-old woman, Kimberly Lashon Watkins, died in Pomona, California, after being shot by police with a taser — a hand-held device which shoots two barbed hooks attached to wires into the victim through which a high voltage current is transmitted.

The use of so-called “less than lethal” weapons is increasing — at least 3,000 police departments authorize the use of Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray. The use of these technologies, some of which invite abuse, is of particular concern given the absence of adequate monitoring systems and national standards for their use.

It is time that the US government took steps to end abusive practices by police and to make police forces more accountable. As a first step the authorities should establish effective independent bodies to monitor police use of force.

Children

International standards recognize that children who are imprisoned or detained have special needs. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), for example, stipulates that children should be held separately from adult inmates. The USA has ratified the ICCPR, but has reserved the right to treat children as adults in “exceptional circumstances”.

Many states prosecute children accused of serious offences as if they were adults. Children prosecuted or convicted as adults are often held in adult facilities. Most are held separately from adults, but in conditions which are not appropriate to their special needs. For example, some are locked in their cells for most of the day with little or no access to educational or other services.

The welfare of children who are not separated from adult inmates is a matter of grave concern. No official statistics are available. However, Amnesty International believes that at least 3,500 children are being held with the general prison population in adult prisons.

Amnesty International calls on the USA to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and to ensure that children in prisons and jails are held separately from adults, unless it is considered in the child’s best interests not to do so.

Torture and abuse of prisoners

Everyone has the right not to be tortured or ill-treated. However, every day, in jails and prisons across the USA this right is being violated.

More than 1.7 million people are in prisons or jails in the USA. More than 60 per cent are from racial or ethnic minorities. Over half are black. Since 1980 the number of inmates has more than tripled; the number of women inmates has quadrupled.

Some 77,000 inmates are held in privately run institutions. There have been serious complaints about abuse of inmates and poor conditions in privately run facilities in a number of states.

New facilities are being built but they have not kept pace with the demand and many are overcrowded and understaffed, creating dangerous and inhuman conditions.

Physical and sexual violence are endemic in many prisons and jails.

In November 1997 an Amnesty International delegation visiting SCI-Greene, a Supermaximum (“supermax”) prison in Pennsylvania housing death-row prisoners, was told by inmates that they were being beaten and racially abused by guards. In May 1998, following an internal investigation, several guards were dismissed and some 20 others disciplined for abuses against inmates.

In 1997 the Department of Justice sued the states of Michigan and Arizona for failing to protect women from sexual misconduct, including sexual assaults and “prurient viewing during dressing, showering and use of toilet facilities”.

In some institutions, rape and sexual abuse have persisted because inmates fear retaliation and feel too vulnerable to complain. Also of concern is the fact that staff of the opposite sex are allowed to undertake searches involving body contact and to be present where inmates are naked.

Inmates across the country, including mentally ill prisoners, are being restrained in ways that are cruel, inhuman and sometimes life-threatening.

It is common practice for prisoners and detainees to be shackled during transportation — whether or not they pose any threat. Pregnant women, for example, are usually held in some form of mechanical restraint while being transported and sometimes while in hospital. Shackling can greatly increase the risk of falling and of injury to the woman or the foetus because she cannot use her hands to protect her body.

Restraint chairs — specially designed chairs which allow inmates to be immobilized — are widely used in prisons and jails despite the known dangers. Scott Norberg died of asphyxia in Madison Street Jail, Maricopa County, Arizona, in June 1996. He had been placed in a restraint chair with a towel wrapped over his face. In 1997 officials said that the jail system's 16 chairs had been used 600 times in six months.

Chemical sprays and electro-shock devices are also used. Some have been banned in a number of countries because of the risks they pose. There is particular concern over the increasing use of remote control electro-shock stun-belts which, at the push of a button, inflict a powerful electric current causing severe pain and knocking the prisoner to the ground.

In 1997 some 13,000 prisoners were being held in "supermax" units, and the number is increasing. These units are designed for the long-term isolation of dangerous or disruptive prisoners and conditions in some constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. For example, in August 1997 Texas opened the W.J. Estelle High Security Unit, where prisoners are isolated in windowless cells for 23 hours or more a day. The concrete cells have no natural light and the solid steel doors have narrow slits which allow only a minimal view of the corridor outside.

Health care in many facilities is seriously inadequate. Complaints include grossly deficient treatment for the mentally ill; lack of provision for women's health needs; failing to deliver prescribed drugs; and refusing or delaying necessary medical treatment.

Annette Romo, a young pregnant woman in a Maricopa jail, pleaded in vain with staff for medical help when she began bleeding in 1997. She eventually fell unconscious and was rushed to hospital. Her baby died.

Lack of proper screening for communicable diseases combined with overcrowded and insanitary conditions are putting many lives at serious and unnecessary risk.

The US government has an obligation to ensure that the human rights of all, including all those in prisons and jails, are protected. There is an urgent need for independent nationwide agencies to monitor conditions and initiate action to remedy abuses, and for national enforceable standards for the treatment of prisoners which are consistent with international human rights standards. Such initiatives would signal a serious commitment by the US authorities to end torture and ill-treatment in prisons and jails.

Asylum-seekers

‘Everyone says America is the place for human rights. I thought maybe I had arrived in the wrong country.’

Hawa Abdi Jama, a Somali refugee who was detained in harsh conditions for 14 months before being granted asylum

Everyone forced to flee their country to escape persecution has the right to seek asylum. The USA has accepted this principle but has rendered it meaningless by detaining asylum-seekers. The USA fails to recognize international standards which state that because of the hardship it inflicts, the detention of asylum-seekers should normally be avoided and that asylum-seekers should not be accommodated with criminal offenders.

In the past few years the number of people detained by the USA’s Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has soared and all the indications are that the numbers will continue to increase. Among them are many asylum-seekers who have fled human rights violations and look to the USA for protection.

The USA is not alone in detaining asylum-seekers. However, as a member of the Executive Committee of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the USA’s failure to abide by international standards is particularly regrettable.

Asylum-seekers in the USA, many of whom are still severely traumatized by the events which caused them to flee their homes, are increasingly being treated like criminal offenders. They are detained indefinitely; confined with criminal prisoners; stripped and searched; shackled and chained; physically and verbally abused; and denied access to families, lawyers and organizations which could help them.

Because of their smaller number, women asylum-seekers are more likely to be mingled with criminal offenders within a detention facility, be it an INS detention centre or a jail. Women detainees have reported that they were verbally and physically abused, subjected to strip searches, denied the basics for personal hygiene, and put in sol-itary confinement for minor transgressions of prison rules that they did not understand.

Too often refugee children are not getting the special help they need. Confinement in a juvenile facility, with juvenile offenders, is not appropriate treatment for such children. For example, 13-year-old Rajakumar was separated from his mother and locked up for more than a month in a New York hotel room with a group of strangers. He was then taken to an INS juvenile facility in Florida without his mother’s knowledge. They had both fled Sri Lanka after Rajakumar’s father was seized by government soldiers and “disappeared”.

The USA’s treatment of asylum-seekers is seen by many governments as an indicator of how much respect they must give international mechanisms for the protection of refugees. It is vital that the US government take steps to honour its commitment to those seeking protection within its borders.

The death penalty

‘From hanging to electric chair, to lethal injection: how much prettier can you make it? Yet the prettier it becomes, the uglier it is.’

Scott Blystone, a Pennsylvania death row inmate, 1997

More than 350 people have been executed in the USA since 1990. More than 3,300 others are on death row.

International standards seek to restrict the scope of the death penalty. They forbid its use against children; see it as an unacceptable punishment for the mentally impaired; and demand the highest legal safeguards for capital trials. On all these counts the USA is failing.

More than 100 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. The USA by contrast has increased its rate of executions and the number of crimes punishable by death. Thirty-eight states currently have the death penalty on their statute books.

Children have not reached a full understanding of their actions. No one should be sentenced to death for a crime they committed before the age of 18. However, in 24 US states people can be sentenced to death for crimes committed when they were children.

In 1989 the US Supreme Court ruled that it was not unconstitutional to execute mentally retarded people. Since then some 30 mentally impaired people have been executed. However, some positive steps have been taken. In 1998 Nebraska became the 12th state to adopt a law banning the execution of mentally retarded prisoners.

Whether someone is sentenced to life or death can depend more on their lawyer than on the crime. A defendant who cannot afford an experienced and competent lawyer is more likely to be sentenced to death than someone who can. Calvin Burdine, who is openly homosexual, was sentenced to death in Texas after a trial at which he was represented by a lawyer who referred to homosexuals as “queers” and “fairies”, did not interview a single witness in preparing the defence, and was seen to fall asleep repeatedly during the trial. Calvin Burdine remains on death row and has twice come within hours of execution.

No one knows how many prisoners have been executed in the USA for crimes they did not commit. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of people who went to their deaths despite serious doubts about their guilt.

Curtis Kyle was released and the charges against him were dropped in 1997. He had been in prison for 14 years, twice coming close to execution. He became the 75th wrongly convicted person to be released from death row since 1973.

The death penalty has become a political campaigning tool in the USA. Politicians who speak against it are attacked as “soft on crime” by their opponents. Others compete over the strength of their support for it. In late 1994 the District Attorney of Oklahoma City campaigned for re-election on his record of having “sent 44 murderers to death row”.

The application of the death penalty is racist. Black and white people are the victims of violent crime in roughly equal numbers, yet 82 per cent of people executed since 1977 have been

convicted of killing white victims. Other factors, such as aggravating circumstances, cannot explain the disparity in sentencing linked to the race of the defendant and of the victim. Blacks make up just 12 per cent of the US population, but 42 per cent of those on the nation's death rows. The judicial system which tried and sentenced them remains overwhelmingly white. In 1998, in those states which have capital punishment, there were 1,838 officials (mostly district attorneys) responsible for deciding whether or not to seek the death penalty in individual cases. Of these officials, 1,794 were white.

There can be no denying the cruelty of the death penalty, no matter what method is used. A person rendered helpless by the state is confined, sometimes for years, under threat of death, often in harsh conditions. Most executions are carried out by lethal injection. But this is not a painless, clinical process as is sometimes claimed.

Tommy Smith was executed in Indiana in 1996. The execution team searched for 16 minutes for a vein in his arm before calling a doctor who tried unsuccessfully to insert a needle into his neck. After 36 minutes the poison was finally injected through a vein in his foot. Tommy Smith was fully conscious throughout.

Many of those sentenced to death have been involved in brutal crimes. But the death penalty is a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment — rights that belong to all human beings, whoever they are and whatever they have done. Amnesty International calls on the US government and state authorities to abolish the death penalty. In the interim it calls on the authorities to impose a moratorium on executions; to prohibit the use of the death penalty against juvenile offenders and the mentally impaired; and to ensure that all capital defendants are adequately represented.

US arms and human rights abuses

‘I had electric shocks applied to my feet and hands for so long they had to change the batteries, and I became so weak I told them what they wanted.’

Pius Lustrilanang, an Indonesian political activist, speaking in February 1998. In 1993 the US Commerce Department licensed the export of thousands of electro-shock stun guns to Indonesia.

The US government has supplied arms and security equipment to governments and armed groups that have committed torture, political killings and other human rights abuses in countries around the world. It has trained military officers who have committed human rights violations. Current oversight by public bodies is inadequate to the task of ensuring that US supplies do not contribute to further human rights violations.

Amnesty International believes that the USA should adopt and enforce a code of conduct to regulate all military, security and police sales and assistance to other countries, in order to ensure that US transfers of equipment or expertise do not contribute to human rights abuses elsewhere.

Rights for all

‘Each of us has a part to play in upholding human rights for men and women of all political, ethnic, religious and racial backgrounds’

US President Bill Clinton, 1997

Civil and political rights in the USA have been fought for and won, sometimes after bitter battles. However, despite this long and proud tradition, many people are unaware of the importance of the rights they possess.

Amnesty International has launched a major campaign against human rights violations in the USA. The campaign is part of the continuing work of Amnesty International's members around the world to promote the rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is 50 years old this year.

The aim of the campaign is to increase public awareness of human rights violations in the USA, to strengthen cooperation with the human rights constituency in the USA and to achieve some concrete reforms. These include: increasing the accountability of the police by setting up independent oversight and monitoring mechanisms; establishing enforceable standards for the treatment of prisoners, including steps to prevent sexual abuse of women and a ban on the use of electro-shock stun-belts; ending the execution of juvenile offenders and of the mentally impaired, as a step towards abolition of the death penalty; ending the unlawful detention of asylum-seekers; ratifying in full international human rights treaties; and adopting a code of conduct to prevent US arms and equipment being used to commit abuses elsewhere in the world.

The USA has a responsibility to ensure respect for its own laws and for international human rights standards, many of which it has been instrumental in developing.

It must take steps to safeguard basic human rights at home and to ensure respect for the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Human rights belong to everyone, or they are guaranteed to no one. It is time to demand rights for all.

Action for human rights

Amnesty International is campaigning for the following specific improvements in the protection of human rights. It calls on the US authorities to:

- Establish independent and effective monitoring bodies to investigate allegations of abuses by police and of abuses in prisons and jails.
- Ban inherently dangerous and cruel restraint procedures, including hogtying and the use of electro-shock stun-belts.
- Ban the routine use of restraints on pregnant women prisoners and all restraints during labour.
- Act to prevent sexual abuse, including rape, in prisons and jails by restricting and regulating the role of male staff with regard to female inmates.

- Ensure that asylum-seekers are detained only as a last resort. Ensure asylum-seekers are never held in jails.
- Ban the death penalty for juvenile offenders as a first step towards total abolition.
- Ratify, without reservations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- Adopt and rigorously enforce a binding code of conduct, based on human rights, covering all transfers of military, security and police equipment, services and expertise.

Amnesty International is seeking the broadest possible mobilization of individuals, groups and community organizations to achieve these changes. We welcome comment and feedback on how we can most effectively make progress on these issues.

Amnesty International's full recommendations to the US authorities are contained in the report, United States of America: Rights for all, and on the campaign website, at: <http://www.rightsforall-usa.org>

Please support our campaign for Rights For All by:

- Helping to raise awareness about human rights violations in the USA.
Distribute Amnesty International's publications. Raise the issue with any relevant organizations you are in contact with. Write letters to the press about human rights violations in the USA.

- Urging the US government to protect human rights.

Write to:

President Bill Clinton
The White House
Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington DC 20500
United States of America

Urge him to promote and protect human rights in the USA by taking the steps outlined above.

- Writing to the US Ambassador or other US diplomatic representative in your country asking them to forward your concerns to the relevant authorities in the USA.
- Contacting Amnesty International's office in your country and joining the campaign for human rights in the USA.
- Visiting the campaign Internet website at: <http://www.rightsforall-usa.org>

How to obtain campaign publications...

This Amnesty International briefing, Rights for all: Human rights in the United States of America, is one of a series of publications produced by Amnesty International for its 1998-1999 campaign against human rights abuses in the USA.

Other campaign materials include: United States of America: Rights for all, a detailed Amnesty International report; theme leaflets; a Focus article in AI News; and a photo display.

If you live in one of the many countries where there is a section of Amnesty International, you can obtain our campaign publications from the section.

If there is no section in your country, you can order our campaign publications direct from Amnesty International Publications, Marketing and Supply team, International Secretariat, 1 Easton Street, London, WC1X 8DJ, United Kingdom.

Texts of other major documents on human rights abuses in the USA issued by Amnesty International are available on AI On-Line, Amnesty International's general Internet website, at: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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USA briefing - captions and credits

1. map kindly supplied by Benn's Media
2. Homeless people sleeping on the sidewalk in Washington D.C. The USA has the most powerful economy in the world. Yet there are extreme disparities of wealth and power; an estimated nine per cent of the nation's children live in extreme poverty and 13.7 per cent of the US population lives below the poverty line.
© Dede Faller/Impact Visuals
3. The UN building in New York
© UN photo 185522/A. Brizzi
4. Paraguayan citizen Ángel Francisco Breard was executed in 1998 in flagrant defiance of an order by the International Court of Justice. On 9 April 1998 the Court ordered that the execution be suspended until it had considered whether the USA had breached the UN Vienna Convention on Consular Relations by denying Ángel Francisco Breard assistance from Paraguayan consular officials. Five days later the state authorities in Virginia executed Ángel Francisco Breard.
© HO/Reuters
5. Protesters demand justice for Abner Louima (inset), a Haitian immigrant who suffered serious internal injuries after New York police officers beat him in August 1997. One allegedly rammed the handle of a toilet plunger into his rectum at a Brooklyn police station. Four officers were awaiting trial on federal charges of assault in mid-1998. Main picture © Peter Morgan/Reuters. Inset ©Pool/Reuters
6. Sheriff's deputies stand guard in St Petersburg, Florida, following riots sparked by the death of black teenager Tyrone Lewis in October 1996. Tyrone Lewis was shot dead by two white police officers after he had been stopped for speeding and allegedly refused to roll down his window. His death caused two days' rioting among the town's black community, who accused the police of racism.
© AP/St. Petersburg Times, Maurice Rivenbark
7. A juvenile held in leg-irons, in breach of international standards
© Alan S. Weiner/NYT Permissions
8. In Alabama prisoners have been tied to a restraint pole (known as the "hitching rail") as punishment, sometimes for hours in sweltering heat or freezing conditions. In January 1997 a federal magistrate ruled that the state should stop using the rail, describing it as a "painful and tortuous punishment". However, a state appeal against the ruling was still pending as of July 1998.
© Donna Binder/Impact Visuals
9. A cell in the high security wing of the Women's Correctional Institution of Columbia, South Carolina
© Valentine Schmidt

10. Prison guards monitor inmates during a “shakedown” (a mass search for contraband items) in Ellis 1 Unit in Huntsville, Texas
© Danny Lyon/Magnum
11. The Maricopa County Jail’s all-female “chain gang” carrying a coffin to its burial place, Phoenix, Arizona
© Stan Grossfeld/The Boston Globe
12. Detainees at the Port Isabel, Texas INS facility. In the USA asylum-seekers are often detained with criminal offenders and have difficulty accessing legal assistance and the special care they need as people who have fled serious human rights violations.
© Barbara Karl/SND
13. Sixteen-year-old Shareef Cousin became the USA’s youngest death row inmate when he was sentenced to death in 1996 in Louisiana. The prosecution’s case hinged on the eye-witness testimony of a friend of the murdered man. She told the jury she was “absolutely positive” Shareef Cousin was the murderer. After the trial an anonymous source sent Shareef Cousin’s lawyers a copy of the friend’s original police statement in which she had said that she could not describe the assailant at all, because it was dark and she did not have her glasses with her. The prosecution withheld this information from the defence. The prosecution was also shown to have pressured an informant into testifying against Shareef Cousin, and was accused of hiding alibi witnesses favourable to the defence. At his appeal in early 1998, Shareef Cousin won the right to a new trial.
14. Demonstrators outside the prison where Karla Faye Tucker was executed on 3 February 1998. While on death row she educated herself and became deeply religious. Karla Faye Tucker is one of three women who have been executed in the USA since executions were resumed in 1977. In June 1998 another 43 women remained on death row in 15 states.
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15. Death chamber and witness room, Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, Lucasville, Ohio. The 180 men currently facing execution in Ohio are given the choice between death by lethal injection, or electrocution.
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16. Protesters on the US/Mexican border fence near San Ysidro, California, call out to people on the Mexico side for solidarity after completing a 76-mile march from Temecula in April 1996. The march was organized to protest against the beatings by police of two illegal immigrants, Leticia González and Enrique Funes Flores, in Riverside County.
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Front cover: Prisoner tied to a restraint pole in Limestone County, Alabama
© Donna Binder/Impact Visuals

Back cover: Demonstrators protest against the alleged beating and sexual torture of a Haitian immigrant, Abner Louima, by white police officers © Peter Morgan/Reuters