

URGENT ACTION

DROP CHARGES AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

On 17 January 2018, US Border Patrol agents arrested Dr. Scott Warren, a Human Rights Defender and humanitarian aid volunteer. The US Department of Justice prosecuted him on two counts of felony “harboring” and one count of felony “conspiracy” for his humanitarian aid activities in the USA–Mexico border areas. In June 2019, his case resulted in a mistrial. On 2 July 2019, US federal prosecutors decided to retry Dr. Warren on the two “harboring” charges. His retrial begins on 12 November 2019. He faces up to 10 years in prison, if convicted on both charges. Authorities should immediately drop all criminal charges against Dr. Warren for his vital humanitarian work.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr. Michael Bailey
First Assistant United States Attorney
District of Arizona
United States Courthouse
405 W. Congress Street, Suite 4800
Tucson, Arizona 85701
Email: Michael.bailey@usdoj.gov

Dear Mr. Bailey,

I am writing now to urge you to immediately drop the charges against Dr. Scott Warren (case 4:18-cr-00223-RCC-BPV), which appear to constitute a retaliatory and politically motivated violation of his protected rights as a Human Rights Defender.

Amnesty International acknowledges the volunteer activities of Dr. Warren and his associated organization No More Deaths as vital humanitarian aid directed at upholding the right to life of migrants and preventing the further arbitrary deaths of thousands more migrants and asylum seekers in the Sonoran Desert.

Amnesty International is opposed to the criminalization of humanitarian aid and calls on all states to ensure that their laws are not misused to target and harass human rights defenders working for the rights of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, or others whose lives and other human rights are at risk.

Human rights defenders and their organizations must be able to carry out their work in a safe and enabling environment, free from fear of reprisals.

We call on you to immediately drop all the charges against Dr. Warren.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The case of Dr. Scott Warren was one of those featured in the July 2019 report by Amnesty International, [‘Saving lives is not a crime’: Politically motivated legal harassment of migrant human rights defenders by the USA](#).

Dr. Warren is a geography teacher, humanitarian aid volunteer and organizer in Ajo, Arizona, USA. He holds a PhD in Geography and has lived in Ajo since 2013. The raid in which he was arrested occurred at a building called The Barn, a humanitarian aid space in Ajo, located 35 miles north of the USA-Mexico border, in a 70-mile migration corridor in the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona. The Barn is owned by a local doctor and used by multiple humanitarian aid groups working to prevent migrant deaths in the Sonoran Desert. The humanitarian aid provided at The Barn includes food, water, medical care, and a place to rest.

Dr. Warren’s arrest came hours after the release of a report by an organization Dr. Warren volunteers with, No More Deaths/No Mas Muertes, which documented the wilful destruction by US Border Patrol agents of humanitarian aid supplies in the US-Mexico border areas. There was a [corresponding video](#) that went viral showing the destruction of several water jugs in the desert by Border Patrol agents.

Amnesty International has documented that the criminalization of Dr. Warren is not an isolated incident, but part of a larger politically-motivated campaign of legal harassment and intimidation by the US government that is in clear violation of US and international law. Because of the extreme conditions in the desert, every year many migrants die in the hostile border terrain. Human Rights Defenders in humanitarian aid groups, faith-based communities, activist groups, and communities living in towns along the border, have provided assistance to these migrants for many years. Not only have USA government authorities failed to fulfil their obligations to prevent migrant deaths, they are actively discouraging HRDs from carrying out their work through systematic harassment, intimidation, and prosecution. People who dissent against the Trump administration’s extreme, hard-line, dangerous immigration policies by aiding migrants and asylum seekers throughout their perilous journeys north are being targeted and punished for their life-saving and necessary work.

Not all people crossing the border irregularly, through the desert or otherwise, are seeking asylum. Yet all migrants and asylum seekers have the same human right to life, which US authorities cannot arbitrarily violate by denying them life-saving humanitarian aid, whether directly or indirectly.

The crackdown on migrant human rights defenders at the USA-Mexico border comes within the broader context of the Trump administration’s assault on the asylum system in the USA and immigration policies in general. More information about this is available in Amnesty International’s 2018 report [You Don’t Have Any Rights Here](#). Amnesty International has documented how people seeking safety and protection in the USA have been systematically denied their right to pursue asylum at the border. In constellation, these policies and practices carried out by the US government appear to be deliberately executed in order to deter and punish requests for protection by people seeking asylum.

Part of this deterrence strategy has included a variety of tactics that discourage asylum seekers from pursuing access to the United States through designated ports-of-entry, putting them in a position where it is sometimes more expedient to take extremely dangerous “irregular” routes to cross into the US. Those tactics include the ongoing system of “metering” asylum seekers – forcing them to add their names to illegal asylum waitlists with thousands of other asylum seekers, only a few of whom are called each day, if any at all. Left stranded on the Mexican side of the border, migrants and asylum seekers (especially those from vulnerable populations, such as LGBTI, elderly, unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, etc.) are often targeted and at higher risk of kidnapping, extortion, and violence at the hands of organized crime. Facing such risks of irreparable harm, many make the difficult decision to cross the border between official ports of entry, including by dangerous routes through the desert. They are often forced to rely on smugglers to guide them.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 December 2019.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Scott Warren (he/him/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5103632019ENGLISH.pdf>