

Main Talking Points

Today we come to your office to voice our concerns about the US weaponized and surveillance drone program. And to encourage the Senators to speak out against it and to create legislation that outlaws the use of militarized drones.

Specifically we have brought with us the stories of people who are victims of this drone program.

We have a letter from a young man named Raz Mohammed, whom some of us know, that requests that the surveillance and weaponized drones cease terrorizing his family and the people of his village. His brother in-law was killed by a US drone strike while sitting drinking tea with some friends This has left his wife and children devastated.

#We also have brought with us an article from the Guardian newspaper about the Pakistani family whose mother/grandmother was killed while picking okra in the field. Momina Bibi was 67 years old,(just 3 years older than Senator Schumer) she was the area's only midwife, and as her son testified to the US Congress, "she was the string that held our family together". Alas, only five congresspersons attended that hearing.

#Please see the Stanford/NYU report, *Living Under Drones*. This report aims to uncover the crucial gap in understanding, specifically about life under drones and the socio-economic impacts of drone strikes on civilians in North Waziristan. These impacts are significant, and challenge the prevailing US government and media narrative that portrays drones as pinpoint precision weapons with limited collateral impact. This report brings in well documented data and we strongly suggest the you read it in its entirety so that the voices of those affected be given due weight in US debates about drones.

#Also see Reprieve's new report, released 11/24/2014, *You Never Die Twice: Multiple Kills in the US Drone Program*. The report looks at deaths resulting from US drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan between November 2002 and November 2014. It identifies 41 men who appeared to have been killed multiple times – drawing into question the Obama administration's repeated claims that the covert drone program is 'precise.' Jennifer Gibson, Staff Attorney at Reprieve who compiled the report, said: "These 'high value targets' appear to be doing the impossible – dying not once, not twice, but as many as six times. At the same time, hundreds of unknown men, women and children are also caught in the crosshairs. President Obama continues to insist drone strikes are 'precise', but when targeting one person instead kills as many as 128 others, there's only one conclusion that can be drawn – there's nothing targeted about the US drone program."

#We come today also to remind the Senators of their oath to uphold the US Constitution; part of our Constitution states in Article 6:

"This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding."

#The Preamble of the UN Charter states that its purpose is to “save future generations from the scourge of war” and it further states, “all nations shall refrain from the use of force against another nation.”

Extrajudicial Killings (assassinations)

Killing Civilians

Wars of Aggression

Violation of Due Process

Violation of National Sovereignty

All are crimes against peace and a violation of the UN Charter, a treaty duly ratified by the US, by a vote of 89 to 2 in the US Senate and signed by the President in 1945. It remains in effect today. As such, it is part of the supreme law of the land.

Under the UN Charter and long established international laws, anyone--civilian, military, government officials, or judge- who knowingly participates in or supports illegal use of force against another nation or its people is committing a war crime.

#As citizens of New York State we are concerned that our backyard has been placed on the map as part of the “battle zone”. We know that the Reaper drones are piloted from Hancock Airfield, which means not only surveillance is happening from our backyard, but the button is being pressed from our back yard to kill and maim people half way across the world in nations where have not declared war. And now we understand that there are plans to establish a similar base in Niagara Falls.

#We come today to ask you to be accountable to the laws and treaties that govern the use of lethal force and war. To the extent that we ignore our laws and Constitution and allow for the unchecked use of lethal force by our government, allowing the government to kill whoever it wants, wherever it wants, however it wants with no accountability, we make the world less safe for children everywhere, from Ferguson to Afghanistan.

#Because of the concerns stated above, we also want to let you know that the Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars has been engaged in an ongoing campaign at Hancock Airfield. Since 2009, we have been holding bi-weekly vigils at the base; rallies at which notable people have spoken (eg. Col. Ann Wright, Dr. Cornel West and Nobel nominee Kathy Kelly); and nonviolent civil resistance actions at the gates where over 100 people have been arrested. Some of those arrested have been to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran and have met with people first hand who have suffered the effects of US drone terror. Some of those who have been found guilty have served time in the Onondaga County jail. The sentences meted out range anywhere between 2 days to 1 year.

#As citizens of this nation, which maintains over 700 military bases around the globe, and the largest, most deadly military arsenal in the world, we believe these words of Martin Luther King still hold true, “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government”.