



Coordinated International Action Can Help More People Escape Persecution by U.S. Federal Agents

The pattern of persecution being carried out by federal agents warrants action from civilians and governmental bodies, within and outside of the United States.

Escalation of Violence

Over the past few weeks, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have escalated their use of lethal violence against civilians, peaceful protesters, and legal observers. On January 24th, two federal agents shot Alex Pretti roughly ten times, despite him being on the ground, disarmed, and having committed no crime that warranted an extrajudicial public execution.¹ Much like the recent murder of Renee Good, this occurrence is part of a series of incidents where federal agents have used excessive lethal violence, and that violence has been justified by DHS officials with statements that contradict all available evidence.² Similar violence can also be seen in incidents of federal agents attacking legal observers³ and deploying chemical gas at protesters and bystanders.⁴ At the same time, there are reports of neglect, violence, medical crises, and preventable deaths inside detention centers with little oversight or accountability.⁵

These human rights violations continue the Trump administration's pattern of escalating persecution against protected groups, including refugees, people of color, immigrants, legal observers, and people assisting those being persecuted.⁶ These patterns of persecution demonstrate that the U.S. no longer meets the European Union's criteria to be considered a "safe country of origin" or "safe third country."⁷ Both of these legal concepts require that a country provide protection from persecution, which the U.S. government is failing to do. In many cases, the U.S. government is actively the source of persecution.

Defining Persecution

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines rights and eligibility for asylum seekers,⁸ as well as acts of persecution and protected groups.⁹ Acts of persecution can include:

- physical, mental, or sexual violence;
- legal, administrative, police, and/or judicial measures which are in themselves discriminatory or are implemented in a discriminatory manner;
- prosecution or punishment which is disproportionate or discriminatory;
- denial of judicial redress resulting in a disproportionate or discriminatory punishment; and
- acts of a gender or child-specific nature.¹⁰

For these acts to meet the definition of persecution, they must be related to the victim's membership of a protected group, including their: race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group (such as being LGBTQIA+ or a child).¹¹

Examples of Persecution

There is a growing pattern of the U.S. federal government persecuting protected groups and violating human rights.¹² For example, attacking, gassing, and murdering legal observers or protestors without adequate legal cause is persecution in the form of physical violence, as well as punishment that is disproportionate, based on



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political opinion. DHS exclusively conducting investigations on its own agents' lethal altercations with civilians lacks transparency and denies judicial redress, especially when there are ample examples of DHS releasing statements that contradict available evidence.¹³

Detaining refugees, immigrants, children, and U.S. citizens based on race, language, and work, often without even looking at their identification, is persecution against refugees, immigrants, and people of color in the form of legal, administrative, and police measures that are in themselves discriminatory.¹⁴ Detaining people from these social groups without due process or access to timely legal aid is a denial of judicial redress resulting in disproportionate or discriminatory punishment, especially for those who are killed or wrongly deported.¹⁵ This short list represents just some of the many examples of persecution committed by the Trump administration throughout the U.S., often with the support of the Supreme Court.¹⁶

No Longer Safe

Although the U.S. has long been on many “safe country of origin”¹⁷ and “safe third country”¹⁸ lists, evidence shows that the U.S. is no longer safe for many protected groups. Countries that engage in persecution do not meet the EU’s criteria to be considered a “safe country of origin” or “safe third country.” Proving that the U.S. government is engaging in persecution can create a legal basis for removing these labels or at least creating exceptions for persecuted groups.

Therefore, Help Me Leave is trying to convince the United Nations Security Council, the European Commission, and each nation individually to investigate the United States’ status as a “safe country of origin” and/or “safe third country” and open more legal migration pathways for people persecuted in the U.S. The removal of the U.S. from these lists impacts whether people seeking asylum after fleeing the U.S. are offered a thorough, full-length asylum proceeding by default, as well as whether a country is likely to accept a refugee who previously sought asylum in the U.S.

How You Can Help

Help Me Leave is committed to helping people experiencing or at risk of persecution in the U.S. find legal and accessible paths to safety abroad. We are expanding our advocacy work to increase access to asylum and other permission-to-stay statuses for people fleeing persecution in the U.S. We also need help with research, marketing, client support, Spanish translations, managing our community server, web development, and more. **If you would like to help and have relevant skills, please fill out our volunteer form: <https://forms.clickup.com/90151711045/f/2kyqbwa5-2035/V90S8EIQNBHMTKXE4X>**



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About Help Me Leave

Help Me Leave is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit platform helping people find safe pathways out of countries where their rights are under threat. We provide practical visa and relocation information, connect people with legal and community support, and advocate for fairer global migration systems.

For press inquiries or expert comment, visit www.helpmeleave.us/guides-resources