Preventing Gross Human Rights Violations, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes
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My name is Adotei Akwei and I am the Managing Director of Government Relations for Amnesty International USA. LN behalf of AIUSA and the larger Amnesty Movement I would like to thank and commend the Lantos Commission for convening this briefing and injecting important discussions about human rights around the annual celebration of International Human Rights Day on December 10.

I would also like to express our gratitude to Commission Chairmen Pitts and McGovern as well as to Representative Lowenthal for continuing to show that Congress will remain a key champion on human rights and a driver of foreign policies that promote human rights and of course to the Commission staff who continue to manage Herculean achievements despite having such a small staff.

Who We Are
Amnesty International was founded in 1961 with the premise of improving the respect for and protection of human rights by engaging the general public in advocacy on behalf of human rights around the world. We have established an organization that conducts rigorous, first hand, impartial research to document human rights abuses and offers recommendations to address the abuses in question.

We currently have research hubs in Nairobi, Johannesburg, Dakar, Abuja, Hong Kong, Brussels, Tunisia, Mexico City and London, as well as AI structures in 40 countries, and seven million members globally.

We work to stop human right abuses across a wide spectrum of areas, including those committed in the context of major crises, where violations of both international human rights and humanitarian law are committed, including crimes against humanity and war crimes.

AI is committed to the principle that the most effective way to prevent gross violations is to oppose behavior and initiatives that could lead to the larger abuses or create an environment conducive to them happening when they first emerge and to work constantly to build capacity and political will in the country or locale at risk and among the global community to act.

Using our research, AI engages with national, regional and international institutions that have the mandate to protect human rights and address gross human rights violations. These includes:

The International Criminal Court
The African Union
The African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights
The Organization of American States
The Inter American Commission on Human Rights
The European Union
The European Court of Human Rights And key UN structures
The Security Council
The Human Rights Committee

The UN General Assembly

A full time crisis response team deploys trained staff to crisis spots to do in person in depth research to document abuses. This research is turned into reports that are used for advocacy with governments, UN bodies and agencies, the media, other NGOs and the general public in an effort to raise awareness, galvanize political will at the UN and within influential governments to take action that can help stop the abuses and ideally also start the process toward enforcing accountability.

AI staff then meet with officials in the organizations listed above to share our findings and recommendations.

AI also works to stop flow of arms to situations where they'll be used to commit these serious crimes; his includes our work on passage and enforcement of the UN global arms trade treaty as well as fighting for arms embargos on countries where the is a real risk of human rights violations such as South Sudan and the Central African Republic

AI works to bring those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity to justice (and in so doing, we hope we're helping to deter would-be perpetrators) through our work on the ICC, urging governments to ratify and implement the treaty, and by working for the effective exercise of universal jurisdiction.

We also of course reach out to media outlets and social media platforms to try raise awareness about the crisis and generate public pressure.

AI also then mobilizes it members to raise awareness in their communities and press their elected officials to take action.

AI has also issued a call to address the paralysis of the UN Security Council that has prevented it from responding to grave human rights violations such as crimes against humanity and mass

atrocities. We have asked the P5 members to commit to abstain from using their veto faced with human rights violations of such serious magnitude.
https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/amnesty-international-global-report-call-un-security-council-relinquish-veto

At the operational level AI employs a number of different technologies and methods to enhance our capacity to respond.

Leveraging technology
Amnesty International's use of science and technology to document war crimes and crimes against humanity is generally based on three areas of expertise:

1. Remote Sensing (e.g. satellite images)
   Amnesty International has been using satellite imagery since the early 2000s, which by now has become a standard technology used in our research. While we use satellite imagery to document violations across the entire spectrum of human rights, this technology has proved especially useful in documenting war crimes and crimes against humanity. The technology has been successfully deployed to document attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, or to detect mass graves, to just name a few examples. It has proven very useful during situations of armed conflict, which are often characterized by restrictions to physical access.

2. Open source research and verification (e.g. social media content).
   Advances in information and communication technologies have dramatically increased access to human rights relevant information over the last five years. Photographs and videos shared online yield new opportunities to uncover war crimes and crimes against humanity, but only if systemically and methodology assessed to ensure the accuracy of the information. Amnesty International has developed sound methodologies in this field, and started to also build up volunteer networks to assist with tracking and monitoring social media content.

Scientific expertise
We regularly work with experts from various fields, such as forensic pathology, chemical weaponry or digital image forensics to assess claims and digital content we receive. For example:

https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/apr/04/how-satellites-are-being-used-to-expose-human-rights-abuses

Some examples from last 12 months of our work

Darfur Sudan

https://medium.com/lemming-cliff/access-to-the-inaccessible-documenting-darfur-human-rights-violations-from-space-7fcfc8c41b51#.x1i0uxwz0

Decode Darfur Initiative

AI built a network of digital volunteers to help uncover human rights violations and abuses in the conflict-ravaged Sudanese region of Darfur as part of a revolutionary crowdsourcing project.

The Decode Darfur interactive platform enabled Amnesty International supporters to analyze thousands of square kilometers of satellite imagery in remote parts of Darfur where bombings and chemical weapons attacks are suspected to have taken place by using their phone, tablet or laptop. The initiative proceeded in two phases: the first a six week period where participants will help to map a remote, largely barren landscape to locate villages vulnerable to attack in the East Jebel Marra area of Darfur.

In phase two, they will compare before-and-after images of the villages to pinpoint which ones have been destroyed. Before they start decoding, participants will first be given a short tutorial on what exactly to look for. In the second participants compared before-and-after images of the villages to pinpoint which ones have been destroyed. Before undertaking any work all of the participants went through a training on what to look for and how to look.[1]

http://www.forbes.com/sites/federicoguerrini/2016/10/22/tracking-human-rights-violations-in-darfur-with-crowdsourcing-and-satellite-imagery/#361c115b7f21

Virtual Reality Initiative on Sudan

Amnesty also partnered with TransformMedia around a Virtual Reality initiative which will allow viewers to experience life in South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions of Sudan, which have been subject to regular indiscriminate aerial bombardment and other grave violations. AI has taken the Virtual Reality experience to the United Nations in New York, to Brussels, to policy makers in Washington DC and London, and will be using this technology to build political will for a comprehensive arms embargo, unimpeded humanitarian access and accountability.

Sudan
Scorched Earth Poisoned Air report October 2016

AI interviewed 231 people by phone or over the internet, including 184 survivors of violations committed by government forces in Jebel Marra (Darfur Sudan) between January and September 2016. Amnesty has corroborated the testimony from these survivors and witnesses

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[1] http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/digital-volunteers-to-expose-darfur-human-rights-violations-in-%E2%80%98revolutionary-crowdsourcing-project

with satellite imagery, still photographs, UN and media reports, and reports by local human rights monitors.

We then did in depth analysis 195 square miles of the Jebel Marra area using natural color and false colored infrared high resolution satellite imagery taken between March 2015 and May 2016 to document evidence of new damage and destruction to villages along with other significant changes to illustrate the situation in the region.

Using satellite imagery, we confirmed that 171 villages were destroyed or damaged. Numerous villages had been attacked multiple times, including many that were torched after they had been abandoned by the local residents. The objective of nearly all of these attacks appears to have been to attack the entire population of these villages. The overwhelming majority of the attacked villages had no formal armed opposition presence at the time of the attack.
AI also confirmed that between 200 and 250 people may have died as a result of exposure to the chemical weapons agents, with many – or most – being children.[2]

Nigeria

The Zaria Massacre

In the northern Nigerian city of Zaria, AI documented the 2015 mass slaughter of hundreds of men, women and children by soldiers and the attempted cover-up. AI published evidence gathered on the ground revealing how the Nigerian military burned people alive, razed buildings and dumped victims' bodies in mass graves.

https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/04/nigeria-military-cover-up-of-mass-slaughter-at-zaria-exposed/

Giwa

In 2016 AI issued a report that used evidence from interviews with former detainees and eyewitnesses, supported by video and photos and satellite imagery to show that many detainees may have died from disease, hunger, dehydration, and gunshots wounds. Boko Haram in North Eastern Nigeria AI used satellite imagery to confirm the scale of the Boko Haram attack on the village of Bama [3] as well as the appalling violations linked to the Nigerian government's counter insurgency, including the deaths of possibly over 7000 people.[4]

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[2] **SCORCHED EARTH, POISONED AIR** SUDANESE GOVERNMENT FORCES RAVAGE JEBEL MARRA, DARFUR, Amnesty International, October 2016, page 6

[3] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/01/nigeria-satellite-images-show-horrific-scale-boko-haram-attack-baga/

[4] http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/nigeria-no-justice-for-the-640-men-and-boys-slain-by-military-following-giwa-barracks-attack-two-yea

North Korea

AI utilized satellite imagery in 2013 and 2016 to document the continued operation of North Korea network of gulags that are thought to hold thousands of prisoners.

https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/north-korea-prison-camps-very-much-in-working-order/

Burundi

Amnesty used satellite images, video footage to compliment witness accounts around investigations of the killing of dozens of people by Burundian security forces in December 2015 who were later buried in mass graves.

https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/burundi-satellite-evidence-supports-witness-accounts-of-mass-graves/

http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/28/satellite-images-point-finger-at-burundian-forces-in-mass-killing/

Syria AI used satellite technology in a report on Syria's Saydnaya "intelligence facilities" prison. https://saydnaya.amnesty.org/

https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/harrowing-accounts-of-torture-inhuman-conditions-and-mass-deaths-in-syrias-prisons/

AI used satellite technology to document Russian air strikes in Syria that had killed hundreds of civilians and caused massive destruction in residential areas, striking homes, a mosque and a busy market, as well as medical facilities. A pattern of attacks that show evidence of violations of international humanitarian law,

https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/12/syria-russias-shameful-failure-to-acknowledge-civilian-killings/

AI used satellite technology to document airstrikes by the US/International coalition that killed some 300 civilians during two years of strikes targeting the armed group calling itself Islamic State (IS).

https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/10/usa-must-come-clean-about-civilian-deaths-caused-by-coalition-air-strikes-in-syria/

Myanmar/Rakhine

In a forthcoming (report in December AI will use video and photographs in combination with satellite image analysis to independently corroborate disproportionate use of force by Myanmar authorities against civilians.