



American ideals. Universal values.

March 16, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Since your first days in office, you have emphasized the importance of transparency to a strong democracy and accountable government. Over the years, your commitment to transparency has been put to the test when it comes to drone strikes and other uses of force outside of traditional battlefields. So we welcomed the announcement last week that your administration plans to release casualty assessments and a redacted version of the Presidential Policy Guidance (PPG) for strikes outside areas of active hostilities. We strongly support these steps.

In order to ensure that this announcement signals a new chapter of transparency about the use of lethal force in counterterrorism operations, it will be vital that the information released is sufficiently detailed to enable Americans to understand the nature of the targeted killing program, how targeting decisions are made, and the legal justifications for those decisions. In particular, we urge you to ensure that the casualty assessments: identify the procedures used to conduct post-strike investigations; specify the criteria used to classify a person as a combatant or civilian; name the organized armed group to which a deceased individual allegedly belonged; provide the domestic and international legal justification for the strike; disaggregate the data by strike location and date; and describe the policies and procedures for providing compensation when civilians are killed.

Redactions to the PPG should be limited to the minimum extent necessary to protect properly classified information or intelligence sources and methods that if disclosed would harm national security. All legal analysis contained in the PPG should be disclosed to the public, as well as all other legal memoranda related to the use of lethal force in counterterrorism operations.

Releasing this information will enable more informed public debate—here in this country and abroad—about the lawfulness of the U.S. government’s practices and the precedent they are setting as more and more countries acquire—and use—armed drones.

In addition to these steps, to improve accountability and enable public acknowledgment of the use of lethal force, we urge you to press ahead with your stated goal of transferring authority for

conducting these strikes from the Central Intelligence Agency to the Department of Defense. We strongly encourage your administration to begin a comprehensive strategic review of the effect of lethal strikes outside of zones of active hostilities to assess their broader impact, specifically to ascertain whether they are improving or harming national security, human rights, and the rule of law over the long-term.

Drone strikes are not per se illegal, and their use can be legitimate in situations of armed conflict. But the global proliferation of armed drones without a concomitant dedication to transparency, accountability, and the rule of law poses profound threats to national security and human rights. The steps outlined above will help to ensure that U.S. targeted killing policy is not used to establish a precedent for unlawful extrajudicial killing programs by other countries that do not hold human rights in the same regard as the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisa Massimino". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elisa Massimino
President and Chief Executive Officer