

Despite Civilian Deaths, U.S. Pushes Normalizing Global Drone Use



London, October 28 (RHC)-- The UK-based human right group Reprieve and 11 other rights organizations have sent a letter to President Barack Obama requesting he fulfill the terms of his July 1 Executive Order on drone killing by investigating allegations of civilian deaths. "The Obama Administration must investigate mistakes in the drone program, keep an accurate count of civilian deaths and be publicly accountable," said Jennifer Gibson, staff attorney at Reprieve. "That process must start now."

The declaration doesn't address civilian deaths. What it does do is call for a commitment "to the responsible export" of drones and "acknowledging the benefits of transparency."

"Higher standards on drone exports and use are desirable and needed, but this joint declaration doesn't go far enough to ensure that those standards actually set that bar high enough," said Rachel Stohl, an analyst with the Stimson Center, about the declaration. "If standards are low, they provide a blank check to governments to act with impunity and claim they have acted responsibly."

The United States regularly uses drones to attack the Islamic State group, al-Qaida and other militant groups in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries. Recent reports have also

claimed that the U.S. military plans to build a drone base in Niger, in southwestern Africa.

Obama's administration has been heavily criticized for its increasing use of drones and monitoring organizations say that the U.S. is vastly underestimating the death toll from drone attacks, which have frequently killed civilians and missed designated targets.

In July, Obama claimed that as many as 116 civilians were accidentally killed by U.S. drones. But civilian deaths are likely to have exceeded 1,000, according to Reprieve.

Ironically, the State Department's declaration said that "misuse of armed or strike-enabled UAVs could fuel conflict and instability, and facilitate terrorism and organized crime, the international community must take appropriate transparency measures to ensure the responsible export and subsequent use of these systems."

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