

UPR Info Pre-Session 53
United States of America
Statement of Southern Poverty Law Center
and American Civil Liberties Union

This statement is made on behalf of my organization, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the American Civil Liberties Union. Since 1971, the SPLC has worked to protect voting rights and democracy, eradicate poverty, dismantle white supremacy and other forms of hate, and reduce mass incarceration.¹ For more than 100 years, the ACLU has fought government abuse and defended individual freedoms.² Both are nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations that have vigorously opposed human rights abuses by the current administration, and by earlier administrations, regardless of political affiliation.

Since its first day in office, the current U.S. administration has wielded the power of the federal government for retribution against its critics and to silence dissent against its policies and unlawful actions. It has terminated grant funding to many organizations performing vital work, including, for example, 373 Department of Justice grants for work such as violence and hate crime prevention, more than \$200 million for legal representation of migrant children, and \$300 million for women's health and economic security.³ It has issued numerous Executive Orders and memos targeting its perceived enemies. This began with a campaign of baseless attacks against 14 major law firms⁴ that had done legal work disfavored by the administration, unlawfully attempting to extort those firms by imposing damaging restrictions on them.

Institutions of higher education have been targeted for censorship and repression. The Trump administration has weaponized civil rights laws to suppress criticism of Israel, Diversity Equity and Inclusion policies, and so-called "wokeness" across a wide range of issues,⁵ withholding billions of dollars in federal research grants from schools that refused to conform to its preferred ideological approach,⁶ and

coercing some into changing programs, curricula, admissions, and hiring, and curtailing the free-speech rights of students and faculty, to restore funding.⁷ The administration has engaged in a widespread, McCarthyite censorship and retaliation campaign against pro-Palestine campus advocates and universities that were the site of such activism. It has targeted hundreds of noncitizen students and scholars for arrest, detention, and deportation in retaliation for advocacy for Palestinian rights.⁸ These actions violate the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, expression, and association.

The White House instructed the Department of Justice to launch baseless investigations into NGOs that do work it disfavors,⁹ and is engaging in escalating attempts to unlawfully label many such organizations as “domestic terrorists” – a label it purports to apply to organizations that oppose its actions or that it deems “anti-American,” “anti-capitalist,” or “anti-Christian.”¹⁰ The DOJ and Federal Bureau of Investigation announced a host of civil and criminal investigations,¹¹ and created a ten-agency “Joint Mission Center”¹² to launch burdensome investigations designed to harass and intimidate these NGOs for exercising their rights to speak freely and lawfully oppose government policies.¹³

The administration has abandoned efforts to address the most serious domestic terror threats, even deleting a US government report documenting that far-right extremists were responsible for the vast majority of ideologically motivated violence.¹⁴ It has turned national security apparatus toward targeting progressive activists and organizations. The White House issued an executive order to designate “antifa” as a domestic terror organization,¹⁵ even though “antifa” is not an organization at all¹⁶ and there is no US law that gives the President the authority to designate domestic terrorists.¹⁷ Now, the administration has turned to a blatant effort to recast the so-called “antifa” as a foreign terrorist organization. After designating four groups in Europe as foreign “antifa” terrorist organizations,¹⁸ the administration pressured other

countries to take part in an international “summit” on antifa.¹⁹ These actions set the stage for the administration to label the organizations it disfavors as “antifa,” designate them as “terrorist-supporting” under existing laws, and try to shut them down.²⁰ The “antifa summit” was a substantial step in the administration’s plot to cause organizations that stand in the way of harmful policies to cease to exist, whether by stripping them of their nonprofit status²¹ or by simply intimidating donors and financial institutions into withdrawing their support.

Far-right members of Congress are also attacking human rights defenders. There have been more than 130 actions targeting nonprofit organizations during the current session of Congress.²² Congress has repeatedly pursued – so far, unsuccessfully – legislation that would allow the administration to exercise unprecedented power over NGOs and their staff, bypassing due process protections. These proposed laws would allow the Secretary of the Treasury, a political appointee, to revoke tax-exempt status unilaterally;²³ another would have allowed the Secretary of State, also a political appointee, to designate individuals as domestic terrorists and revoke their US passports.²⁴ Members of Congress have held multiple hearings that falsely targeted NGOs, accusing them of misusing federal grant money, being subject to malign foreign influences, or committing nefarious deeds simply for lawfully presenting their concerns to officials of a previous administration.²⁵

The administration has successfully diverted international attention from its domestic human rights abuses, including its campaign against civil society, by creating other sorts of threats and chaos to which UN member states must attend.²⁶ We urge member states to pay close attention to the US government’s escalating attacks on NGOs. Member states should use their influence to oppose and to deter the continuation of these attacks.

¹ [About the Southern Poverty Law Center](#).

² [ACLU History](#).

³ E.g., Council on Criminal Justice, [DOJ Funding Update: A Deeper Look at the Cuts](#), May 2025; Center for American Progress, [How the Trump Administration's Doge Cuts are Harming Women](#), June 9, 2025; ABC News, [Trump Administration halts funding for legal and for migrant children](#), March 21, 2025; Forbes, [Trump Pulls Funding for Catholic Charity That Helps Migrant Children Amid Clash with Pope](#), April 16, 2026.

⁴ American Constitution Society, [Law Firm Independence Under Attack With Executive Orders](#), April 10, 2025.

⁵ Higher Ed Dive, ["A razor's edge": How colleges are navigating civil rights probes under Trump](#), July 20, 2026; Reuters, [US scrutinizes more schools over admission practices, diversity and pro-Palestinian protests](#), August 6, 2026.

⁶ U.S. News & World Report, [Tracking Trump's Crackdown on Higher Education](#), August 4, 2026; NBC News, [Trump administration concedes it canceled research grants in blue states](#), July 24, 2026; Higher Ed Dive, [Inside the federal keyword lists that canceled billions in research funding](#), July 27, 2026.

⁷ The Daily Northwestern, [The Daily Explains: Which universities have struck deals with the Trump administration to restore research funding](#), November 12, 2025; New York Times, [How is Trump Targeting Universities, and How Are They Responding?](#), July 1, 2026.

⁸ BBC, [Marco Rubio says US revoked at least 300 foreign students' visas](#), March 27, 2025; Columbia Spectator, [Federal judge blocks Trump administration from deporting non-citizens for pro-Palestinian activity](#), January 22, 2026.

⁹ Presidential Memorandum for the Attorney General, [Use of Appropriated Funds for Illegal Lobbying and Partisan Political Activity by Federal Grantees](#), August 28, 2025.

¹⁰ Presidential National Security Memorandum, [Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organized Political Violence](#), September 25, 2025.

¹¹ Memorandum from the US Attorney General, [Implementing National Security Presidential Memorandum-7: Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organized Political Violence](#), December 4, 2025.

¹² Charity and Security Network, [FBI and IRS Concretize Implementation of NSPM-7](#), April 9, 2026.

¹³ National Council of Nonprofits, [Attacks on Freedom of Speech: What Nonprofits Need to Know](#), September 29, 2025.

¹⁴ The Hill, [DOJ quietly removes study showing right wing attacks 'outpace' those by the left](#), October 17, 2025.

¹⁵ Executive Order, [Designating Antifa as a Domestic Terrorist Organization](#), September 22, 2025.

¹⁶ International Center for Counter-Terrorism, ["It Can't Happen Here"? Designating Antifa as a Terrorist Organization in Europe](#), October 29, 2025.

¹⁷ Brennan Center, [Trump's Orders Targeting Anti-Fascism Aim to Criminalize Opposition](#), October 9, 2025.

¹⁸ US Department of State, [Terrorist Designations of Antifa Ost and Three Other Violent Antifa Groups](#), November 13, 2025.

¹⁹ New York Times, [US Pushes Allies to Chase a New Terrorism Target: The Far Left](#), April 9, 2026.

²⁰ White House Press Release, [Trump Administration Unleashes Global Campaign to Crush Radical Left Terrorism](#), July 16, 2026.

²¹ E.g., Treasury Secretary Bessent's vow to use "sophisticated financial counterterrorism capabilities" to target domestic organizations with regard to their funding sources. [Post on X](#) by RapidResponse47 (an official White House social media account), July 16, 2026.

²² International Center for Not-For-Profit Law, [Congressional Investigations into US Nonprofits](#); see, e.g., [Civil society coalition letter](#) opposing actions against hundreds of nonprofit organizations by Sen. Josh Hawley and the House Homeland Security Committee, July 16, 2025.

²³ [HR 9495, the Stop Terror-Financing and Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act](#); [HR 1, Sec. 112209](#); [HR 6800](#); [S. 3554](#).

²⁴ [HR 5300, Sec. 4.](#)

²⁵ *See, e.g.,* [House Oversight DOGE Subcommittee hearing on “Public Funds, Private Agendas: NGOs Gone Wild”](#); [House Judiciary Subcommittee hearing “How Leftist Nonprofit Networks Exploit Federal Tax Dollars to Advance a Radical Agenda”](#); [House Ways and Means Committee hearing “Foreign Influence in American Non-profits: Unmasking Threats from Beijing and Beyond”](#); House Judiciary Committee subcommittee on the Constitution, [Partisan and Profitable: The SPLC's Influence on Federal Civil Rights Policy](#); House Judiciary Committee, [The Southern Poverty Law Center: Manufacturing Hate](#).

²⁶ PBS News, [Trump unleashes chaos by distraction upon the international community](#), February 10, 2025.