December 19, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

President Biden,

We are organizations focused variously on human rights; civil rights and civil liberties; racial, social, and environmental justice; humanitarian approaches to foreign policy; faith-based initiatives; peacebuilding; government accountability; veterans’ issues; and the protection of civilians.

We write to express our deep concern about the lack of transparency surrounding your new policy on the use of lethal force outside recognized armed conflict. The Presidential Policy Memorandum (PPM), notified to Congress and reported in the New York Times, appears to be the latest iteration of a U.S. extrajudicial killing program targeting individuals suspected of terrorism outside of recognized battlefields. Many of us were among the more than 110 civil society groups that called last year for an end to this program, citing its appalling toll on Muslim, Brown, and Black communities in multiple parts of the world. Now, we are deeply dismayed by the administration’s decision to keep secret this policy and the associated national counterterrorism strategy.

The new National Security Strategy commits to using force only as the last resort, consistent with U.S. values and laws, with the informed consent of the American people, and while promoting transparency and accountability. Meeting these commitments requires, at a minimum, basic transparency about the rules and policies governing the use of force. In line with your commitments, we strongly urge you to publicly release the PPM and the accompanying national counterterrorism strategy. Previous administrations’ lethal force policies have been made public with redactions, demonstrating that it is possible to provide much-needed transparency regarding U.S. legal and policy justifications and processes for the use of force.

We believe these disclosures are vital for the American people and global community to understand the wide-reaching implications of this policy, and for embedding key transparency and accountability principles in U.S. national security policy for administrations to come. We urge you to publicly release the PPM and associated counterterrorism strategy without delay.

Signed,

Airwars
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Friends Service Committee
Amnesty International USA
Brennan Center for Justice
Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for International Policy
Center for Victims of Torture
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
CODEPINK
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
The Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute
CommonDefense.us
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
Defending Rights & Dissent
Demand Progress Education Fund
Digital Democracy Project
The Episcopal Church
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Justice Clinic, NYU School of Law
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
Institute for Policy Studies New Internationalism Project
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Massachusetts Peace Action
MPower Change
Mwatana for Human Rights
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
PAX
Peace Action
Peace Action New York State
Peace Education Center
Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness
Public Citizen
Reprieve US
ReThinking Foreign Policy
Saferworld (USA)
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows
United for Peace and Justice
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries
University Network for Human Rights
Veterans for American Ideals (VFAI)
Win Without War
Witness Somalia
Women for Weapons Trade Transparency
The Zomia Center

cc:

William J. Burns
Director, Central Intelligence Agency

Avril Haines
Director of National Intelligence