

11 November 2019

United States of America: Migrant rights defender Scott Warren on trial for providing humanitarian aid to migrants

On 12 November 2019, the United States authorities will prosecute migrant rights defender **Dr. Scott Warren** for the second time, charged with harbouring two migrants, after he provided them with humanitarian assistance in his town of Ajo, Arizona.

[Dr. Scott Warren](#) is a member of the group **No More Deaths / No Más Muertes**, which provides water and medical aid on migration routes, and documents the deaths of migrants in the desert. He lives in Ajo, Arizona and for over ten years has provided life-saving humanitarian aid to migrants and asylum seekers who attempt to cross the Mexico-US border through the Sonora desert.

On 11 June 2019, jurors in the felony trial against Scott Warren were unable to reach a verdict, (eight of the twelve jurors found Scott Warren 'not guilty'), prompting U.S. District Judge Raner C. Collins to declare a mistrial. On 2 July 2019, the US Attorney's Office in Tucson, Arizona announced it would retry Scott Warren in a felony case. The government dropped a conspiracy charge and will retry Scott Warren on 12 November 2019 on two counts of harbouring illegal migrants.

The criminalisation of Scott Warren represents an escalation of existing patterns of harassment against humanitarian volunteers and human rights defenders in Arizona. In 2018, officers of the Fish and Wildlife Services accused Scott Warren and other volunteers of No More Deaths for entering the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most deadly migrant corridors along the Mexico-US border, to provide life-saving aid, including water, food and medical supplies, to migrants crossing the desert.

The prosecution of the migrant rights defender forms part of a series of [systematic efforts](#) by the authorities in the United States to [hamper the work of](#) migrant rights defenders, and comes in the context of a migration crisis exacerbated by the border enforcement policy of “prevention through deterrence.” This policy, which funnels migrants and asylum seekers into the most deadly corridors of the desert, is believed to cause thousands of deaths and disappearances in the desert. Every year, the highest number of deaths related to migration in the United States is recorded in Arizona.

On recent country visits, Front Line Defenders found that defamation and criminalisation of humanitarian activity is increasing along the migrant caravan routes.

[A new investigative report](#) (September 2019) from Front Line Defenders and Mexican partners **PRAMI** and **RedTDT** found that human rights defenders in Mexico and the United States have been detained, harassed and criminalised for the provision of humanitarian aid, including distributing food, water and medical supplies, and operating emergency shelters for migrant families. The targeted surveillance, interrogation, and judicial harassment of human rights defenders providing humanitarian aid and support to asylum seekers demonstrates that authorities in the United States are escalating their tactics of deterrence.

Front Line Defenders condemns the criminalisation of Scott Warren, as it is believed to be directly motivated by his humanitarian work assisting migrants and documenting their deaths. Front Line Defenders is further concerned about the increased use of the judiciary to target human rights defenders and organisations who assist migrants at the United States-Mexico border, including by selective enforcement of the law.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the United States to:

1. Strongly condemn the unjust criminalisation of Scott Warren, as well as of other human rights defenders working on migration rights;
2. Immediately drop all charges against Scott Warren, as they are believed to be solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the United States are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 9 (5) *“The State shall conduct a prompt and impartial investigation or ensure that an inquiry takes place whenever there is reasonable ground to believe that a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms has occurred in any territory under its jurisdiction.”* and to Article 12 (1 and 2): *“(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director