

# **Human Rights Record of United States in 2008**

## **2008年美国的人权纪录**

**Information Office of the State Council  
of the People's Republic of China**

**国务院新闻办公室**

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地 址 北京市海淀区莲花池东路北小马厂6号华天大厦25层

邮政编码 100038

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February 27, 2009

The State Department of the United States released its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 on February 25, 2009. As in previous years, the reports are full of accusations of the human rights situation in more than 190 countries and regions including China, but mentioned nothing of the widespread human rights abuses on its own territory. The Human Rights Record of the United States in 2008 is prepared to help people around the world understand the real situation of human rights in the United States, and as a reminder for the United States to reflect upon its own issues.

## **I. On Life and Personal Security**

Widespread violent crimes in the United States pose serious threats to its people's lives, property and personal security.

According to a report published in September 2008 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the country reported 1.4 million violent crimes, including 17,000 murders (*The Washington Post*, June 10, 2008), and 9.8 million property crimes (*The World Journal*, September 16, 2008) in 2007. Throughout 2007, the estimated number of robberies counted 445,125, a 7.5 percent rise over the last five years (*The Washington Post*, September 16, 2008). In cities with 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, the number of murders increased by 3.7 percent than 2006 (*The Washington Post*, June 10, 2008). In those with populations of 10,000 to 30,000, the number of violent crimes rose 2.4 percent than 2006 (*The Washington Post*, September 16, 2008). US residents age 12 and older experienced an estimated 23 million crimes of violence or theft. The violent crime rate in 2007 was 20.7 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older; for property crimes it was 146.5 per 1,000 households. (Criminal Victimization, 2007, US Department of Justice, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/cv07.html>). Among cities with relatively high violence and murders rates, New Orleans reported 95 murders per 100,000 population, Baltimore 45, Detroit 44,

St. Louis 40, Philadelphia 27.8, Houston 16.2, and Dallas 16.1 (Crime down in U.S. and Phila: but the decline in violent crime here still left the city with the highest numbers among the 10 biggest cities, <http://www.lexisnexis.com>). In the United States, one murder is committed every 31 minutes, one rape in every 5.8 minutes, and one burglary every 14.5 seconds (*The Washington Post*, September 16, 2008).

Guns are widespread in the United States. The US Supreme Court asserted that Americans had an individual right to possess and use firearms, even when the guns are not related to service in a government militia, the Christian Science Monitor reported on June 27, 2008. Statistics show that the US citizens own about 200 million private guns, including 60 to 65 million pistols. A total of 48 states in the United States allow its residents to bear guns (The China Press, October 16, 2008), while it is believed that one can buy a gun at gun shows in 35 states without a background check (United Press International, October 3, 2008). A gun store outside Nashville, Tennessee, sold 70 guns on November 5, 2008 alone (<http://www.usqiaobao.com>). More than 20 airports in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco and other cities allow people with gun permits to carry firearms in the general public areas of the terminal (The China Press, October 15, 2008). A local high school in north Texas even let some teachers carry concealed weapons (*The New York Times*, August 29, 2008).

*The Washington Post* reported on December 5, 2007 that 10 states, including Virginia, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Mississippi, supplied 57 percent of the guns that were recovered in crimes in other states in 2007. The 10 states with the highest crime-gun export rates had nearly 60 percent more gun homicides than the 10 states with the lowest rates.

The frequent occurrences of gun killings were a serious threat to the lives of US citizens. According to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1.35 million high school students in 2007 were either threatened or injured with a weapon at least once on school property (United Press International, October 3, 2008). Young people represent an expanding proportion of all shooting victims, from 13 percent in 2002 to more than 21 percent in 2007. According to a Harvard University survey of high school students in 2006, a fifth of the 1,200 questioned in schools across Boston had witnessed a shooting. More than 40 percent believed it was easy to get a gun, and 28 percent said they did not feel safe on the bus or train (*The Boston Globe*, September 18, 2008). In the 2007-08 school year, a record 34 Chicago Public School students were killed (*The Chicago Tribune*, April 2, 2008). Within a week from February 7, 2008, the United States had seven shooting incidents, leading to 23 deaths and dozens of injuries. On March 27, 2008, five people in Georgia and Kentucky were shot dead (The Associated Press,



March 27, 2008, March 28, 2008). On the night of April 18, nine shootings were reported in a period of less than two hours in Chicago (*The Chicago Tribune*, April 21, 2008). In November, Baltimore had 31 shootings (*The Baltimore Sun*, December 2, 2008). On December 24, 2008, a man dressed in a Santa costume shot at a Christmas Eve party at his ex-parents-in-law's house, causing eight deaths, three injuries and three missing persons (The China Press, December 26, 2008).

## **II. On Civil and Political Rights**

In the United States, an increasing number of restrictions have been imposed on civil rights.

According to a report on the Washington Post website on April 4, 2008, the deep-packet inspection, a brand new surveillance technology, which has been applied, is able to record every visited web page, every sent email and every online search. Statistics indicated that at least 100,000 US Internet users had been tracked and the service providers had conducted tests on as many as 10 percent of the US netizens (*The Washington Post*, April 4, 2008). The FBI has been engaged in illegal surveillance launched by the US government nationwide, obtaining thousands of people's phone records, bank accounts and other personal information by unwarranted means.

*The Seattle Times* reported on July 15, 2008 that President Bush signed a bill on July 10 that overhauls government eavesdropping and called it "landmark legislation that is vital to the security of our people." The new law grants legal immunity to telecommunication companies that take part in wiretapping programs and authorizes the government to wiretap international communications between parties outside the US for anti-terrorism purposes without court approval. The US Department of Homeland Security disclosed in July 2008 that as part of border search policies, federal agents may take a traveler's laptop computer or other electronic device to an off-site location for an unspecified period of time without any suspicion of wrongdoing (*The Washington Post*, August 1, 2008). *The New York Times* reported on December 8, 2008 that the National Security Agency illegally wiretapped a Muslim scholar named Ali al-Timimi in Northern Virginia and intentionally withheld materials gained through eavesdropping during a 2005 trial, in which the scholar was convicted on terrorism charges. These materials may provide evidences that the US government's eavesdropping program has violated its citizens' civil rights.

Police abuse of force infringed on the civil rights of Americans. According to a report by the *Chicago Tribune* on June 25, 2008, Chicago witnessed eight shootings by police officers in two weeks in June, causing five with fatalities. Shapell

Terrell, a 39-year-old sanitation worker, was fatally shot by police officers on June 22 at the entrance of a two-story building, where all four apartments were filled with family members (*The Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 2008). Luis Colon, an 18-year-old man in Chicago, was shot and killed by a plainclothes police officer on June 24, when he was walking with his girlfriend to meet friends and eat at a restaurant (*The Chicago Tribune*, June 25, 2008). Daryl Battle, 20, was shot dead in his Brooklyn apartment in New York City on the morning of August 2, 2008. Michael Mineo was sodomized by a police officer's baton on October 15, on a busy Brooklyn subway platform (*The New York Times*, December 10, 2008). Gilberto Blanco was shot and killed when he was swinging a folding chair in front of a policewoman named Dawn Ortiz in a parking lot near the Coney Island church (*The New York Times*, December 1, 2008).

The proportion of US prisoners to its population has hit a new high. *The Washington Post* reported on July 11, 2008 that the United States has 2.3 million criminals behind bars, more than any other nation in the world. A report issued by the US Department of Justice on December 11, 2008 said that over 7.3 million people were on probation, in jail or on parole at the end of 2007, equivalent to 3.2 percent of all US adult residents or one in every 31 adults (The United Press International, December 11, 2008). For black men aged between 20-34, one in nine was in

jail (*The Guardian*, March 1, 2008). The rate of prisoners, higher than any period in the US history, was almost six times the world average (125 in every 100,000 people) (*The New York Times*, April 23, 2008). According to statistics, the recidivism rate stayed high in the United States. Half the people of previous convictions were sentenced to prison again within three years.

There is no proper protection of prisoners' basic rights. Information released in August 2008 by the US Department of Justice showed that the rate of conviction by US courts has been on a rise since 1993. Convicts who committed violent crimes accounted for more than 50 percent of the total. California had 172,000 inmates in its 33 prisons, which were designed for just over half that number, leaving each inmate a space of only 6 square foot (Prison overcrowding blamed for health woes, <http://www.sfgate.com>, November 19, 2008). In Prince George of Maryland, the Upper Marlboro jail held an estimated 1,500 prisoners while it was designed for about 1,330 (*The Washington Post*, July 25, 2008). There were frequent reports inmates dying from prison officers' violence. An Amnesty International report in 2008 said Taser was widely used to control inmates in the US prisons and detention centers. It had tracked more than 300 cases since 2001 in which people died after being shocked by a Taser. Among them, 69 died in 2008. According to a report by the *Washington Post* on July 25, more than 10 jail officers in Prince

George of Maryland have arrest records. At least six officers were suspended in the past seven months and nine others still worked in the prison though they were accused of crimes or violence. Baron Pikes, arrested on a cocaine charge, died in January 2008 after a police officer had shocked him nine times with a Taser (The CNN website, on July 22, 2008). Ronnie L. White, 19, died of strangulation on June 29, 2008 when he was held in solitary confinement at a correction center in Prince George County, Maryland (*The Washington Post*, September 23, 2008). According to the latest statistics released by the US Department of Justice in June 2008, 1,154 inmates in the federal and state prisons died of AIDS between 2001 and 2006 (Number of state prisoner deaths, by cause of death, 2001-2006, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov>). Some US jails have become the "new asylums" for drug addicts and mental patients, with six out of 10 people in jail living with a mental illness (Jails bulging with people with mental illnesses, the homeless and people detained for immigration offenses; costing counties billions, [http:// justicepolicy.org](http://justicepolicy.org)). *The Economist* reported on May 10, 2008 that the US was one of the few countries where the felons were deprived of rights. Some US states even forbid felons to vote.

### **III. On Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

American people's economic, social and cultural rights are not

properly protected.

There is a wide wealth gap in the American society. According to a New York Times report on October 5, 2008, the United States developed the most unequal distribution of income and wages of any high-income country over the past 30 years. The richest fifth of the Americans earn an average of 168,170 US dollars a year, about fifteen times the figure for the bottom fifth -- 11,352 US dollars. The top one percent of New York City tax filers received 37 percent of the city's adjusted gross income-- which includes wages, business income and capital gains, among other earnings (*The New York Times*, April 9, 2008). There are 64 billionaires in New York City with a combined net worth of 344 billion US dollars, 469 percent more than the collective worth of the city's billionaires two years ago (*The Washington Post*, September 29, 2008). A UN report released on October, 22, 2008 showed that the wealth gap in big American cities, including New York, Washington, Atlanta and New Orleans, was almost as wide as some African cities, and the ratio of income inequality in American cities was very high.

The number of people who are homeless, in poverty and hunger increased in the United States in 2007. Figures released in August, 2008 by the US Census Bureau showed that 12.5 percent of Americans, or 37.3 million people, were living in poverty in

2007, up from 36.5 million in 2006. Eighteen percent of children (13.3 million) were impoverished in 2007, up from 17.4 percent (12.8 million) in 2006 (Reuters, August 27, 2008). Some 7.6 million American families, or 9.8 percent of the total, were living in poverty. In 2007, the annual income of 1.56 million American people, 41.8 percent of the country's population in poverty, reached only half of the poverty threshold. In New York City, latest study shows 23 percent of the people are living in poverty (*The Washington Post*, July 14, 2008).

According to a nationwide survey jointly conducted by the *Washington Post*, Harvard University and others in 2008, about 80 percent of low-income workers could not afford to buy fuel or save for pension insurance under the influence of the financial crisis. More than 60 percent of them could not afford medical insurance and 50 percent could not pay for food or housing. The Reuters reported that food stamps, the main U.S. anti-hunger program which helps the needy buy food, set a record in September 2008, as more than 31.5 million Americans used the program, a year-on-year increase of 17 percent (Reuters, December 3, 2008). About 48 percent of New York City residents, had difficulty affording food for themselves and their families in 2008, doubling that of 2003. Already, 1.3 million New York City residents rely on emergency food organizations, up 24 percent from 1 million in 2004 (The NYC Hunger Experience

2008 Update: Food Poverty Soars as Recession Hits Home). Some 68.8 percent of emergency food agencies reported that they did not have enough food to fulfill demand (Survey shows impact of hunger crisis, <http://www.nyccah.org>). More than 2 million American families were unable to pay back house loans. Statistics released on November 13, 2008 showed that foreclosure filings grew 25 percent nationally in October 2008 over the same month in 2007. More than 84,000 properties were repossessed by banks in October (The China Press, November 14, 2008).

Statistics collected by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development showed that the number of chronically homeless people living in the nation's streets and shelters reached 123,833 in 2007. About 1.6 million people experienced homelessness and found shelter between October 1, 2006 and September 30, 2007 (*The New York Times*, July 30, 2008). The number of requests for emergency shelter doubled from fiscal year 2007 to fiscal 2008 (*World Journal*, October 22, 2008). In Louisiana and Kentucky, the number of homeless families increased to 931. In December 2008, 19 of the 25 American cities surveyed reported some kind of increase in homelessness between October 1, 2007 and October 30, 2008 (Advocacy Groups Fear New Wave of Homeless, <http://ipsnews.net>). The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless estimated that more than 6,000 people were homeless in the District on an average



day. Among them, 47 percent were "chronically homeless" (*The Washington Times*, December 13, 2008).

The rights of laborers are not properly protected. The unemployment rate in America keeps high. Statistics released by the US Department of Labor on January 9, 2009 showed that the unemployment rate increased from 4.6 percent in 2007 to 5.8 percent in 2008, the highest since 2003. A total of 2.6 million jobs were lost in 2008, the biggest loss since 1945. In December 2008 alone, 524,000 jobs were lost, driving the unemployment rate to a 16-year-high of 7.2 percent (*The New York Times*, January 10, 2009). The number of long-term unemployed (those jobless for 27 weeks or more) reached 2.2 million in November, up by 822,000 over the past 12 months (Employment Summary, <http://data.bls.gov>). According to a poll conducted by Harris Interactive, the median time Americans spent working in 2008, which included housekeeping and studying, was 46 hours, which was one hour more than that of 2007. One in every four Americans said their working hours increased in 2008. The median time Americans spent playing in 2008 was 16 hours, a decline of four hours from a year ago and the lowest since 1973 (Agence France Presse, December 10, 2008). A survey of day-laborer sites in 25 states found that half of all workers had been underpaid or not paid at least once (*The Washington Post*, July 8, 2008). In July 2008, a Minnesota court ruled Wal-Mart Stores Inc