



“I No Longer Love Blue Skies”

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“I no longer love blue skies. In fact, I now prefer grey skies. The drones do not fly when the skies are grey.” - Zubair

Eight years ago this week, then-13-year-old Zubair and his sister Nabeela [testified](#) before Congress on the impact of the U.S. armed drone program. One year before, a U.S. drone had killed their grandmother as she was gardening outside her home.

This story is all too common. In the remote areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and a growing list of countries in which the U.S. conducts drone strikes, communities talk about the hum of drones overhead and the constant fear of terror from the sky. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, the U.S. has launched over 14,000 strikes in the past decade, resulting in 910 - 2,200 civilian deaths. Hundreds of these have been children.

In 2016, a Pakistani artist collective displayed a massive public image of a child's face, the victim of a U.S. drone strike. The image was large enough to be seen by satellite mapping software as a reminder to drone operators, and the world, of the human cost of drone attacks. [#NotABugSplat](#) was the accompanying social media hashtag that pointed to the dehumanizing jargon often used by drone operators to refer to kills or “bug splats.”

“Bug splat” is the pinnacle of callous normalization that has accompanied these killings. “Bug splat” suggests these deaths are small, collateral, even necessary consequences of life. They are not. These civilian killings by drones are happening on our watch, ordered by our leaders, and justified as necessary for our protection.

Weeks ago, following the deadly attack on Kabul airport, President Biden authorized a strike on a suspected ISIS-K terrorist planning a second attack. The hellfire missile struck its intended target, a white 1996 Toyota Corolla. The victim, however, was Zemari Ahmadi, a humanitarian aid worker and father on his way to

deliver water containers to his family. Ten were killed in the strike, including seven children.

While President Biden claimed he ended the “forever war” in Afghanistan, nothing could be further from the truth. While announcing the U.S. withdrawal, the president simultaneously reassured the American public of our “over-the-horizon” capability, essentially doubling down on U.S. exceptionalism and the promise of lethal drone technology (only now with less reliable on-the-ground intelligence).

As people of faith, we must not allow politicians to obscure the facts or avoid the faces of victims. Let us join impacted communities in denouncing the moral failure of drone warfare. The [Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare](#) has several free videos available to learn about the impact of lethal drones. As Congress starts to pay attention to the issue, legislation will soon be introduced calling for greater transparency and accountability—which you can support. As a global community, we can come together to ban armed drones the same way we’ve banned biological, chemical, and other weapons that threaten our humanity through global treaties.

Together, let us create a world in which all kids can love and enjoy blue skies.

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