Local to Global: DC’s UPR Projects

Two Collaborations Send Human Rights Reports to United Nations

Washington, DC: The DC Human Rights City Alliance, the United Nations Association of the National Capital Area (UNA-NCA), and the George Washington Law School International Human Rights Clinic (GW IHRC) have published a report on the most important human rights issues in DC as part of the United States’ Universal Periodic Review. UNA-NCA in collaboration with the Gender Justice Project of the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law have published a separate report of five human rights issues as seen through a gender lens.

In 2008, at the urging of a broad range of DC grassroots organizations led by the American Friends Service Committee, the District of Columbia was declared a Human Rights City by City Council Resolution (CER 17-461), making Washington, DC the first Human Rights City in the United States.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a process of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council that examines the human rights performance of each Member State [country]. The official report on the United States’ human rights performance will be submitted by the Trump Administration in May 2020.

Local communities and civil society organizations have the opportunity to contribute reports to inform the United States’ review through a process called shadow reporting. The shadow report submitted by the DC Human Rights City Alliance, UNA-NCA and the GW IHRC Clinic spotlights local human rights challenges including DC statehood, poverty & economic inequality, and housing/homelessness. The shadow report submitted by the Gender Justice Project and UNA-NCA addresses women’s health, affordable housing for women and children, income security and equal pay, gender-based violence, harassment, sex trafficking and inhumane prison conditions for women and children.

In addition to submitting the reports to the United Nations, they are available online at www.unanca.org.

One report advocates for DC Statehood and sustainable housing reform. Importantly, it argues for these as solutions to clear and pervasive human rights violations: “First, unlike persons living in the 50 states, D.C. residents do not have voting representation in the federal Congress, which, moreover, directly oversees the District’s legislative and judicial powers. Second, the District’s poorest inhabitants continue to suffer from discriminatory housing policies and the lack of adequate affordable housing. While their city continues to expand and gentrify, these residents remain deprived of their basic human rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.”
The second report focuses on gender equity in the District of Columbia, calling for the city to conduct an intersectional gender analysis of its operations, programs, and policies. "At a time of prosperity in our nation's capital, far too many women -- especially women of color -- lack basic human rights to economic security, housing, health care, and freedom from gender-based violence," says Paula Boland, Executive Director of UNA-NCA. “We urge D.C. to fulfill its promise as a Human Rights City by adopting the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in its legislative process."

The groups submitting the reports hope that framing these issues through a human rights lens will create a sense of moral and legal urgency to act, both locally and at a national level. “These reports demonstrate that DC still has a long way to go in upholding the promise of a human rights city. Documenting where our policies and practices fall short on human rights values will help ‘Bring Human Rights Home’ to DC. And as the first human rights city in the United States, DC’s leadership in human rights could spark a national shift towards prioritizing human rights,” said Rachel Bergsieker, Human Rights Learning Associate for the American Friends Service Committee. In submitting these reports, we strive not only to catalogue DC human rights violations impacting the United States’ human rights record, but also to demand local accountability for securing and protecting human rights for all Washingtonians.

###

The DC Human Rights City Alliance is a coalition of organizations, movements and activists working to secure protect and promote human rights for all Washingtonians through education and advocacy. It is convened under the American Friends Service Committee, DC Peace and Economic Justice Program. The American Friends Service Committee is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service. Its work is based on the belief in the worth of every person and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.

Established in 1953, UNA-NCA is one of the oldest and largest chapters of the United Nations Association of the USA. UNA-NCA is a not-for-profit membership-based organization that works with foreign policy and political decision makers, schools of all levels, and other organizations in the National Capital Area to build knowledge, understanding, informed opinion, and new ideas on the United Nations, its specialized agencies, and its relationship with the United States.

Founded in 2004, the GW Law School International Human Rights (IHR) Clinic engages actively in domestic and transnational human rights advocacy on a range of cutting-edge issues. Under the direction of Professor Arturo J Carrillo, the Clinic partners with civil society organizations in the United States and abroad to press for the protection of human rights in a variety of contexts.

The Gender Justice Project was founded in 2017 to heighten public awareness of the legal issues that impact women and LGBTQ individuals, especially those who have suffered multiple forms of discrimination. GJP is located at the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law, a public HBCU in the nation’s capital. Our goal is to combat gender inequities by influencing public policy development and legislation through education and advocacy.