

***Bringing Human Rights Home: Local policy recommendations from  
the UPR report to the U.S. Government***

US Universal Periodic Review 2019-2020 (Third Cycle)

*based on work by the Pittsburgh UPR Cities Initiative*

In 2019-2021, the United States Government underwent a comprehensive assessment of its human rights record as part of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. The Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance worked with numerous community partners—including Casa San Jose, Hill District Consensus Group, Pittsburgh for CEDAW, Pittsburghers for Public Transit, Just Harvest, and the City’s Commission on Human Relations and Gender Equity Commissions to assemble a report on local human rights conditions and recommendations for this review of the US human rights record, entitled *Racial inequity at the core of human rights challenges in Pittsburgh*. Our coalition has continued to educate residents about the United Nations UPR process and to help monitor and raise consciousness about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on residents—particularly those from historically oppressed groups. Since the spring of 2020, we have hosted regular webinars as part of a community forum series called Learning from COVID-19: Shaping a Health and Human Rights Agenda for our Region.

Our process of working together as a local coalition to develop a UPR stakeholder submission has expanded our community’s understandings of intersecting dimensions of human rights and the ways the pandemic has affected these rights. We have also sought to learn how other communities have worked to improve human rights protections and to share recommendations and guidelines emerging from the United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on how to ensure human rights during this global health crisis. We have been joined in this work by organizers in cities and communities across the United States—including New Orleans, Washington DC, Jackson, Chicago, Atlanta and others—all working to support more people-centered policies in our communities. Working in collaboration with other communities, Pittsburgh organizers contributed to a national stakeholder submission to the UPR from U.S. cities, “The Growth of Corporate Influence in Sub-National Political & Legal Institutions Undermines U.S. Compliance with International Human Rights Obligations.”

This work has contributed to our understandings of human rights governance and the importance of community involvement and participation in efforts to support human rights work in our communities. We have been fortunate to have supportive leaders in our City’s Commissions on Human Relations and Gender Equity who have seen our work as complementary to their Commissions’ mandates. Moreover, we have learned about the serious gaps in U.S. human rights institutions that leave local officials with poor legal guidance and support and insufficient financial resources to carry out their international legal obligations and related human rights expectations. With the following report and with our continuing engagement in the UPR process, we hope to strengthen Pittsburgh’s and our region’s compliance with international human rights standards and to make our community a model for others.

We have reviewed the Final Report of the UPR Working Group and consulted with international human rights experts in compiling the following set of recommendations, and we build upon the work of community leaders in Pittsburgh and other cities to define priority areas for action. We found that these recommendations fell into four major categories:

1. End Structural Racism and Racial Discrimination,
2. Fulfill International Human Rights Expectations & Legal Obligations,
3. Advance gender equity, and
4. Strengthen protections for economic, social and cultural rights

We note that many of the 347 recommendations the international community brought to our nation's leaders relate to areas of local jurisdiction, and indeed, the United States' ability to fulfill its international obligations and expectations from the UPR all require substantive changes in policies and practices at the local level. Certainly, change is needed at the federal level to better support municipalities as well as state and county leaders, and we will work with national human rights advocates and local officials to promote such changes.

The following report highlights specific actions we can take in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County to demonstrate our commitment to human rights and aspiration to become a model for other cities, as expressed in our City Proclamation naming Pittsburgh the Fifth Human Rights City in the United States.

#### **Summary of key UPR Recommendations with Local/County Applications**

##### **1) End Structural Racism and Racial Discrimination**

- *Undertake urgent measures to counter systemic, institutionalized racism in every facet of public policy*
- *Make fundamental reforms to end police impunity for human rights violations, protect voting rights and rights of peaceful assembly.*
- *Address structural racism and inequities*
- *Combat right wing extremism, xenophobia & racial discrimination, and bullying in schools*
- *End police & justice system discrimination & Strengthen police training in human rights*
- *Increase protections of the rights of immigrants*
- *Promote and protect rights of Indigenous peoples*

##### **2) Fulfill International Human Rights Expectations & Legal Obligations**

- *Strengthen human rights institutions & encourage local engagement in national human rights implementation efforts;*
- *Bring the United States Government into full compliance with its obligations under the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies (CERD, ICCPR, CAT)<sup>1</sup>*
- *Develop Local Action Plans for major human rights world conferences and other international human rights agreements including the Durban Conference Action Plan to combat racism,<sup>3</sup> racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances, and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.*
- *Ratify human rights treaties<sup>2</sup>*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Implement obligations in Global Conference Declarations and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) regime</i></li> <li>• <i>Promote and prioritize human rights education</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>3) Advance Gender Equity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Recommit to women’s rights in Pittsburgh and the region</i></li> <li>• <i>Promote gender equity and reproductive health</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide paid maternity leave</i></li> <li>• <i>Combat gender violence</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>4) Strengthen protections for economic, social and cultural rights in addition to political and civil rights</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Introduce reforms to realize expanded and equitable access to all economic, social and cultural rights;</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide universal health care &amp; end health inequities</i></li> <li>• <i>Address homelessness and housing insecurity</i></li> <li>• <i>End gun violence and promote stronger gun regulation</i></li> <li>• <i>Combat climate change</i></li> <li>• <i>Protect voting rights</i></li> <li>• <i>Protect right to peaceful assembly</i></li> </ul>

**Notes**

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<sup>1</sup>The United States has ratified the following international human rights treaties and is legally bound by these treaties and their review processes: International Convention Against Torture (CAT), International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

<sup>2</sup> In 2016, the City of Pittsburgh followed other U.S. cities in adopting an ordinance implementing the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This model of treaty ratification “from below” can help generate support for greater compliance of our federal government with global human rights expectations while strengthening local capacities for implementing these in communities.

<sup>3</sup>On September 22, 2021, the United Nations will hold a High-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. This offers an opportunity for Pittsburgh to contribute to national conversations on ways to combat structural racism in U.S. cities and communities.

**References & Documentation**

- [U.S. Report to the UN Universal Periodic Review, Third Cycle 15 May 2020 \(A/HRC/WG.6/36/USA/1\)](#)
- [Summary of Stakeholder Submissions \(Civil Society\)](#)

- [Final Report of the UPR Working Group](#) 15 December 2020—Including 347 recommendations to the U.S. Government
- [U.S. Response to UPR Working Group report](#), March 17, 2021 (Note: the state under review must respond to all of the recommendations made by the working group, indicating whether or not it supports each recommendation.)