

Workshop on Human Rights Cities and Today's Political Context
Friday July 27, 2018, Washington DC

This workshop convened human rights activists, scholars, and policy practitioners to consider lessons learned from a growing global “human rights cities” movement. Participants heard presentations about global and national trends, opportunities, and challenges to “bringing human rights home” here in the United States. We considered the question of whether and how human rights advocacy might be strengthened through the efforts of the National Human Rights Cities Alliance, which grew from previous such convenings in the Human Rights Cities of Pittsburgh and Washington DC. Lessons from the workshop are intended to shape the ongoing work of the National Human Rights Cities Alliance and its support for local human rights organizers and movements providing leadership and advocacy to secure, protect, and promote human rights for all people.

The following provides some roughly sketched notes from this workshop, based on both the formal presentations and discussion with all workshop participants. The aim is not to transcribe all the ideas presented, but rather to highlight and synthesize some of the lessons emerging from the entire program and discussions among participants. The summary includes links to resources provided by speakers and other participants that can help organizers working in a variety of local settings.

[Link to full program](#)

- [Link to Livestream Recording-Part 1](#)
- [Link to Livestream Recording-Part 2](#)

Lessons and Ideas-Highlights

- Participants agreed that a formal human rights city proclamation is not as critical as is mobilized group of residents committed to advancing human rights practices)
- **Activity—Graz Human Rights Council: Human Rights Election Monitoring—** independent human rights body monitored all campaign advertisement and reported all hate speech present. The aim was to undercut the efforts of far-right/anti-immigrant groups to fuel polarized electoral contests.
- Local leaders need to be educated about international human rights law and their responsibilities to implement international treaties/law
 - USHRN—has brought municipal leaders to Geneva and other UN venues to help them learn and share local experiences relevant to human rights (Birmingham, AL example)
- [National Economic and Social Rights Initiative](#) (NESRI) *The [New Social Contract](#)* – Provides a roadmap of strategies to help address the root causes of human rights violations and exclusions. It seeks to rebuild community by addressing historic fault lines/systemic exclusions. Promotes preventive approach that centers frontline communities. Approach is **values-driven** (vs. interest-driven) and *targeted universalism*--

universal solutions that prioritize needs of historically oppressed people and communities.

- New forms of participatory democracy are needed—existing institutions exclude too many groups
- Need for local-global analyses and networks
- Coalition work is critical—constant effort to find ways to bring in diversity of groups and voices
- Radical imagination is needed to realize human rights communities—political and legal imaginations
 - Example: Aristotle Theresa Lawsuit vs. DC for policies that systematically displace African Americans from city: [Washington, DC, Is Being Sued for Gentrification](#)
- Centering values: TAUPE: Transparency, Accountability, Universality, Participation, Equity
- **The Commons**—A critical focus for human rights cities/communities?
 - Linking environmental justice with other human rights—communities vs. the extractive economy.
 - Model for **moving from Extractive to Living Economies**
 - [Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance](#)-formed to work for global climate justice
 - [Our Power Campaign](#)- U.S.-based Grassroots Global Justice brings together frontline voices in global climate justice struggle
- **Corporate power**—the growth of transnational corporations poses a major threat to democracy at all levels, and cities are particularly impacted.
 - [Kochtapus](#) map of money and influence
 - Seattle's [People's Economy Lab](#) is working to create a community-centered economy in Seattle. Assessing the opportunity costs of corporate giveaways and engaging public in critical dialogue about taxes and the work they help support (vs. dominant anti-taxation theme)
 - In Pittsburgh the Human Rights City Alliance convened several public sessions to provide space for critical discussion of how an Amazon HQ2 development would impact human rights in the city. The panels centered the voices of groups that would be most disadvantaged by this development: [Forged for All? the Amazon HQ2 Debate & the Future of Pittsburgh](#)
 - Unite residents around vision of what kind of city/community we want/need— vs. simply reacting to corporate initiative.
 - Re-framing jobs debate—vs. idea that jobs must come from outside investment
 - UN [Treaty on Transnational Corporations and their Supply Chains with regard to Human Rights](#)) The Human Rights Council Open-Ended Inter-Governmental Working Group (OEIGWG) was charged with developing “an international legally binding instrument on TNCs and other business enterprises with respect to human rights” by the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 26/9 of 26 June 2014.
- Human Rights Cities need to make better use of international human rights review mechanisms and their reports/ reporting procedures, such as:

- [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination \(CERD\)](#) & US Human Rights Network Shadow Report process
- [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) provide avenues to advocate for social, economic and cultural rights
- UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty—Philip Alston 2018 Report to US: [Poverty in the United States and the Exacerbation of Inequality in the Age of Trump](#)
- [UN Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#)
- **Cities for CEDAW**—*reflects a strategy of bottom-up treaty ratification: “[Applying a Global Treaty on Gender Equality to American Cities](#)”*
- **Human Rights and Housing-** [UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Housing](#)
 - [Cities for Adequate Housing: a global alliance for the right to housing](#)—“*A city without residents is not a city, and without dignified housing and an adequate environment and neighbourhood it’s impossible to guarantee people’s quality of life. With this premise, major cities from around the world made their case at the headquarters of the United Nations.*”
 - [Housing is a Human Right: Slideshow](#) -- Resources and links to mobilize communities around the Human Right to Housing
- Activity: (Hawaii) Career fair for common good

We were especially privileged to have two speakers from Europe who travelled overseas to attend our meeting. These speakers, Frederique Hanotier and Anna Lindstrom, brought a systematic analysis based on research across a number of human rights cities and human rights initiatives happening in Europe. More detailed notes/highlights from their presentations appear below:

Localizing human rights

Requires attention to how to frame issues for diverse groups

Need to re-calibrate strategies and ideas as new lessons and information come together

Reflexivity is important in this work

Rights-based horizontal governance—linking diverse actors from community, government, academia

Working to change the script of politics—center people and community well-being over profits, growth

Frederique Hanotier, [European Fundamental Rights Forum](#)

[EU Policy Lab](#)—Vienna May 2018—meeting on cities and governance—Key themes:

- Participation
- Quality of life for residents

- Contextualized policy analysis & planning

European Fundamental Rights Forum =Working to build a network of cities in Europe to promote human rights city organizing.

Key steps:

- Map stakeholders
- Identify interests & Issues
- Proclaim city's commitment to human rights
- Defining sustainable strategy/plan
- Inclusivity
- Evaluation

Lessons:

- Critical reflection is essential
- Work at multiple levels—not just municipal
- Engage innovative methods—not politics as usual
- Aim for equity always

Challenges:

- Localizing human rights
- Cultural differences vs. building a human rights culture
- Framing to reach diverse groups

City of Vienna has Human Rights Office—a municipal initiative with a focus on children's rights

Anna **Anna Lindström**, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)-- *Human Rights & Municipalities in Europe*

- SALAR Human Rights education portal
- Indicators lab
- Stressed the need for a **horizontal process** involving: residents; civil society organizations; trade/industry; city officials; universities
- Need to think about human rights work as **governance**—*building rights-based governance across diverse places in society: government, schools, employers, service providers*
- Attention to **principles**: Non-discrimination, equality, participation, inclusion, responsibility, transparency
- Measuring impacts