

Recommendations for Human Rights City Organizing Building on Past Lessons and Practices

*Based on proceedings from a 2022 convening of human rights practitioners led by the Human Rights Go Local Academy (Full reference below), in combination with experiences of US human rights city organizing network.

	Description	Models
Actors	<i>Who must be involved in work to support and promote human rights city?</i> Local governments University leaders/academics Civil society organizations	Local Human Rights City Steering Committees, ideally with representation from government agencies and staff/funding from municipality to coordinate Committee’s work. Leadership and grounding must be with community organizations!
COMMITMENTS to Human Rights Principles	Localities should express commitment to set of human rights principles—ranging from a specific treaty (i.e., CEDAW) to UDHR and related body of international human rights laws.	* Global Charter Agenda for Human Rights in the City (United Cities and Local Governments, 2011)+++ European Charter for the Safeguarding of Rights in the City (2001) Gwangju Declaration on Human Rights City (World Human Rights Cities Forum, 2011) Gwangju Human Rights Charter (2012)
ACCOUNTABILITY: Action Plans with targets, timetables, and indicators	Localities should engage a process to identify human rights priorities and reasonable targets and timelines for achieving these.	International Coalition of Inclusive & Sustainable Cities 10 Point Action Plan Fundamental Rights Agency Framework for reinforcing rights locally (2021)
Mechanisms & Procedures for monitoring & assessing compliance	Communities should develop and provide sufficient authority and resources for a process of collecting and analyzing data on specified, concrete indicators of human rights achievements. Public engagement in a regular review of the community’s human rights record is key.	Municipal human rights advisory commission- i.e., Winnipeg, Human Rights Committee of Council Municipal human rights secretariat (paid staff) UN Training Manual on Human Rights Reporting Routine reporting process, such as York (UK) Human Rights Reporting Process UN Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary Local Review UN Human Rights Review Processes, e.g., CERD, UPR Cities Eugene Oregon’s Triple Bottom Line Tool Seattle Racial Equity Toolkit Government Alliance on Race and Equity Toolkits Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments

<p>Strengthened enforcement mechanisms</p>	<p>Global human rights leaders and civil society need to make compliance easier /more politically rewarding and non-compliance more costly. HR Cities encourage and support compliance through constructive government engagement and peer-pressure and by promoting recommendations and good practices to help remedy shortfalls.</p>	<p>Human Rights Ombudsperson (i.e., Montreal) Human Rights Budgeting</p> <p>Human Rights City Government Networks - - - Government Alliance on Race and Equity Canada Right to Home Municipal Working Group</p> <p>Local human rights capacity building through, e.g.; public education; cultural work, training of police and government officials; incorporating human rights in school curriculum, etc.</p>
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*Recommended model for human rights cities in HRGL 2022 Synthesis Report. This builds on previously established charters and integrates input from multiple countries/regions.

+++[GLOBAL CHARTER-AGENDA FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CITY](#)

[Suggested Action Plan](#)

- Adoption and application of a human rights training program for the employees of local public services, with emphasis on the respect for differences, coexistence and the common good, as well as, if needed, the hiring of human rights specialists.
- b) A participatory analysis or audit of human rights in the city, which would allow for a diagnostic of the situation and the formulation of a local development plan based on citizen participation.
- c) Periodic evaluation of the Charter-Agenda as part of a public consultation.
- d) A participatory local action plan on human rights, as a result of the previous analysis and evaluation.
- e) Creation of different institutions, independent of the political authority, empowered to: provide information to citizens on how to gain access to their rights; receive complaints and suggestions from the city’s inhabitants; perform inquiry and social mediation functions.

Further details

Actors & Agency

Local government commitment can vary, and at minimum the engagement with relevant human rights/anti-discrimination agencies such as Commissions on Human Rights or Diversity and Inclusion officials in local government. Ideally, executive and legislative agencies are engaged in leadership work, and staff is allocated and sufficiently resourced to both facilitate and support civil society engagement with local governance that relates to the realization of human rights and the operationalization of human rights action plans, monitoring, and follow-through/enforcement.

Universities are common partners in human rights city work, and they can play multiple different support roles in helping support human rights education, provide assistance with research, and contributing leadership to support and guide human rights city implementation. Universities should be recognized as both part of civil society and as targets for human rights enforcement, since they often

play important roles shaping local economic decisionmaking and since their activities impact the human rights of residents, including their access to educational resources and affordable housing.

Civil society must be a key partner in the work to shape human rights commitments and action plans as well as to monitor and enforce these. Ideally, diverse actors in civil society come together around the aim of advancing the human rights city agenda in a practical way through the varied work of community members. A formal ‘human rights city alliance’ can help coordinate and lead civil society input and participation in relevant work of setting human rights goals, monitoring process, and pressing for improvements in human rights practices. Following the [people-centered human rights principles](#), the most vulnerable groups who are denied the full enjoyment of human rights are typically least able to be fully engaged and influential in the organizing and policy processes involved. Thus, human rights leaders must facilitate an intentional process to empower such groups and incorporate their voices and interests in planning and monitoring work. Also important are efforts to build capacities of civil society to be full participants in democratic local governance.

Work on human right cities has generated important lessons about the important roles civil society plays in improving human rights practices. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Building local constituencies for human rights
2. Improving knowledge and capacity of diverse civil society actors to support human rights in local institutions and governance;
3. Improve public and local officials’ understandings of relevant human rights laws and standards and enhance their salience in local policy processes; and
4. Strengthen cooperation between community advocates and local government officials to press for changes in national policies to improve local capacities for protecting and promoting human rights.

Commitments: City officials should formally commit to incorporating human rights into public policies, and a number of models have been developed in different regional contexts. The recommended model is [Global Charter Agenda for Human Rights in the City](#) (United Cities and Local Governments, 2011), given its comprehensiveness and that it has built upon lessons from different regions. The goal of human rights city advocates should be to ensure that commitments are made based on desire to realize human rights of residents rather than (purely) to advance political or business agendas. In addition to securing formal commitments from local officials through a Human Rights City Ordinance or Charter or even a less binding Proclamation, human rights city advocates should work to build commitment of residents to engage actively in work to help build and support human rights city practices and policies.

Implementation/ Responsibility/ Realizing Human Rights Outcomes

Linking local human rights performance to global standards is also helpful, and this can happen through, e.g., the Sustainable Development Goals and [Voluntary Local Review](#) process as well as through individual treaty reviews or the UN Universal Periodic Review process. Experience indicates that human rights city advocates should work to make human rights a “way of life” in their communities. This needs to happen on multiple fronts—through education/ socialization of various publics (including government officials) in human rights principles and good practices. Promoting the use of positive “peer pressure” across cities by encouraging exchange and cooperation between local governments and multi-stakeholder engagement across local, national, regional and global scales.

Summing up

Human rights city organizers should aim to contribute to advancing the following activities as part of efforts to improve the realization of human rights in local contexts:

- Facilitate multi-dimensional and multi-actor aspects of human rights city organizing
- Dedicate /ensure sufficient human and financial resources to finance human rights city coordination and implementation
- Advance the goal of implementing legal and good governance human rights discourse in policy through formal commitments; plans of action that include timetables, targets, and indicators; procedures for monitoring and assessing human rights performance; and strengthening enforcement mechanisms.
- Strengthen and support meaningful civil society participation in human rights city organizing

Reference

[From Commitment to Responsibility for Human Rights in Cities and Regions](#). Jasmien Deklerck. (2022.) European Training Center for Human Rights and Democracy; UNESCO Center for the Promotion of Human Rights at Local and Regional Levels and the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security, University of Graz, *Human Rights Go Local Publication Series*, Graz, Austria.