Summary Report
Greenville SC Human Rights Cities Alliance Convening
Convened November 16-18, 2018

From November 16-18, 2018, the National Human Rights Cities Alliance and local organizers with the Ubuntu Institute for Community Development and Turn South: Southern Women for Change, convened a group of local/regional human rights organizers in Greenville, South Carolina (Program Link). The goal of this regional meeting was to facilitate and support the creation of networks of organizers engaging with the human rights/ human rights city-community framework to organize in their areas while building our national Alliance.

The human rights city organizing framework is intentionally both intersectional—that is, consciously working to build broad alliances across diverse groups of people and organizations, and transformational—aimed at fundamentally re-ordering power relations of society to center the leadership and priorities of frontline communities.

The format of this meeting seemed to provide a good model for other convenings in places where we hope to promote the human rights city idea. The "Human Rights 101" section focused on the distinction between civil and human rights and helped expand people's thinking about how international law and connections can be useful in local human rights organizing. The use of video clips of Malcolm X speeches was particularly powerful. Other themes introduced in this part of the program were the idea of people-centered human rights, human rights visions of what a human rights culture/city might look like, and how the emphasis on different human rights priorities might vary according to the population in which organizers are working. This was complemented by a brief summary of how the US Human Right Network operates and about the International Decade for People of African Descent and its role in helping connect grassroots strategies with international processes and discussions about human rights, racial justice and historical truth telling.

Following the introduction to human rights, short presentations on current social justice work in SC were made to the group and on different examples of how human rights city models are being applied in particular places. We included a report from Ms. Frederique Hanotier, who is organizing the Human Rights City Network in order to aggregate lessons from across Europe and elsewhere. Frederique provided examples from cities like York and Barcelona, along with some general lessons and guidelines about effective local strategies. Notable in the York example was the organizers approach to survey (in person and through other means) local community members to learn their top five human rights concerns. Findings informed establishment of thematic working groups inclusive of civil society, academia, and local government representatives to develop strategies to address the concerns including developing tools to monitor progress. The survey proved an important means to grow awareness of the human rights frame and promote community buy-in for the human rights city effort.

This session was followed by a skillfully facilitated discussion with the local/regional activists present about human rights issues in the region and about whether this organizing model could be applied effectively. Local activists spoke to the impact of implicit bias in school classrooms, how it contributes to the increased instance of expulsion and in-school suspension for black and brown children, and the significant deficit of training for school administrators and teachers in this regard. Local organizers also described the impact of homelessness and lack of adequate housing: Tent Cities in Greenville, homeless children bathing at local YMCAs before school, families living in hotels displaced after government housing has been torn down. Poor and

insufficient public transportation has direct implications for human rights protections. Participants were asked to consider playing a role in a process of building a regional human rights city/community network, and to set a time frame and goals for achieving modest objectives (i.e., 2 human rights cities in the Southeast in the next 6 years).

The final day of our meeting was begun with a presentation from Alliance Steering Committee member Joshua Cooper about the international mechanisms and how human rights activists have been able to use these to amplify local work. We concluded with brainstorming on upcoming dates and possibilities for advancing our organizing both locally/regionally and nationally. This format of **interspersing concrete local examples with illustrations of international processes seemed a fruitful way to help us link grassroots struggles with global human rights processes**, movements, and opportunities.

Two concrete plans that emerged directly link important local conversations with global processes. First, we plan to **use the upcoming Atlanta meeting of human rights cities/communities to begin work to prepare the Universal Periodic Review shadow report** (the US review will be in April 2020 and the review process begins April 2019). The group decided to hold the Atlanta meeting in the latter part of April 2019 to coincide with the UPR process. Second, the focus on housing raised the prospects of **using the 2019 meeting of the [Left Forum] in New York (early June) to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing to visit** the two sites where Amazon will build its new headquarters—New York and Washington DC to highlight the problem of corporate power and government incentive packages that contribute to displacement of residents. We will explore the possibility of a visit to the Greenville region if this can help further the work there, or perhaps another city in the Southeast where we have strong networks who can mobilize around this visit.

Other ideas included **building a wiki page** supported by our growing network that can improve our ability to collect and organize resources and information for folks wishing to use the Human Rights Cities framework. It was also noted that a [Voluntary Local Review as conducted in NY City] is also a means to highlight and address local human rights concerns, with focus on assessing local community efforts to meet UN Sustainable Development Goals. Further the local organizers committed to explore the feasibility of a second human rights gatherings in SC or NC in 2019, possibly in connection with the Carolina Human Rights Organizing Conference to be held Fall 2019. Alliance Steering Committee members agreed to follow up with USHRN colleagues to draft a letter to the US Mayors Conference regarding the 2014 resolution passed by the Conference affirming international norms as a guide for city and county government policy.

The National Human Rights Cities Alliance's plan to hold a series of convenings in the South was helpful here: Organizers from Atlanta who will help lead the next convening there in Spring 2019 were able to be part of this convening. Thus, lessons about how to model the next meeting for local/regional participants and to consider how we can build and connect our local, national and international human rights work can be developed through linked conversations across convenings and between local and national level organizers.

Recommendations for Future Convenings

For the introduction to human rights, we might frame the whole session around USHRN's "People-Centered Human Rights" framework. Key ideas here are that 1) human rights are not limited to the formally recognized legal rights, but rather are constantly evolving through popular struggles for justice; 2) Human rights struggles must be centered on the experiences and needs of frontline communities/ most impacted groups. This idea reflects popular knowledge reflected in

peoples' movements like the U.S. civil rights and liberation theology movements in Latin America. 3) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights law/institutions are useful tools for human rights struggles but they do not reflect the limits of human rights demands. Their utility comes in that they help **provide unity across national and other divisions**, prioritizing our humanity over other identities such as nationality. International human rights institutions also help provide a **focal point for collective struggle** and can provide legitimacy, protection, and leverage for local and national struggles for human rights. The importance of raising awareness of the [International Decade for People of African Descent](#) and promoting related actions was affirmed. 4) People-centered human rights stresses the **inalienable, inseparable, and universal nature of human rights**. Rights are inter-dependent, and we cannot separate economic, social and cultural rights from political and civil rights. 5) People-centered human rights and human rights cities address **collective rights** in addition to individual ones. The approach points to the centrality of Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates: "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized." 6) People-centered human rights are, as the previous points make clear, global in scope. National divisions and the hierarchies they reflect contradict the basic notion of universal human rights and dignity and this basic divide must be transformed in order to realize human rights and dignity for all.

One idea that might be incorporated into the presentation on the differences between civil rights and human rights is a segment entitled, perhaps, "One Covenant or Two?" which addresses the history of the Cold War and how it shaped the politics separating political rights from economic ones. Discuss the impact this had on the subsequent evolution of international human rights law and the civil rights movement, and how the separation of rights undermined the global human rights movement that had established early ties between U.S. civil rights activists and national liberation struggles in other parts of the world. Introduce figures like CLR James, Boggs, W.E.B. DuBois, etc.

Recommendations for Written/Video Resources (Available online)

Participants noted several resources/tools that would be useful to raise awareness of and promote advocacy around Human Rights Cities:
- Organizing Principles for how to Create Human Rights Cities;
  - What is a Human Rights City? Why a Human Rights City?
- Examples illustrating human rights intersectionality and interdependence;
- Quick Reference Lessons Learned/Best Practice from efforts to date in the US/global human rights cities efforts;
- **Concrete examples of how promoting human rights standards/human rights cities can be integrated into current local organizing, social justice work** --- demonstrating how the work is not an addon but an effective means to advance on-going advocacy efforts.