

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, November 10, 2010

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United States Must Not Betray Its Commitment to Freedom from Want, Human Rights Groups Say

Call comes as the United Nations issues 228 recommendations to the United States on human rights improvement

NEW YORK/ATLANTA/MADRID--International human rights organizations called on the United States today to implement the recommendations made by the UN Human Rights Council to address economic and social rights in the U.S and ensure freedom from want.

Following the United States' appearance before the Council's [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) in Geneva on Friday, the Council adopted a report yesterday with 228 recommendations for the U.S. government to improve the status of human rights in the country. UN member states participating in the Council's [interactive dialogue](#) voiced concerns on a range of issues and shared recommendations to decrease social and economic inequality as well as deprivation in the United States.

[Submissions to the UPR](#) by international human rights groups documented the scale and extent of such deprivation, poverty and inequality. The organizations found that despite being the world's wealthiest economy, the United States has the poorest economic and social rights outcomes of all industrialized countries. Human rights groups also drew attention to the impact of the economic crisis and called for rights-based reforms to macroeconomic and fiscal policy, as well as to the financial regulatory system.

"The U.S. has made promising steps by engaging in the UPR process towards increasing its legitimacy within the international community as an upholder of human rights. However, it has a long journey ahead in the path to protecting, fulfilling and respecting the right to housing, health, education and employment especially for the most vulnerable including women of color. Given the effects of the current financial crisis the U.S. must implement mechanisms to promote the economic policies and legal reforms needed to make freedom from want a reality for all in the U.S.," said Radhika Balakrishnan, executive director at the [Center for Women's Leadership](#) (CWGL).

In addition, dozens of UN member states recommended that the United States ratify key international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The United States is one of only six countries in the world to have signed but not ratified the Covenant and one of seven yet to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It also stands virtually alone in not having ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The United States said it will examine the recommendations seriously and give a formal response at the March 2011 session of the Human Rights Council. The U.S. delegation in Geneva said the administration was "working to obtain Senate advice and consent to a number of human rights treaties, particularly CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities."

However, the U.S. government representatives taking part in the UPR did not mention any intention to ratify the ICESCR. "The absence of an explicit commitment to uphold economic and social rights standards is striking and very disappointing, particularly given the number of countries that urged the U.S. to ratify the Covenant," said Ignacio Saiz, executive director of the [Center for Economic and Social Rights](#) (CESR). "We hope the administration will heed the call of civil society groups to bring these rights home, and that concrete steps will be taken towards ratification of the ICESCR."

Government representatives explained the delay in ratifying these international treaties arguing that the United States “has pursued a practice of compliance before ratification, in contrast to the practice of ratification before compliance that some other nations may pursue.”

“The U.S.’ implicit admission that it is not complying with the provisions of the Covenant is an acknowledgement of widespread violations of economic, social and cultural rights. Putting pressure on the U.S. Senate to approve ratification would send a signal that the Obama Administration recognizes the rights to health, housing and education as human rights,” said Salih Booker, executive director of the [Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions](#) (COHRE).

“We welcome the U.S. government’s engagement with the Human Rights Council as an excellent way to lead by example on human rights,” said Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#) (NLCHP). “But this engagement internationally must be matched with a commitment to bring human rights home to the U.S. This is especially important for our most vulnerable populations – people fearing eviction or foreclosure, or those already on the streets.”

Groups campaigning for economic and social rights in the United States welcomed the opportunity to engage with the government in the UPR process. “However, the government’s preliminary response was vague and raises questions about its willingness to implement the recommendations emerging from the process,” said Ejim Dike, director of the human rights project at the [Urban Justice Center](#). “Whether and how the U.S. administration takes up the UN’s recommendations on economic and social rights will be the real litmus test of the administration’s commitment to all human rights for all people.”

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The [Center for Economic and Social Rights](#) (CESR) is an international nongovernmental human rights organization that works to promote social justice through human rights.

The [Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions](#) (COHRE) is an independent, international, nongovernmental, not-for-profit human rights organization whose mission is to ensure the full enjoyment of the human right to adequate housing for everyone, everywhere.

The [Center for Women’s Global Leadership](#) (CWGL) promotes women’s leadership, the advancement of feminist perspectives in economic and social rights and the elimination of violence against women in local, national and international arenas.

The [International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ESCR-Net) is a collaborative initiative of groups and individuals from around the world working to secure economic and social justice through human rights.

In partnership with communities, the [National Economic and Social Rights Initiative](#) (NESRI) works to build a broad movement for economic & social rights, including health, housing, education and work with dignity. Based on the principle that fundamental human needs create human rights obligations on the part of government and the private sector, NESRI advocates for public policies that guarantee the universal and equitable fulfillment of these rights in the United States.

The [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#)’s mission is to prevent and end homelessness by serving as the legal arm of the national movement. To achieve its mission, the Law Center pursues three main strategies: impact litigation, policy advocacy, and public education.

[Urban Justice Center](#) (UJC) is a national organization working to improve the lives of New Yorkers living in poverty through a combination of direct legal service, systemic advocacy, community education and political organizing.

The [US Human Rights Network](#) was formed to promote US accountability to universal human rights standards by building linkages between organizations and individuals. The Network strives to build a human rights culture in the United States that puts those directly affected by human rights violations, with a special

emphasis on grassroots organizations and social movements, in a central leadership role. The Network also works towards connecting the US human rights movement with the broader US social justice movement and human rights movements around the world.