

Last modified: October 31, 2017

Statement of Human Rights City Principles
US Human Rights Network Human Rights Cities Alliance

The US National Human Rights Cities Alliance supports and promotes human rights city projects in communities around the United States. We embrace a **people-centered human rights** approach, which has been a core feature of the work of the US Human Rights Network. People-centered human rights cities are “political project[s] that [identify] all forms of oppressive relations, including capitalism, neoliberalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism and imperialism, as structural and ideological constraints on the ability to realize the full range of human rights.”¹

The following principles aim to help human rights cities advocates advance human rights and dignity for all residents of their communities.

- Human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.
- Human rights are continually being developed through the engagement and struggles of people whose voices have been marginalized from dominant institutions.

The meaning and content of what are recognized as human rights are to be determined by the people—not state elites. Formal international human rights law is not an end in itself, but a beginning of the work to define the meaning of human rights for people and communities. Human rights cities aim to flip the script of human rights by both “translating” internationally recognized human rights into local contexts and by injecting new, locally defined meanings and possibilities into “human rights.”
- Human rights cities grow from the understanding that actualizing human rights requires vigilant, organized, empowered, and engaged communities whose members monitor, defend, and support individual and collective rights;
- Human rights cities work is intentional about centering the needs, voices, and leadership of historically oppressed groups. It seeks actively to undo the silencing of marginalized groups and of future generations and Mother Earth;

Human rights cities must be consistently anti-oppression and employ a human rights based lens to all social policy.
- Human rights cities are projects that aim to *decolonize*² our communities and our consciousness.

We recognize how the history of oppression has shaped dominant institutions and how it reproduces violence and discrimination. Building human rights cities requires historical truth-telling, reconciliation, and healing for individuals and communities. Human rights learning is critical to achieving this.
- Human rights cities require a social and international order that allows every individual to enjoy the full range of human rights. Thus, the human rights cities project requires active cooperation, collaboration, and mutual support across cities and communities around the world.

Human rights cities are globalist, recognizing the interconnections and interrelationships of local and global issues and processes.

We believe that neocolonialism- a major form of the current state of group oppression- is maintained when states define themselves as nations and not multi-national states. Therefore denying groups rights and muting discussions of self-determination and self-development for oppressed nations. This practice denies collective political standing, in so doing denies group rights to national minorities, as recognized by Article 27 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It also denies people their social and cultural rights, rendering underdeveloped.

- Human rights cities projects are transformative and work to move societies toward the establishment of social institutions, structures and social relationships that reflect a real commitment to human dignity and social justice.
- Human rights learning is a critical component of and foundation for building human rights cities and communities.
- The US Human Rights Cities Alliance recognizes and supports the [Gwangju Principles](#) as a foundation and guide for our work, as it reflects the collective knowledge and experiences of human rights advocates at the 2014 World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF) held in Gwangju, Korea

Gwangju Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City

(Gwangju Principles)

- 1. Human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated,**
2. All levels of governments national, regional and local, has an obligation to protect, respect and fulfill all human rights in their own mandate and competence,
3. A human rights city is an urban community that applies the human rights-based approach to urban governance,
4. A human rights city is an open and participatory process where all actors are engaged in the decision-making and implementation process to improve quality of life in the urban context,
5. A human rights city is a framework to cultivate an inclusive and equitable city based on human rights standards,
6. A human rights city has a specific responsibility to implement a human rights-based approach to municipal governance while recognizing different forms and functions in each country in accordance with its constitution and legal system,
7. The right to the city is a strategic tool for people to realize their rights to enjoy a decent life through their active participation in urban context,

8. The right to the city take into account the common interests for socially just and environmentally balanced use of urban space over the individual right to property,

9. The right to the city ensures full access to basic services including food, education, housing, energy, mobility as well as public facilities that are adequate, affordable, acceptable and adaptable,

10. Bearing in mind that the Gwangju Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City (hereafter “Gwangju Principles”) is an outcome of a series of consultation meetings held at the WHRCF held in 2012 and 2013 among local Korean and international experts,

11. Bearing in mind that the Gwangju Principles identifies key components of a human rights city in terms of values, principles, institutions, and policy implementation,

12. Recognizing that the Gwangju Principles is an instrument to deepen the commitments to the vision and commitments of the human rights city as articulated at the WHRCF in Gwangju, Korea since 2011,

13. Recognizing that the Gwangju Principles is a guide for policy-formulation to implement the Gwangju Human Rights Charter adopted in May 2012,

14. Recognizing that the Gwangju Principles is a living document that is to be implemented and revised progressively and regularly,

Hereby adopt the following principles as the

[Gwangju Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City](#)

Principle 1: The Right to the City

- The Human Rights City respects all human rights recognized by the existing relevant international human rights norms and standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and national constitutions.
- The Human Rights City works towards the recognition and implementation of the right to the city in line with the principles of social justice, equity, solidarity, democracy and sustainability.

Principle 2: Non-Discrimination and Affirmative Action

- The Human Rights City respects the principle of equality and equity among all habitants within its administrative boundary and beyond.
- The Human Rights City implements the non-discrimination policy which includes gender-sensitive policies as well as affirmative action to reduce inequality and to empower the marginalized and vulnerable groups including migrants and non-citizens.

Principle 3: Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity

- The Human Rights City respects the values of social inclusion and cultural diversity based on mutual respect among communities of different racial, religious, linguistic, ethnic and social cultural backgrounds
- The Human Rights City applies a conflict-sensitive approach to promote cultural diversity which is essential for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Principle 4: Participatory Democracy and Accountable Governance

- The Human Rights City upholds the values of participatory democracy, transparency and accountability.

- The Human Rights City establishes effective accountability mechanisms ensuring rights to public information, communication, participation and decision in all stages of municipal governance including planning, policy-formulation, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Principle 5: Social Justice, Solidarity and Sustainability

- The Human Rights City respects the values of Socio-Economic justice and solidarity and ecological sustainability.
- The Human Rights City promotes social solidarity economy and sustainable consumption and production as a means to enhance socio-economic-ecological justice and solidarity among urban and rural communities within the country and beyond.

Principle 6 : Political Leadership and Institutionalization

- The Human Rights City recognizes the importance of collective high-level political leadership by the mayor and municipal councilors and their commitment to human rights values and vision of human rights city.
- The Human Rights City ensures a long-term continuity through institutionalization of adequately-resourced programs and budget.

Principle 7: Human Rights Mainstreaming

- The Human Rights City recognizes the importance of integrating human rights into municipal policies.
- The Human Rights City applies a human rights-based approach to municipal administration and governance including planning, policy-formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Principle 8: Effective Institutions and Policy Coordination

- The Human Rights City recognizes the role of public institutions and importance of policy coordination and coherence for human rights within local government as well as between national and local government.
- The Human Rights City establishes effective institutions and implements policies, with adequate personnel and resources including the human rights office, basic local action plan, human rights indicators and the human rights impact assessment.

Principle 9: Human Rights Education and Training

- The Human Rights City recognizes the importance of human rights education and learning as a means to foster a culture of human rights and peace.
- The Human Rights City develops and implements various types of human rights education and training programs for all duty bearers, right-holders and other stakeholders.

Principle 10: Right to Remedy

- The Human Rights City recognizes the importance of the right to effective remedy.
- The Human Rights City establishes appropriate mechanisms and procedures including the ombudsman or municipal human rights commission for redress including preventive measures as well as mediation, arbitration and conflict resolution.

Notes

¹From Ajamu Baraka, “[The Human Rights Project](#)” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, December 2013.

²Decolonization means “rejecting an unjust status quo and recovering our capacity to look deeply so as not to be trapped by colonial categories that limit our imagination.” (Pablo Salón)