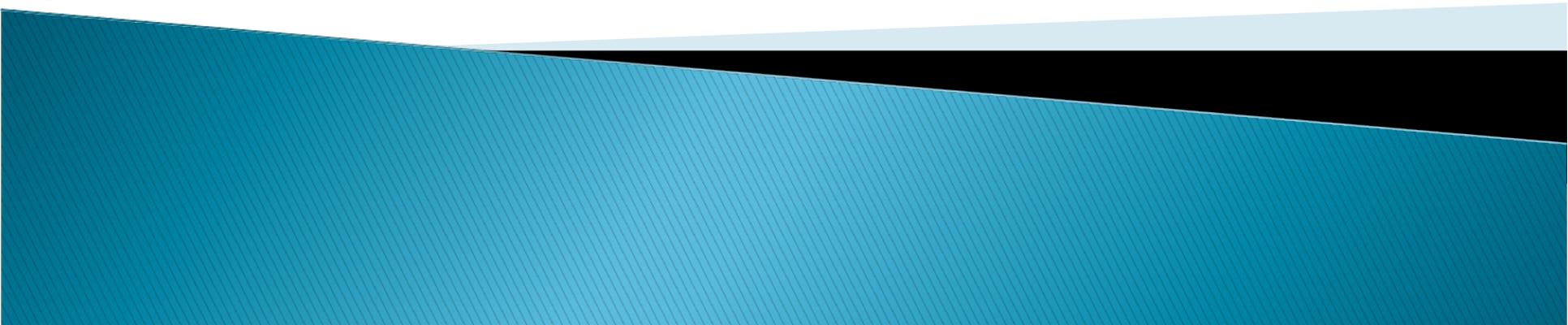


US Human Rights Cities Gathering May 2016



A Warm Welcome
*DC Human Rights City
Steering Committee*

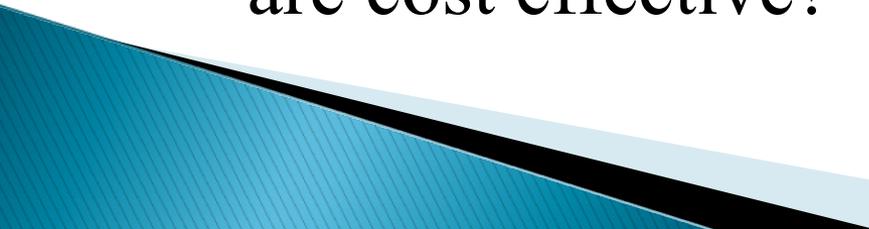
Mai Abdul Rahman



Human Rights Matter

- ▶ Irrefutably, poor and marginalized populations are without political, social, and economic power
 - ▶ Without basic human rights guarantees, they are a vulnerable population excluded from making decisions about matters that affect them directly
 - ▶ Securing the minimum human rights protections will decrease local and state costs and improve the overall future prospects of city residents.
- 

Why are we gathered here today?

- ▶ To strengthen relationships and support local human rights advocacy and legislation
 - ▶ Share our knowledge-successes as well as failures
 - ▶ Above all, to learn from one another
 - What strategies have been found most effective?
 - How and who to partner with?
 - Why improvements in human rights outcomes are cost effective?
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Why Human Rights?

- ▶ According to several UN reports (2009, 2011, 2014) Americans' quality of life, basic human rights and political privileges have been compromised as a result of politically driven problems that have profoundly shaped the future prospects of its middle class and low income communities.

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Human Rights Cities Gathering | Washington, D.C. | May 26 & 27, 2016

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What are the underlining reasons for ignoring human rights?

- ◆ Every major human rights convention has been written and advanced by US leaders, scholars, and international law advocates.
- ◆ For example, Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the main architects of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), and in 1995 Secretary of State Madeline Albright and the US State Department were the chief architect of the last revision of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which the US has yet to officially ratify.

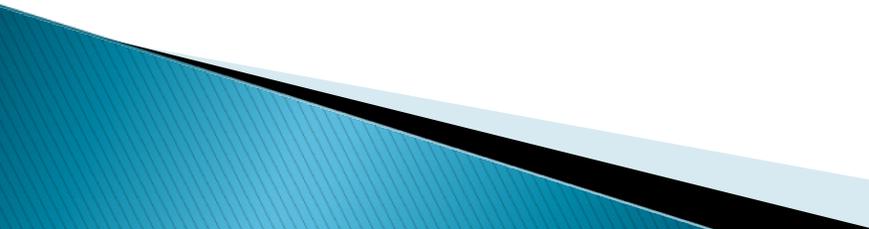
Change in the US is Highly Dependent on Grass Root Communities

- Only three UN member nations have failed to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - ✓ The US,
 - ✓ Somalia (a country without a legally constituted government), and,
 - ✓ The Republic of South Sudan (a country that gained independence in 2011).
- Meanwhile, more than 1.1 million American homeless students between the age of 5-18 are without the right to food, education, and shelter.

US Legislators are Well Aware of the Importance of Human Rights

- ▶ Federal legislators have succeeded in advocating human rights protections for the people of the world whether through UN agencies, or through federal aid packages aimed at improving the human rights of the people of Africa, Asia, and South America, and to some measure the Middle East.
- ▶ Regularly, Congress members return to their states touting their success in advocating for the human rights of citizens in far away Russia, China and Vietnam.
- ▶ But will refrain from addressing the human rights of their own constituents.

Only Deliberate and Sustained Political Pressure will Secure Human Rights for all Americans

- ▶ Undeniably, US legislators are well aware of the importance of human rights.
 - ▶ So what holds them back? The absence of grass root pressure to generate the political will to act. Legislators will do the right thing only if they must.
 - ▶ In short, realizing human rights for average Americans depends on advocates like us willing to take the effort. Those who care about the quality of life and future prospects of all Americans.
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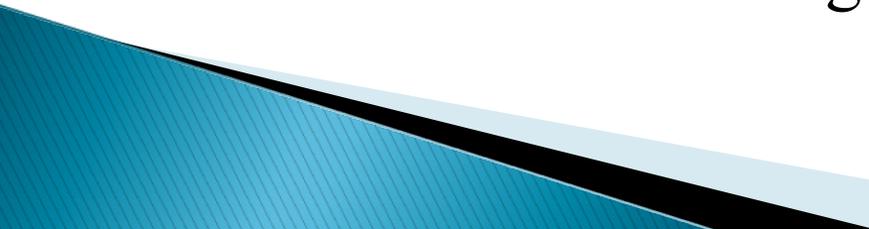
So what can we do?

- ▶ Naturally, human rights advocates should inform, educate about internationally agreed upon basic universal human rights.
 - ▶ But what else beyond these generalities?
 - *Outline a matrix of human of rights for our respective cities that reflects local needs.*
 - *Devise an organic human rights index that covers the entire spectrum of needs, but highlights the absence of those rights considered most acute.*
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Why A Human Rights Municipality Index?

- ▶ ***Make it count!***
- ▶ Measure each of our cities and municipalities by simply monitoring legislative initiative that address local needs and as fortified by internationally agreed upon basic human rights.
 - Track responsive legislations, legislative failures and success
 - Share and disseminate local human rights record and outcomes
 - Annually repeat until we have accomplished our goals of protecting the rights of our fellow neighbors and citizens to live in dignity

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Steps that worked for us here in the District of Columbia, the nation's capital:
 - ▶ We devised a set of rights based on the needs of low income and marginalized DC residents, we also documented a number of specific challenges that DC's community sub-groups were facing
 - ▶ Reported our findings and ensured that the smallest legislative attempt was honored and accounted for
 - ▶ But we did not hesitate to call attention and suggest solutions to the many human rights issues that our city suffered because of legislative inertia.
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Human Rights Advocacy Matters

- ▶ In 2012, the DC Human Rights Report proposed steps to address the high rates of unemployed former inmates and city residents. The report argued, that after serving time countless of DC men, women, and young adults are unable to gain meaningful employment, apply for state and federal school loans, or vote. The report recommended a set of solutions, among them “***stronger legislation and enforcement to end long standing discrimination against people with criminal records***”.
- ▶ These recommendations were implemented as was noted in our follow up 2015 Human Rights city report.

Addressing Islamophobia

- ▶ In 2015, our report documented discriminatory practices and bias against DC's Muslim community and offered steps that legislators and DC agencies could take to combat it including community engagement.
- ▶ Just few days ago the DC Council Committee on the Judiciary issued a commendation with the tag of “*New agency initiatives*” that outlined three new specific interventions, among them one that specifically addressed Islamophobia.

First Step in a Long Journey

- ▶ May 5, 2016 DC Council: Committee of the Judiciary
“Standing with our Muslim Neighbors: A Workshop for Allies in DC: On March 9, 2016, OHR held this event to combat Islamophobia in the District. The free panel discussion with Muslim faith and community leaders focused on helping residents better understand the Muslim faith, the experiences of the Muslim community in the District, and how to be effective allies to the Muslim community. The Committee congratulates the agency on an important and well-executed program.”

Looking Beyond: Educating the Next Generation

- ▶ Since 2008, Jean Louis has partnered with District of Columbia public school teachers to educate the next generation of DC human rights advocates.
 - ▶ Each year, 150 students learn about human rights and their utility to bring about social change, peace and justice through actions in their schools and communities.
 - ▶ So far, the program has involved more than 850 DCPS students.
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