

Media Advisory

February 25, 2020

Pittsburgh Youth and Community Leaders Travel to Washington DC to Make an “Appeal to the World” for Human Rights

Youth leaders in Casa San Jose, working as part of the [Pittsburgh Universal Periodic Review task force](#),* travel to Washington DC on February 27th to make an “appeal to the world” for human rights. Joining counterparts from around the country, local delegates will encourage foreign ambassadors to support recommendations for improving human rights conditions. The initiative is part of the United Nations assessment of the U.S. human rights record, the “Universal Periodic Review.”

This trip bears echoes of 1947, when U.S. civil rights movement leaders brought an “Appeal to the World.” They argued that ***“No nation is so great that the world can afford to let it continue to be deliberately unjust, cruel and unfair toward its own citizens.”***

At a time when political leaders claim to be “making America great again,” we are watching human rights conditions in our country worsen, as those at the highest levels of government show blatant disregard for the rule of law. But the rise of right-wing hate movements and anti-immigrant sentiment, the loss of affordable housing, the failure of governments to confront racial and gender discrimination and to devote resources to basic human needs are not just local problems. They require global solutions. So Pittsburgh is joining other cities in appealing to the world community for help.

Ben Gutschow, youth leader in Casa san Jose, was a driving force behind this effort to bring Pittsburgh and youth voices directly to international leaders: “Youth in our community face harassment at school for the color of their skin and citizenship status, while also living in constant fear of ICE taking away parents and friends. We shouldn't have to stay afraid to stay safe... The only ICE we should be worried about is the ice that is melting.” Ben’s motivation also reflects today’s young people’s concerns for our environment: He points out, “Climate change not only contributes to the inequality in our cities, but it is also pushing people to cross borders. 36% of the global population lives in water scarce regions; by 2030, this water crisis will displace as many as 700 million people. It is about time that the youth get a say. After all, we are the ones to inherit this earth and these issues.”

While climate change drives more of the world’s people from their homes, urban development policies are driving a global housing crisis that is felt acutely in Pittsburgh. The city has a deficit of more than 20,000 affordable housing units, with vulnerable groups, such as single mothers, children, disabled and LGBT residents suffering the most. Black Americans have been particularly hard-hit by rising housing costs, and in Pittsburgh, Black residents are being forced from the city at a rate of as many as 5 per day.

Delegates will be bringing stories of how well public policies are reflecting the commitment of local governments to implementing U.S. human rights obligations. Pittsburghers for Public Transit will help bring accounts from transit riders on the impacts of transit cuts on low income people and people of color. On average, nearly half of all transit riders in cities are completely transit-dependent, yet more than 52 cities across the country suffer from major transit deserts that leave riders cut off from access to

food, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Also represented will be accounts of women and mothers in our region, whose experiences shaped the Gender Equity Commissions damning report, "[Pittsburgh's Inequality across Gender and Race](#)". Organizer Khalid Raheem, of the [Peoples Campaign for Reparations and Black Self-Determination](#), will be urging international officials to push the United States government to take meaningful action to support reparations for slavery. He hopes such international recognition in the UN report to the United States can help encourage more Americans to learn about the international discussions around reparations and to think more deeply about how this conversation applies in the United States.

Pittsburgh delegates will join activists from Jackson Mississippi, New York, Atlanta, and other communities, and they'll address representatives of governments involved in the UN human rights review of the United States, including Cameroon, Germany, Haiti, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Namibia, Uganda, and others. They will provide some of the "human stories" behind the coalition's report to the United Nations, "[Racial Inequity at the Core of Human Rights Challenges in Pittsburgh.](#)"

They'll be asking international officials to bring our recommendations into the United Nations review of U.S. human rights practices. The UN report will be used by other governments and by communities to help make human rights a more central focus on national as well as state and local public policy. Local activists are preparing a regional human rights assessment targeting city and county officials, and plan to present this in May, when the United States appears in Geneva for its third Universal Periodic Review.

For more information about this national human rights campaign, see:

- [Bringing human rights home: new strategies for local organizing](#) By: Jackie Smith & Joshua Cooper, *Open Global Rights*
- [Universal Periodic Review for US Cities- Campaign of the US Human Rights Cities Alliance](#)

***The Pittsburgh Universal Periodic Review task force includes:** Alliance for Police Accountability, Casa San Jose, Green Party of Allegheny County, Hill District Consensus Group, Pittsburgh for CEDAW, Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance, Just Harvest, City of Pittsburgh Human Relations Commission & Gender Equity Commission, Urbankind Institute. For more information see [UPR Pittsburgh](#)