

DRAFT*

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* 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

Notes

**This draft statement has been discussed and approved by the National Human Rights Cities Alliance Steering Committee. It is intended to guide further dialogues among local human rights organizers as we build a national Human Rights Cities movement. (Last modified: October 2017)*

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