

MEDIA & PUBLIC STATEMENT: INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

December 10, 2020



Pittsburgh Joins Global Efforts to Target Systemic Racism, Bring Human Rights Home

In the absence of national leadership, cities and community advocates work to build a global crisis response that centers human rights and basic needs.

The City of Pittsburgh's Commission on Human Relations and Gender Equity Commission, in cooperation with Pittsburgh's Human Rights City Alliance and other community organizations join people around the world commemorating the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Connecting with global allies and UN bodies can advance national policy changes and improve our city's ability to implement its international human rights obligations.

As Pittsburgh and other cities struggle to stem the spread of COVID-19, officials and advocates are especially concerned that the City's already grave racial disparities are exacerbating the pandemic's impact and hampering our recovery, especially for Black residents. Recent federal policies have fueled racism and xenophobia and prevented unified responses to the extreme health, environmental, and economic threats we face. In the absence of national leadership, cities and community advocates have been working to build a global crisis response that centers human rights and basic needs.

Pittsburgh's elected officials have been committed to advancing human rights in our region. In 2011, Pittsburgh became the 5th Human Rights City and in 2016 the 6th city in the United States to adopt the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The resulting City [Gender Equity Commission](#) helped bring attention to "[Pittsburgh's Inequality Across Gender and Race.](#)" and has continued to engage residents to document inequities and map out solutions. This summer the Commission released a set of recommendations for improving the well-being of all of its residents, [Building an Equitable New Normal: Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commission Recommendations](#). Pittsburgh is also the second U.S. city to formally commit to integrating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in local government. It recently [issued a report assessing its progress towards the SDG goals](#) of ending poverty and hunger, reducing inequalities and advancing environmental and human health and wellbeing.

Racial inequities and police violence intensify threats to the safety and livelihoods of people of color, and this summer's protests drew a global response. In July, the UN Human Rights Council responded to a request from the families of George Floyd and other victims of police violence and held an [Urgent Debate on racially inspired human rights violations](#). World leaders will be examining the effects of systemic racism and police brutality against people of African descent in the U.S. and elsewhere. Human rights organizers in Pittsburgh and nation-wide will be working to support this process and bring local concerns to the global stage.

At this time when the health and safety of all residents depends upon everybody's ability to quarantine at home, an unprecedented number of people worldwide—especially racialized minorities, single parents with children, seniors, and other vulnerable groups—face evictions and homelessness as a result of a long-standing global housing crisis. In the United States, [evictions have led to nearly half a million excess cases](#) and over 10,000 excess deaths from COVID-19. Knowing the worldwide threat the Coronavirus poses, the [United Nations has urged governments to place moratoriums on evictions](#) during the pandemic and to take more concerted [steps to end housing discrimination and ensure the right to adequate housing](#) for all people.

These concerns over persistent racial inequality, affordable housing, and economic opportunity for residents of our region were emphasized in a [report submitted to the United Nations last year](#) as part of the world body's comprehensive review of the United States human rights record known as the [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR). The UPR continues into the coming year and world leaders will work with national advocates to press the new Biden-Harris administration to address the human rights concerns and implement recommendations in the report. Many of these recommendations originated from the work in local communities, including Pittsburgh.

The Commission on Human Relations and Gender Equity Commission joined other representatives from state and local governments in a national [statement in support of the UPR](#), declaring: "As the United States Federal Government flouts its human rights obligations at home and abroad, it falls to state and local governments to honor this nation's commitment to human rights....[W]e stand ready to cooperate and collaborate with communities in the United States and abroad, and to partner with our counterparts around the globe to live up to human rights ideals."

Along with the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Pittsburgh leaders and residents recognize human rights as important tools for addressing today's critical challenges. Together with national and international groups, we will continue working to "bring human rights home" as we build back better.

Contact Information:

Jam Hammond, Interim Director, [Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations](#), jam.hammond@pittsburghpa.gov

anu jain, Executive Director, City of Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commission, genderequity@pittsburghpa.gov

Jackie Smith, Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance, jgsmith@pitt.edu