



**Media & Public Statement
International Human Rights Day 2025**

**City governments and community advocates are building a
“firewall for freedom” in the face of human rights emergency**

December 10, 2025

[Pittsburgh’s Human Rights City Alliance](#) and our partner organizations join people around the world commemorating International Human Rights Day, 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 the world marks the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, the rise of authoritarian governments in the U.S. and elsewhere pose an unprecedented human rights emergency. In the face of new threats from the deployment of ICE and national guards in our communities and from dramatic cuts to social spending, city and regional leaders in government and civil society are coming together to protect vulnerable members of our communities and restore democratic rights and protections. We cannot do this alone. Our global networks of human rights defenders are critical to protecting the basic rights that many Americans take for granted.

Federal policies are actively fueling racism and xenophobia and preventing unified responses to the urgent needs our cities face, from the global housing crisis and the climate emergency to the extreme inequalities that are driving growing numbers into poverty. 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. This global movement depends upon residents at the local level demanding their rights to basic needs and the protection of their democratic freedoms.

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](#) has been working to bring attention to the intersections of gender, racial and other inequalities and to map out solutions. As more and more residents face a future of housing and food insecurity, extreme racial inequities and police violence intensify other threats to the safety and livelihoods of people of color especially.

These concerns over persistent racial inequality, affordable housing, and economic opportunity for residents of our region were emphasized in reports we submitted to the United Nations in [2019 on racial inequality](#) and [in 2024 on unfair tax policies](#) as part of the world body's comprehensive review of the United States human rights record known as the [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR). Despite the Trump administration's unprecedented refusal to participate, UN officials and world leaders are working to support our efforts to hold U.S. leaders accountable to international human rights standards and obligations.

Some of our own local elected officials have joined [state and local officials from 33 states across the U.S. in a letter to the UN Human Rights Council](#) urging them to continue this effort on accountability despite federal withdrawal. Elected officials know human rights cannot wait. As leaders entrusted to care for the American people, they condemn this retreat and recommit to accountability. (Read the letter here: <https://lnkd.in/eBRNw2Bf>).

Last month, national human rights advocates joined city, county and state officials in an appeal to world leaders at the UN in Geneva—calling upon them to help support local and state governments from the assaults on human rights coming from the federal government. Panelists, including the District Attorney of Philadelphia Larry Krasner, explored how collaborating with UN human rights bodies can strengthen accountability and support the United States in meeting its obligations under international human rights law. They called upon world leaders to support local efforts by both elected officials and civil society to create a **“firewall for freedom”** to address the human rights crisis in the United States. The panel discussion, which included remarks from Chicago's mayor Brandon Johnson, [can be viewed online](#). Mayor Johnson's office also issued this [press statement](#) on the event.

This December 10 we join others around the world in remembering past struggles for human rights and we re-commit ourselves to that vision. Local governments are vitally important tools for addressing today's human rights emergency. Together with national and international allies, we celebrate the hard work of human rights defenders worldwide. We know that “human rights don't trickle down, they rise up.” We know that we can build a democratic, welcoming, and most livable city for every single resident. Our differences make our communities the vibrant and creative places we love, and we must celebrate them. Global change starts with local action, and we look forward to continuing our work together to bring human rights home.

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