

Urging Federal Leadership on Human Rights Protections, Advocates Highlight How States and Localities Across the U.S. are Leading the Way

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New York, March 10, 2014 – This week, the U.S. will undergo a significant review of its human rights record at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Dozens of civil society groups will travel to Geneva to participate in the review, conducted by human rights experts that monitor compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a treaty ratified by the United States in 1992. One of the key issues that will be addressed is the need for federal support to ensure human rights compliance at the state and local level. Columbia Law School’s Human Rights Institute is joining the delegation to Geneva to advocate around a [report](#) they submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Committee last fall. The report, written in collaboration with the [national association of state and local human rights agencies](#), details how the U.S. government’s failure to adequately support state and local implementation has led to myriad gaps in human rights protections and undercuts U.S. credibility on human rights.

“Human rights transcend the jurisdictional divides of federal, state, and local governments,” says JoAnn Kamuf Ward, associate director of the Human Rights in the U.S. Project at the Human Rights Institute. “Making human rights a reality requires concerted and coordinated action at all levels of government, along with community partnerships.” While state and local governments are on the front lines of protecting and promoting human rights, they currently lack the capacity and resources to do so effectively.

The report points out that as a result of U.S.'s failure to support or encourage state and local human rights implementation, which is required under the ICCPR, rights violations continue to persist, including housing discrimination, employment inequality, and profiling on the basis of race and national origin.

Despite the lack of federal leadership, state and local agencies and officials across the country are engaging in innovative efforts to promote and protect human rights. A number of states and localities have explicitly incorporated international human rights standards into local law, policy and practice. California, Vermont, Madison, and Salt Lake City offer positive examples of local leadership highlighted in the report. However, on the whole, state and local actors lack the capacity and resources for human rights monitoring and implementation.

The report recommends steps the federal government must take to ensure that state and local actors have the knowledge and tools to protect human rights. “Federal

leadership and support for human rights are essential for the U.S. to live up to the human rights ideals it espouses on the world stage,” Kamuf Ward stated. More effective and comprehensive human rights implementation will require, at a minimum, dedicated staff, education and training on human rights and funding. By taking concrete action to make human rights a reality in local communities, the federal government can demonstrate leadership both at home and abroad.

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