My name is Robert Robinson

I am speaking today on behalf of several organizations - the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, Partners for Dignity & Rights, UPR Cities Network, Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute, Center for Rural Enterprise and Environmental Justice, and the US Human Rights Network. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the human rights situation within the United States.

The focus of our brief remarks is the causes and impacts of the ongoing failure of the United States to recognize, or protect, basic rights essential for an adequate standard of living, health, and dignity.
We will focus on the communities within the United States. Disinvestment and neglect of housing, health care, sanitation and water have long harmed people living at or near the poverty line. Black, indigenous, and migrant communities - those who have historically lacked political power, are the most impacted. As all the data about the current pandemic shows: these communities are now in even greater peril.

* Coronavirus deaths are hitting black communities hardest. And those falling sick are least likely to have adequate healthcare.

* Low wage workers are on the front lines because they rely on wages to live and risk losing jobs if they stay home. Homeless persons face the greatest risk and have the least support.
Lack of Adequate Sanitation Has Health & Environmental Impacts
All of this highlights the need for immediate solutions and long-term investment in basic needs. The federal, state and local governments have failed to protect economic and social rights and that must change.

The United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet over a million people lacked access to adequate, affordable, healthcare, housing, sanitation and water before this pandemic. This is true in cities and in rural communities. In practice:

* Rural households have failing, and in some cases non-existent systems to dispose of human waste. Water being delivered to many of these communities contains high levels of lead due to faulty infrastructure, much of which is more than a hundred years old.

* In cities, families and individuals are burdened with rent and mortgages consuming fifty percent or more of household income, forcing people to make choices of paying for housing or paying for necessary healthcare. Today, hotels and houses stand empty and many cities refuse to open them to individuals in need of shelter.
More than 2,000,000 Americans live without basic access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

This number includes:

1.4 million
people in the United States lack access to indoor plumbing (hot and cold running water, a sink, a shower/bath, or a flush toilet).

250,000
people in Puerto Rico

553,000
homeless people in the United States* who may lack equitable water and sanitation access.

Many more people face related water challenges:

Native American households are 19 times more likely than white households to lack indoor plumbing.

More than 44,000,000 people are served by water systems that recently had health-based Safe Drinking Water Act violations.*

23% of private wells tested by the United States Geological Survey showed contaminants with health concerns, including arsenic, uranium, nitrates, and E. coli.**

17% of people living in rural areas report having experienced issues with safe drinking water.

12% of people living in rural areas report issues with their sewage system.***

What is needed?

There has been no political will to recognize water, sanitation and housing, as basic rights and laws and policies do not promote an adequate standard of living as human rights require. Ongoing structural discrimination and heavy corporate influence in US politics mean that decision-making does not reflect what is best for the public good, and communities that have been historically marginalized continue to be excluded from decision making. This is what we want to change.
Racial Disparities in Homelessness

In Every State, African Americans Are More Likely Than Whites to Experience Homelessness

Ratio of Black-to-White homelessness rate by state, 2018

Poverty Rates by Age, Race, & Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Under 18</th>
<th>Adults 18-64</th>
<th>65+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Alone</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Alone</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (any race)</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Alone</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations
We urge your governments to make recommendations to the United States that promote access to affordable healthcare, housing, water and sanitation on an equal basis. The US must:

FOR WATER AND SANITATION:
* Prioritize access to affordable and potable water and basic sanitation for all
* Provide direct funding targeted for infrastructure improvements in indigenous, rural and urban communities
  o This includes projects that will ensure lead free water is delivered to homes and schools; particularly in low income and minority communities
* Encourage states and localities to eliminate laws that penalize poverty

FOR HOUSING:
* Invest in targeted affordable housing that ensures those most in need have access to housing that requires residents to pay no more than thirty percent of household income; a standard set by the US government
* Focus on the over 500,000 people homeless in the US by reinvesting in public housing and refocus on “Opening Doors” the US government’s plan to end homelessness.

We are happy to provide our reports and 2 pagers on these issues to give further details.
Thank you
US Human Rights Network
UPR Task Force

* Center for Rural Enterprise and Environmental Justice
* Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute
* National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
* Partners for Dignity and Rights
* UPR Cities Network
* Hawaii Institute for Human Rights