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Dear Reader,

The dire need for human rights in the United States has never been more apparent than it is today. The coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on the ways in which those vulnerable to human rights abuses in the U.S. -- people of color, people experiencing homelessness, people in detention, people with disabilities, and others -- are also most likely to get sick and even die from COVID-19 related complications. This pandemic has proven to us that we are all connected and that the recognition of human rights for our most vulnerable communities is essential to the well-being of all people.

Last month, the US Human Rights Network, together with our members and partners, coordinated a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) briefing on human rights and COVID-19, which we presented to over 55 diplomats from 44 countries. The briefing focused on nine key issue areas that have been worsened by -- or communities who are particularly vulnerable to -- the coronavirus, including housing, sanitation, and water; workers’ rights; prisons, jails, and detention centers; healthcare; democracy and voting rights; Black communities: Asian communities; Indigenous Peoples; and women’s rights. For more information on the briefing, visit our UPR website resources page.

The UPR is a United Nations process where each member country’s human rights record is reviewed in a 4-5 year cycle; USHRN has been advocating around the third cycle of the UPR since early-2019. The original date for the review of the U.S. was set for May 11, 2020, but was postponed as a result of the global pandemic. We decided to release our annual human rights report on May 11 as a message that we will not stop working towards realizing human rights in the U.S.; civil society remains committed to holding the U.S. accountable to its human rights obligations.

Black people are 2 1/2 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than whites. According to APM Research Lab, the latest available COVID-19 mortality rate for Black Americans is 2.6 times higher than the rate for whites. Their analysis shows that while Black Americans represent 13% of the population in regions of the US releasing data on COVID-19 infection and death rates, they have suffered 27% of deaths.

Photo: Bebeto Matthews
The following report is split into ten chapters which are identified by a cluster of human rights, like Housing or Immigration. Each chapter is opened by one of our directly impacted members or a community member they serve, who shares their personal story of a human rights violation they have faced. After the story, each chapter provides an overview of the relative human rights framework, and a 2019-2020 update on the situation of that human rights issue area in the United States.

We recognize that systemic oppression has made it so that many of the most disenfranchised people in the U.S. are also part of communities that are most affected by or vulnerable to the novel coronavirus. We stand with you, frontline workers; low-wage workers; undocumented workers; people in prisons and immigration detention centers; people experiencing homelessness; people without access to affordable healthcare; people who are scapegoated and whose rights are further infringed upon as a result of the pandemic. We believe in a future where the inherent dignity, freedom, and potential of every person is fiercely protected and, working together, we believe that this future is within our reach.

In solidarity,

Salimah K. Hankins, Esq.
Interim Executive Director
US Human Rights Network
In January of 2013, my workplace was raided and I was detained during the raid. I spent two months at Estrella Jail in Maricopa county -- back then it was former Sheriff Joe Arpaio’s jail -- and one month in detention at the Eloy Detention Center, a private prison under contract with ICE. It was a devastating, depressing situation, I had no clue people would be treated so inhumanely when being arrested. At Estrella Jail, a women’s-only jail in Phoenix, I experienced being fed rotten food and milk. The food would have tiny insects in it, and the guards would say that they were “vitamins”. I had to share unsanitary restrooms and showers with over 100 other women.

When I was detained, my mother came into contact with Puente Human Rights Movement and they helped her organize a campaign around my case. While I was detained, I saw on TV that she was outside of the ICE office having a press conference. A couple of weeks after the press conference, I had my court hearing where I was granted release on OR (own recognizance) after a brief discussion between the judge, attorney, and prosecutor.

During the hearing, they asked things like “have you seen what we have received?” -- at the time I had no clue what they were talking about, but it was a petition that Puente had created and gotten signatures from the public for, in order to pressure ICE to release me. These human rights violations have not ended -- people who are currently incarcerated are still living in inhumane conditions.

I WAS CAGED AND FED INSECTS

MY GOAL IS FOR ALL OUR PEOPLE TO BE FREE FROM CAGES.
THESE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS HAVE NOT ENDED -- PEOPLE WHO ARE CURRENTLY INCARCERATED ARE STILL LIVING IN INHUMANE CONDITIONS.

I believe it has gotten worse instead of improving. I used to believe that we have human rights, but after my personal experience I no longer believe that because I saw with my own eyes how our people are truly being treated in jails and detention centers. I now work at Puente Human Rights Movement and my goal is for all our people to be free from cages.

The right to migrate includes, among many other rights, the right to freedom of movement within and between countries. Migrants have an inherent right to life, liberty, and security of person regardless of identity, especially race or ethnicity. The right to be treated like a human being extends to all migrants including those who are laborers in places other than their nation of origin and to those who may be subjected to detention and torture in their host nation. All migrants have the right to relief from persecution by applying for asylum or refugee status.

IMMIGRATION IN 2019

On January 24, 2019, the Department of Homeland Security implemented the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), requiring asylum-seekers to provide documentation and identification before being allowed to enter the United States. [1] Asylum-seekers often do not have the necessary documents on hand due to the emergency nature of fleeing violence in their home countries or long distance travel to arrive at the border. [2] The United States remains one of only a handful of countries that has refused to join the UN Global Compact on Migrants. [3] Sadly, more than 16,000 children under the age of 18 have been sent back to Mexico under MPP, including 4,300 children under the age of five. [4] The policy of separating migrant children from their parents at the southern U.S.-Mexico border officially ended in the summer of 2018, after a judge reversed President Donald Trump's executive order. [5] However, more than 1,100 cases have been identified, since then, of children as young as 5 years old being separated from their parents. [6] The new policy gives the federal government discretion to separate children from their parents if the migrating parent is deemed unfit or presents a danger to the child. [7]
In addition, the government continues to remove children from other adults they are traveling with, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and adult siblings, even when they show guardianship documents or written authorization from parents.[8] Studies have shown that separating children from their families has long lasting, traumatic psychological impacts for both children and guardians. [9]

According to the American Psychological Association, “the intense fear, sense of helplessness and vulnerability for the child associated with forced separation from their parent can lead to a state of hyperarousal, attention deficits, depressive symptoms and interference in their ability to communicate and relate to others”[10].

In July 2019, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, expressed that she is “appalled by the conditions in which migrants and refugees - children and adults - are being held in detention” after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.[11]

According to a recently released report, Black Lives at the Border, by Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), “Advocates and organizers at the border estimate that 3,000 Haitians were paroled into the U.S., another 3,000 were detained or deported, and 2,000-3,000 Haitians were denied entry outright”[12].
Simultaneously, “growing communities of African refugees and immigrants at the border were seeing increased Immigration and Customs Enforcement presence and vapid displays of white supremacy and even instances of hate violence”[13].

Resources for recently arrived Haitian and other Black immigrants, such as housing, legal services, and Haitian-Creole and African language translation and interpretation are routinely unavailable for these populations, making them increasingly vulnerable to human rights abuses.[14]

After the Trump administration pushed through the controversial “Muslim Ban” -- which targeted for exclusion from the United States, people from Muslim-majority countries -- the policy was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2018. Subsequently, President Trump added six more countries to the banned list, all of which are located in the global south.[15] Although civil rights groups have been fighting the constitutionality of the ban for more than a year, the limited changes still ban about 7% of the world’s population from receiving visas to come to the United States.[16] The Trump administration insists that the policy is not racist or Islamophobic, however, in July 2018, President Trump allegedly referred to immigrants from Haiti and West Africa as coming from “shithole countries.”[17][18]

On August 8, 2019 in Mississippi, ICE officials conducted their largest raid in the history of the United States.[19] It was the second attack aimed at immigrant communities in less than a week, just days after the white nationalist domestic terrorist attack in El Paso, Texas took the lives of 22 mostly Latinx people.[20] Both events were orchestrated attacks against the undocumented immigrant community, fueled by racist hate rhetoric of the Trump administration and white nationalist pundits.[21]
I am a Black transgender woman and sex worker rights advocate who has experienced racial and gender profiling, known as “walking while trans”. In 2013, I attended a rally to protest Project ROSE, which was a sting operation set up by the Phoenix police, Arizona State University School of Social Work, and other local service providers. The next day I was arrested under the project myself while I was walking to a local gay bar in my neighborhood. I was taken to a church where I was told I had to accept diversion services or be charged with “manifesting the intent to prostitute” (which is basically being told that you look like a prostitute).

I spent the next two years fighting the charges brought against me and bringing a constitutional challenge against the law. I worked with a network of organizations to challenge the manifestation statute and I ran my own campaign, the “stand with Monica campaign,” with the support of community groups and the ACLU-AZ. I travelled to Geneva in 2014 and 2015 as part of the UPR process organized by Best Practices Policy Project and Desiree Alliance to highlight the injustice of manifestation and loitering statutes. During that time, I was often unable to leave my apartment because police officers would station themselves outside and I was constantly followed by police on the street. In late-2015 I was placed on a global threat “watch list” because of my constitutional challenge.
In the last two years my economic rights and my right to organize have been violated by the passage of the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA). Since these laws have been passed, I have not been able to share safety information online, internet spaces for sex workers have closed, and everyone in our community has lost income to a devastating degree.

I feel constantly worried about my financial future. The manifestation law still exists; it allows the police to detain trans women for no reason. I can be arrested at any time for who I am. I am worried about other trans women and low-income women who are still being arrested under these laws during COVID-19; I think about what is happening to them as they get caught up in Maricopa County’s jail and the prison system. The law is being used more frequently against undocumented immigrants and women of color. I want sex workers and trans people to be able to exist and live freely, and not have to fight for their rights constantly. We need to decriminalize sex work and end state-sanctioned and policy-based transphobia.

The human rights violations inherent in the criminal justice system “play out on a number of fronts: racial disparities in arrests, convictions, and sentencing; draconian sentences mandating that nonviolent offenders serve the rest of their lives behind prison walls; the heightened impact of incarceration on vulnerable populations, such as children and the mentally ill; and more”[HR2]. This violates the right of each person, regardless of race, gender, or religion, to fair and equitable protection before the law. Criminal charges must be evaluated by independent, impartial tribunals in a fair and public hearing. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, including solitary confinement or execution by a State or sovereign body.[HR3]
In the last year, hard fought battles have been waged at state and local levels to reform the criminal justice system and to decrease mass incarceration rates in the United States. However, the United States still sits at the top of the list for having the most people in prison than any developed nation in the world with close to 2.3 million people in prisons and local jails.[1] The Sentencing Project projects that it would take approximately 75 years to reach a 50% reduction in the number of people incarcerated in the United States.[2] According to a civil society report by Justice Strategies -- submitted for the 36th Session of Universal Periodic Review of the United States -- approximately half of the 2.3 million incarcerated population in United States prisons and jails are parents. The impact of parental incarceration on their children is devastating. This alarming statistic demonstrates the intersection of “increasing mental health, child homelessness and intergenerational inequalities” that are disproportionately affecting Black and Latinx families[3] who made up 33% and 23% of the US prison population respectively, according to a Pew Research report on Bureau of Prison data for 2017.[4]

Equal Justice Initiative shared a report on Department of Justice findings (dated 4/30/19) to the Alabama Governor regarding constitutional rights violations found in Alabama state prisons. The report concludes that, since the DOJ began investigating the prison in 2016, conditions have worsened. The state “violated inmate constitutional rights by failing to protect them from rampant violence and sexual abuse. They were also found to have misrepresented the causes of death of inmates and failed to report at least 30 deaths”[5].

A report by a Coalition of Sex Worker Rights NGOs -- submitted for the 36th Session of Universal Periodic Review of the United States -- outlines systemic, overt, and pervasive human rights violations experienced by sex workers in the U.S. Sex workers' rights to freedom of assembly and association are routinely breached with LGBTQ people of color being particularly targeted by where and how they congregate. Other violations include assault, harassment, rape, and trafficking by police officers and border control agents. The report outlines several recommendations encouraging governmental bodies in the United States to amend or repeal federal, state and local policies that criminalize, endanger, and prevent sex workers from being protected against human rights violations.[6][7]

In the United States, police killed 1,099 people in 2019. Black people were 24% of those killed despite being only 13% of the population.[8] Staggeringly, there were “only 29 days in [all of] 2019 when no one was killed by police” [9], and “99 percent of killings by police from 2013-2019 have not resulted in officers being charged with [any] crime” [10]. Police forces that adopt use of force policies--such as requiring deescalation, requiring the exhaustion of all other means before shooting, and reporting all uses of force--kill significantly fewer people.[11]
I have a chronic health condition called Diverticulosis. Because of this, I frequently suffer from flares where the pockets that are formed in my colon become infected. I cannot work due to the flares, which cause pain, fever and then the need for antibiotics. I need surgery to remove 30 inches of my colon, but I do not have health insurance. So, I cannot get the surgery that I need to be able to live a full life.

I have applied for Medicaid but been turned down. My husband works, and our income is over the limit to receive Medicaid. I cannot get the healthcare I need. My perspective on human rights in this country is dim. If you have enough money to buy health insurance, then you are deserving of healthcare. If you don’t have enough money for health insurance, then you have to pull yourself up by your nonexistent bootstraps, and have 2-3 jobs to be able to pay the premiums.

I feel less than a human because I’m not treated as a human being. I deserve healthcare. I deserve to live a productive life. Because I can’t hold a job due to my illness -- and you can’t “see” my illness -- there are times when people don’t believe how sick I am.

I need for my government to work to ensure everyone has the healthcare that they need. I need my government to recognize that I am a human being who deserves to be healthy. I want healthcare for all, not health insurance.
Healthcare is a human right. The right to adequate healthcare is not the same as the right to purchase healthcare from a private company. Access to timely, acceptable, and affordable healthcare of appropriate quality is a human right and should include providing for the underlying determinants of health, such as safe and potable water, sanitation, food, housing, health-related information and education, and gender equality. This healthcare must prioritize the needs of those furthest behind first towards greater equity. [HR4] The right to healthcare includes: The right to a system of health protection providing equality of opportunity for everyone to enjoy the highest attainable level of health; The right to prevention, treatment and control of diseases. All services, goods and facilities must be available, accessible, acceptable and of good quality. Women are entitled to reproductive health care services, goods and facilities that are: (a) available in adequate numbers; (b) accessible physically and economically; (c) accessible without discrimination; and (d) of good quality. Woman must have control over matters related to sexuality, including reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. Mental health services, if required, must also be a core obligation of states in the context of pregnancy and childbirth.[HR5]

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE & HEALTHCARE IN 2019

Higher levels of income inequality coincide with increased mortality for lower income individuals who are disproportionately female, people of color, minorities, and Indigenous Peoples. African-Americans are especially affected by rising uncovered health costs because of wealth and income inequality.[1] As of 2016, white households have 6.5 times more wealth than black households. Such income stressors and the cumulative experience of racism and sexism, especially during sensitive developmental periods, trigger a chain of biological processes called weathering, that undermine African American women’s physical and mental health.[2] For women who give birth, the average out-of-pocket cost for maternity care is approximately $16,500, more than half of the average income for a woman of reproductive age.[3] Disparities in maternal health and healthcare are stark. Indigenous women are 2.5 times more likely than white women to die from a maternal death.[4] Women with disabilities are at higher risk of adverse health outcomes during pregnancy, delivery and the postpartum period.[5] Asians were also more likely than whites to have low-birthweight births and births that received late or no prenatal care; however data on health issues and outcomes may mask disparities among Asian American subgroups, leading to an incomplete picture of the health of this population group.[6]

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has raised particular concerns about healthcare services in immigration detention centers in the United States, particularly focused on the lack of sexual and reproductive healthcare services...
suitable for women. According to the Principles and Best Practices on the Protection of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas, women deprived of liberty have a right of access to specialized medical care, including reproductive health needs.[7] IACHR recommends granting access to medical and healthcare services, especially for migrants who are pregnant, and having competent medical personnel on site to perform and prioritize health screenings.[8] The Commission is also concerned about the barriers to necessary medical services that incarcerated black men experience.[9]

June Medical Services v. Gee has made its way to the Supreme Court and will address the Unsafe Abortion Protection Act in Louisiana.[10] This case threatens access to abortion services which primarily impacts marginalized communities, including immigrants, low-income women, women of color, LGBTQI+ persons, persons living in rural areas, and persons with disabilities.[11] In the first quarter of 2019, 28 state legislatures introduced an array of abortion bans.[12] A new Trump administration rule to limit access to abortion and other forms of reproductive health services went into effect on August 19, 2019. This new Domestic Gag Rule requires physical and financial separation of Title X services from abortion services, even prohibiting recipients from referring patients for abortion care.[13]

Changes to Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act overturn the prohibition of discrimination based on gender identity as well as specific health insurance coverage protections for transgender individuals. Only 14 states and the District of Columbia expressly prohibit private insurers from discriminating on the basis of gender identity, and only 20 states and the District of Columbia ban insurers from offering plans that categorically deny coverage for transition-related care.[17] Additionally, due to the transgender military ban, the Department of Defense has stopped covering transgender-related healthcare for service members.[18]

Updates to Section 1557 also loosen the requirement that medical providers let patients know about their right to language interpretation services as well as communication assistance such as qualified sign language interpreters or written information in alternative formats for the visually impaired, language assistance that supports people with disabilities and immigrant communities.[19] More than 1 in 4 Asian Americans and nearly 1 in 10 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders have limited English proficiency, and these changes to the ACA create a barrier to accessing and understanding healthcare.[20]
In December 2019, a federal appeals court struck down a central part of the ACA, ruling that requiring people to have health insurance is unconstitutional, putting the healthcare of 17 million people at risk.[21] Fifteen states have pursued or implemented Medicaid work requirements which have a discriminatory effect on vulnerable and marginalized populations, and may deprive over 800,000 people of healthcare access.[22][23]

In 2017, 32% of Black women and 27% of Latinx women of reproductive age were covered by Medicaid.[24] As of 2017, non-elderly Latinx people and American Indians & Alaska Natives were nearly three times as likely as whites to be uninsured.[25]

The Trump Administration issued a rule entitled “Protecting Statutory Conscience Rights in Health Care," also known as the Denial of Care Rule, which empowers healthcare workers to turn a patient away for any moral or religious reasons. This rule has no emergency exception nor limits on what constitutes a religious or moral denial. Those invoking a denial of care based on a moral or religious reason do not need to be doctors, and could be a hospital receptionist or an orderly booking an operating room. [26] Facilities receiving funding through HHS will be incentivized to cease offering contraception, abortion and LGBTQ-focused care for fear of losing federal funding if they do not grant employees absolute freedom to deny information and services.[27] The rule also threatens the ability of clinics and other smaller providers to stay open. The Denial of Care Rule, which was issued in May 2019, was struck down by a California District Court in November.[28]
I live on land that has been in my family since 1891. A hog operation moved in next door in 1986. The operation is located on my family’s land, and I am now forced to live with hogs in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFOs). These CAFOs, including a manure lagoon and sprayfield system, are located in close proximity to my home. The animal waste is sprayed on sprayfields in order to keep the hog waste lagoon level low. The waste is sprayed on fields eight feet from my home, and consequently the waste spray lands on and inside my living space. The spray comes onto my property. The smell invades the air that I breathe. I stopped using my shallow water well because manure mist was landing on it. I feel that I am being treated inhumanely. My rights to clean air, clean water, and my right to enjoy my home are being violated by the industry. The right to breathe clean air and water are necessary for a healthy life. The industry acts as if I deserve to live with animals and their waste, as if I am less than human.
The hog farmer and industry people are unwilling to address my concerns. The Industry has done nothing to improve my living conditions. The North Carolina Environmental Justice Network (NCEJN) and Waterkeepers have helped to educate and organize communities like mine to unite and speak with one voice about the environmental and social injustices we are living with. We have learned how to document the operation practices and get our stories into mainstream media, and how to meet with local legislators to pass legislation to bring permanent relief to impacted communities.

We need to be at the table when decisions are being made concerning our communities. The industry has the resources to clean up these dirty and abusive practices, they just refuse to do so. I would love to see these CAFOs eliminated as they exist today, the Sprayfield and Lagoon System is antiquated as the industry admitted to in an agreement with the state in 2000, twenty years ago. In twenty years, nothing has changed in my community. I am still living with animals and their waste.

Every person and Peoples has the right to baseline protections against drastic climate change to ensure that social, cultural, economic, and political rights remain intact. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change recognizes the right of present and future generations to a preserved climate system, on the basis of equity (Article 1) and takes into account the degree of responsibilities that economically developed nations must bear to minimize and ultimately eliminate the negative, asymmetrical impacts of climate change. Included in this right, is the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of each person and each person’s family (including food, water, and sanitation).[HR6]

ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE JUSTICE IN 2019

A 2019 report, Safe Climate: A Report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, found that the United States produced 25 percent of global emissions over the past 270 years, demonstrating that certain nations disproportionately impact climate change more than other nations.[1] As climate change-induced natural disasters persist, the United States saw an increase in extreme weather in 2019.[2]
In the United States, 14.3 million people cannot afford adequate food, and people of color are more likely to experience food insecurity.[12] Recent studies found that 21.1 percent of Black households and 16.2 percent of Latinx households experience food insecurity, compared to 8.1 percent of white households.[13] Structural and economic inequalities often prevent food-insecure households from accessing nutritious foods.[14] Families living in “urban food deserts” do not have access to a variety of healthy food options in local stores, nor the transportation to access a wide range of food stores. Limited access to healthy food often results in serious health conditions.[15] The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides assistance to 40.3 million Americans. However, in 2019, the Trump administration sought to reduce the number of people eligible for the program. If Congress were to allow these changes, an estimated 3 million poor and low-income people would lose food benefits.[16]
Adult illiteracy is a major problem in Memphis where most people can’t afford legal advisers and have a hard time getting legal assistance, even if they really need it. I am a college graduate, community activist, and founder of Black Lives Matter Memphis. Many people who need help with interpreting things they don’t understand contact me for help.

As a result of my community advocacy, I am profiled continuously when I enter government buildings. This is done to discourage others from attempting to navigate and expose courts or governmental agencies that are unequal in treatment to the public, or otherwise corrupt.

The local government acts in a tactical fashion to intimidate, humiliate and harm me and other activists. As a social justice advocate, I have been improperly labeled by state actors as a dangerous person and even as a terrorist. In 2019, I won a defamation and slander suit against a former county commissioner in Tennessee who called me and other activists “terrorists.”

My win in court illustrates that activists are not terrorists, but are fundamentally important to ensuring transparency, accountability, equal protection and dignity for all citizens.
However, I am still being followed through public buildings like a terrorist. I continue to experience human rights violations including profiling, targeting, detention, denial of equal rights, and denial of the right to parent my child, as a result of trying to advocate for those less fortunate.

The situation makes me feel hopeless and defeated. I feel angry that our local government is so corrupt. I feel that as a Black woman and a human rights defender, I don’t have any human rights in the United States, especially in Memphis.

Political human rights, including the rights to vote, to dissent, and to privacy are essential for any meaningful participation in governing systems. These rights include protection from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home, and correspondence. The right to vote by secret ballot in periodic elections is a crucial aspect of political participation on the basis of equal and universal suffrage, as is the freedom of peaceful association and assembly regardless of race or color.[HR7]

The people continue to fight to expand voting rights and end increased gerrymandering and voter suppression across the nation. Following a peoples’ victory that restored voting rights to formerly incarcerated people in Florida, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill 7066, an unconstitutional poll tax requiring former felons to pay restitution, fines, and court costs before they can vote -- SB 7066 is in litigation as of April 2020. The Trump administration worked to include a citizenship question on the 2020 Census, a move which would likely stop many undocumented and immigrant communities from completing the Census form and lead to gerrymandered redistricting and rigged elections; the administration was thwarted by legal battles and grassroots advocates who fought for the integrity of the Census. During the coronavirus pandemic, nearly half a million people in Wisconsin lined up to vote for the presidential primary election at a drastically reduced number of polling places, risking their health to cast a ballot; at least 40 people who worked at the polling places or who waited in line to vote contracted the deadly virus.

Advocates who defend the rights of refugees and asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico Border have reported experiencing harassment and criminal prosecution by law enforcement agencies in the United States.[1] This targeting of human rights defenders has the effect of deterring activists from documenting and addressing any human rights violations against migrants.[2] Additionally, human rights defenders
During a visit to the southern border from August 19-23 in 2019, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights was briefed on the targeting of human rights defenders, including: “(i) restrictions on meeting with the people they are assisting, especially if they are being detained; (ii) threats and harassment, including sometimes through formal accusations that allege they have broken the law; and (iii) refusals to let [defenders] make telephone calls and restrictions on their mobility”[4]. Scott Warren, a university professor and member of the civil society organization No More Deaths, faced three felony charges (harboring and conspiracy), simply for offering migrants in Ajo, Arizona, food, water, medical assistance, and a bed to sleep in. Following a hung jury mistrial and an almost immediate retrial, Warren was found not guilty. In 2019, authorities in the United States prosecuted 9 humanitarian volunteers from the No More Deaths organization for providing aid to migrants on the border of Arizona, where thousands have died.[5]

The United States continues to target and imprison human rights advocates, largely for their political beliefs and actions.[6] Many of these individuals were targeted and sentenced to life during the COINTELPRO-era -- a “counterintelligence program conducted by the FBI from 1956 to 1971... [that] often used extralegal means to criminalize...social movements, such as those for civil [and human] rights”[7]. Individuals who are believed to have evidence exonerating them but who have spent, and continue to spend, decades of their lives in prison include: Leonard Peltier, an activist in the American Indian Movement; Mumia Abu Jamal, campaigner against police abuses in Black communities; and Simón Trinidad, a negotiator for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP).[8] More recently, Water Protectors have been incarcerated for resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline for its dangers to the Standing Rock Sioux people. Two Water Protectors, Red Dawn Fallis and Michael Little Feather Giron, have been sentenced to 36 months and 57 months in prison, respectively, and many others have been targeted.[9]

Concerns have increased over the breadth of data being collected by the Big 5 Tech companies, namely Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and Google (Alphabet), which together account for over $5 trillion in the economy.[10] Facebook can determine political views, religious affiliation, income level (determined through partnerships with data brokers), and ethnicity based on individuals’ profiles. Both Microsoft and Facebook store facial recognition data based on pictures being uploaded. A variety of these platforms collect data regarding emails, documents, and messages. Some United States senators are seeking to have the Big 5 Tech companies report to users what data is being collected, and how much that data is worth.[11] This type of data collection serves as an extremely lucrative business as these companies sell consumers' information to marketers for advertisement targeting purposes.[12]
The protection of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a human rights issue for the Gwich’in Nation. If the United States continues to fasttrack oil and gas development in the Coastal Plain, they will be doing so in direct violation of our human rights. The Coastal Plain is the birthing and calving grounds for the Porcupine Caribou Herd. We refer to it as *Izhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit* or The Sacred Place Where Life Begins. We are caribou people.

Our sacred lands are being violated. Our rights to self-determination are being violated. The United States government is not obtaining our free, prior and informed consent before entering our lands. They are speaking to the corporations that operate for profit instead of talking to us, the people who live here in Alaska. The situation makes me feel like our identity and way of life is not important to those who only care to fill their pockets.

It brings me a lot of anxiety and stress. We are real people with jobs, families, and grandchildren, and we have always protected these lands. It’s overwhelming to have people come to our land and disrupt the thousands of years of history we have with our land and our animals. The actions of the United States are threatening our food security. We already see a huge decline in the herds that are in the areas of oil and gas development. Our concerns are not being listened to. This has been going on for over 30 years.

“IT’S OVERWHELMING TO HAVE PEOPLE COME TO OUR LAND AND DISRUPT THE THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF HISTORY.”

BERNADETTE DEMIEN'TIEFF
Fairbanks, AL
Gwich’in Steering Committee

MY COMMUNITY’S LIFEWAY IS UNDER ATTACK

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We go to Washington D.C. to speak with decision makers and plead our case. We have tried speaking with the Alaskan leadership, but to no avail. We have had community meetings and there is a lot of concern that nobody is taking our suggestions, recommendations, or human rights seriously. We also attend meetings with oil and gas companies and financial institutions. As of April 25, 2020, 19 financial institutions have updated their policies to ban project-level financing for oil and gas development in the area.

We are doing the best we can, but we need help. Our voices continue to be dismissed. It is crucial that everyone learns about who we are and how we are spiritually and culturally connected to our animals.

The fate of the porcupine caribou herd is the fate of the Gwich’in people and our way of life. I wish for our voices to be heard and for our lands to be protected for all future generations; for our animals to have a permanently protected place in our homelands – the same one they have had for thousands of years. It is our belief that if we take care of the land, the water, and the animals, they will take care of us. —

The Human Right to Sovereignty and Self Determination is foundational to the enjoyment of economic, cultural, social, and political rights. All Peoples have the right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and political development. This right can be claimed by all Peoples and is inextricably linked to each individual’s right to participate in ongoing political dynamics. Indigenous Peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.[HR8]

SOVEREIGNTY & SELF-DETERMINATION IN 2019

Indigenous Peoples continue to face systemic attacks on their right to sovereignty by local, state, and federal governments. The Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, “also known as the People of the First Light, has inhabited present day Massachusetts and Eastern Rhode Island for more than 12,000 years”[1]. In March 2020, the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs notified the tribe that “it will be rescinding its reservation designation and removing the [over 300 acres of] land from federal trust”[2]. The decision is “‘the latest concerning sign that the Trump administration is willing to use its discretionary powers to attempt to take lands away from tribes,’ said Jean-Luc Pierite, of the North American Indian Center...‘this is an existential crisis for tribes,’ Pierite said. ‘It’s a power grab and a land grab by the Trump administration’”[3].

Mauna Kea is a mountain and "a site of religious and cultural significance for Kanaka Maoli, or Native Hawaiians"[4]. The United States helped overthrow the Kingdom of
On July 17, the Governor of Hawai‘i, David Ige, issued an emergency proclamation after a day of protectors blocking access to the roads. Thirty three kūpuna, or elders, were arrested. Protectors continued to gather, and over the course of the week, numbers grew from 500 to 2,000.[7]

The construction of TMT would negatively impact and interfere with the cultural and religious practices of Kanaka Maoli. This is a violation of the standards set by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), including articles 12 (1) and 25 regarding spiritual practices, and article 32 (2) on free, prior, and informed consent. As articulated in the UNDRIP articles 11 and 12, the United States, including the State of Hawai‘i, is obligated to respect the cultural and religious customs of Indigenous Hawaiians.[8]

This year marks 30 years since the passage of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). The Disability Rights Movement, which gained traction in the 1980s, achieved the passage of the ADA after its members were systematically ignored, mistreated, and denied the right to self-determination, freedom, and choice about their own bodies.[9] In 2014, more than 4.7 million Americans had Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities.[10] While ableism is still pervasive and its effects are far reaching, 2019 marked a year with significant advances for disability representation including inclusive emoji’s, representation in television and film, and as a major campaign issue in the 2020 presidential race.[11][12][13] However, for already vulnerable communities, such as people of color, children, LGBTQIA communities, detained immigrants, other incarcerated individuals, and many others, a lack of protection based on their disability can compound their vulnerability to oppression and human rights abuses.[14][15][16]
I DO NOT HAVE A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE

I am a first generation American. I am African. I am a queer, non-binary femme. I’m working class. Since I don’t fit into the hegemonic model of how America is supposed to work and for whom it works, my experiences have been affected by my identity. I’ve dealt with homelessness, racism, gender-based violations, sexual harassment and assault.

I was in a psychologically and physically unsafe household growing up. I rushed off to go to college, in a sense it was an escape for me. I was really involved in my housing life on campus, but I experienced institutional racism and saw how it pervaded a lot of things on campus. It was a very draining situation because there were a lot of micro-aggressions and underhanded racial dynamics. There was a moment where I was addressed as “the angry Black woman” instead of having people try to understand my perspective and my actions. My grades were suffering.

When my campus housing contract ended in 2019, I moved in with my dad. He was living in a shared household with several other men who I didn’t know. After a while, my dad wasn’t coming home; he wouldn’t come home for two days at a time. I had a room to sleep in but the door was unlocked; I felt unsafe. There was a guy who lived there who started asking me weird and invasive questions. Alarm bells were going off in my head. He did things like offer me financial assistance, invite me out late at night when my dad was not around, and other actions that put me on edge given the context of the questions he was asking. I felt unsafe there.
I’m now staying back with my mother temporarily. I don’t have a stable home life. Right now I’m trying to figure out what my next steps are going to be. Grassroots organizations like The Lighthouse have been a blessing in my life. The Lighthouse has been really helpful in creating a place for me to rest so I can think straight, and think about the world from a place of possibility. I’m learning to see things for what they are, but not just accept them for how they are. It’s a place of rejuvenation where I feel recognized for my humanity. I want a roof over my head but not just a roof over my head; I want a safe place — a safe house of my own. A home. A safe environment and community. I want liberation and reparations, including access to therapy, because the things that I’ve experienced — human rights violations — are things that stick with you. I’m realizing how mental, emotional, and spiritual health is wrapped up in physical safety and wellbeing.

According to international standards, the human right to housing consists of seven elements: (1) security of tenure, (2) availability of services, materials, and infrastructure (3) affordability, (4) accessibility, (5) habitability, (6) location, and (7) cultural adequacy. Human rights law requires that countries take progressive steps to respect, protect, and fulfill the right, to the maximum of the country’s available resources, in a non-discriminatory manner. The right to adequate housing includes protections against forced eviction and arbitrary destruction of one’s home; The right to be free from arbitrary interference with one’s home, privacy and family; and the right to choose one’s residence regardless of race, sex, or gender; to determine where to live and freedom of movement. The right to housing also includes security of tenure; housing, land and property restitution.[HR9]
In early 2019, the UN Human Rights Council, referencing a number of reports by Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups, assessed the status of the human right to housing in the United States.[1] The reports found that Black and Indigenous communities, migrants, and people with disabilities remain disproportionately vulnerable to forced evictions and homelessness.[2] Furthermore, these populations often lack the resources to access judicial recourse.[3] The reports also found that while criminalization of homelessness or engaging in life sustaining activities on the street (such as sleeping/camping, eating, sitting, and/or asking for money/resources in public spaces) has decreased, the United States has failed to create adequate positive measures for the full realization of the right to housing.[4] The reports concluded that the United States needs “enhanced access to justice for structural remedies” and a comprehensive application of the right to housing in related court cases.[5]

Over 500,000 people are experiencing homelessness in the United States.[6][7] The United States does not recognize the human right to housing, so, instead of those in need receiving assistance with securing and maintaining clean, safe, and affordable housing, many families are at risk of eviction, and homelessness continues to increase, particularly in urban areas.[8] Since 2007, homeless encampments have increased more than 1300 percent.[9] The majority of these jurisdictions do not have legal protections for tenants or those experiencing homelessness and vulnerable residents live in constant fear of being evicted.[10] Civil society organizations are concerned about members of the Trump administration’s degrading remarks about communities that are unhoused and its attempts to create policies that criminalize people experiencing homelessness.[11] Research shows that this rhetoric promotes hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness.[12] Furthermore, access to affordable housing remains unattainable for millions of Americans. More than 10 million Americans spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing.[13] Federal funding for housing subsidies have decreased, resulting in only 25 percent of renters eligible for federal housing assistance attaining these necessary funds.[14]
A lack of access to affordable and adequate housing disproportionately impacts communities of color and other vulnerable groups in the United States. Black people represent 39 percent of all unhoused communities yet make up only 13 percent of the general population, and Latinx people represent 22 percent of all unhoused people, yet make up less than 18 percent of the general population.[15] Moreover, 20 percent of Black households and 16 percent of Latinx households are extremely low income renters, compared to 6 percent of white households. Low-income renters experience evictions at a higher rate than other renters, and remain unlikely to have representation against landlords to seek judicial remedies.[16] Additionally, gentrification and use of eminent domain often result in displacement, decreasing access to affordable housing and increasing homelessness.[17]

The Trump administration proposes to drastically cut funding from the National Housing Trust Fund in 2021.[18] Civil society organizations demand an expansion of this fund, allowing for rental assistance, repairs to existing public housing, and more subsidies to private landlords towards renting properties to low-income families.[19] Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont recommends that the United States invest in community land trusts, allowing local jurisdictions to maintain low cost housing prices on that land for the future.[20] Some human rights organizations propose social housing as another solution. Social housing is public housing which serves families with a variety of income levels and addresses issues like concentration of poverty and segregation that results from existing low-income housing.[21]
Victoria is a woman who lives in a rural community of San Luis Potosí, Mexico. Although she wanted to be an radio announcer, she could only study until high school because she needed to contribute income to support her family. However, the lack of well-paid jobs in her community forced her to look for a job in the United States.

**MY COMMUNITY IS ROBBED WHILE SEEKING WORK**

In 2007, a contractor offered me a job at an apple packing house in New York, but he never sent me to work. He just lied to me and asked for more and more money to secure the job, and he held onto my passport. Although I have continued to look for contracted jobs in the U.S., recruiters only hire women for low-wage jobs like packing goods, making chocolates, or cleaning seafood, while men are more often asked to cut vegetables. The recruiters believe that women cannot do physical work -- that is unfair, because we are totally capable.

In my community there are still many cases of fraud like the one I experienced, because people want to work and earn a living. In our rural community in Mexico, the salary we make is not enough to support our families, so many people are looking for alternatives such as employment in the U.S.. Fraudulent recruiters take advantage of people’s needs and deceive jobseekers, offering them jobs in the United States. The false recruiters ask for money to do visa paperwork and then they disappear with the money or they no longer answer our calls.

This abuse and these fraud cases have made me feel helpless, so I decided to be part of the Centro de los Derechos del Migrante (CDM) and their program Comité de Defensa del Migrante (Migrant Defense Committee). We disseminate information so that other people do not experience these abuses. We go to different communities to prevent people from paying for false work. We teach them about their rights and how to look for help in the United States.
WE TEACH THEM ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS AND HOW TO LOOK FOR HELP IN THE UNITED STATES.

Much remains to be done. If hiring could be done without intermediaries, it would be much better and safer. I would also like companies to hire more women for equal jobs, and provide childcare and education facilities for us to take our sons and daughters to. We just want to work, and we want to be treated fairly and with dignity. We go months without seeing our families and we just want to receive what is right and fair for the work we do. In fact, I would like people to have a fair salary right here, at home. I wish there was no need to leave our families alone.

The rights to decent work, fair wages, and leisure time are considered workers’ rights, more broadly. Everyone has the right to access employment of one’s choice, based on qualifications, and decent working conditions once employed. Workers are entitled to a decent living, equal pay for equal work, safe and healthy working conditions, and the right to join trade unions in order to protect their interests. The right to work also includes freedom from compulsory labor, discrimination, and abuse.

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.[HR10]

EDUCATION & WORKERS’ RIGHTS IN 2019

The fight against racial and gender inequality within schools and at work is imperative for the survival of low-wage workers, people of color, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with disabilities. A report released by EdBuild revealed that school districts in the Rust Belt economic region in the northeast United States are some of the most economically segregated in the United States and that this has created “two completely different education systems”[1]. According to the report, “37 (of the) most economically segregated boundaries in the U.S. are concentrated in only four states in the Rust Belt region. Ohio is home to 17 of the most segregating borders, New York has nine, Michigan has six and Pennsylvania has five.”
In Puerto Rico, many students have not been able to attend school at all after Hurricane Maria and the earthquakes that struck at the end of 2019. These students “missed an average of 78 days of school in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria”[2].

A 2018 report from the National Council on Disability found that “one in three undergraduates with disabilities was a victim of sexual violence on campus. Furthermore, over twice as many deaf female undergraduates experienced an incident of sexual coercion from their partner compared to hearing female undergraduates (61 percent compared to 28 percent)” [3]. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights noted “with concern the persistence of violence and discrimination against LGBTI students in the education sector, and the lack of effective prevention, protection and reporting mechanisms”[4][5].

Amy Zhang, a young Chinese-American woman, filed a lawsuit against her employer for sexual harassment. Asian Americans Advancing Justice--Asian Law Caucus, in a press release, notes:

...sexual harassment is a familiar experience for far too many low-wage workers and immigrant women, who are in many instances more vulnerable to such abuse because of language barriers, fear of retaliation, unfamiliarity with their legal rights and our legal system, and how and where they can seek help.[6]

The Domestic Worker Bill of Rights and the Fairness for Farm Workers Act of 2019 were both bills introduced in Congress to recognize the rights of millions of low-wage workers, most of whom are migrant persons of color. A report by six different legal organizations submitted to the Human Rights Committee illuminates how farmworkers, numbering 2.7 million, “are frequently discriminatorily exempted from protections of state and federal laws designed to protect workers under exemptions that have their roots in Jim Crow-era white supremacy. For example, farmworkers generally do not have to be paid overtime, sometimes they are not even guaranteed the minimum wage, and they may be lawfully retaliated against for trying to join or organize a union, or for taking any concerted action to improve their wages or work conditions”[7]. Similarly, domestic workers, “are among the lowest-paid workers in the country, and most get no benefits. The median annual salary for a home health aide was $23,000 in 2017, slightly above the $20,420 federal poverty level for a family of three. About 88 percent of domestic workers don’t have paid time off or other benefits either”[8].
I have been in the foster care system for almost two years. While in foster care, I also received a delinquency charge. I feel that I am often disrespected in a number of systems including foster care, delinquency, education, and mental health systems because I am a Black teenager. I feel that people don’t expect much from me, try to dumb me down, and feel that I will not contribute anything positive to society. In the past, when I’ve gone to court for my case in foster care, the Magistrate would always shut me down and not listen to what I had to say. My old attorney didn’t even advocate for what I told her I wanted; she stated something different than what I wanted, which made me mad and frustrated. I have been racially profiled, faced detention, been treated without dignity or respect, and have been silenced. These experiences made me feel like I had no voice. I felt that all the adults were talking and I had no voice, even though I had an attorney who was supposed to advocate for me. I felt disrespected, unheard, and worthless; I felt that I did not matter.

The Franklin Law Group, P.C. assigned me a new attorney who seems to understand a lot about me, listens to me, fights for me, tells the court what I want, and understands exactly what I need. This attorney fights for me hard! The attorney holds the court accountable to following the law, and pushes for specific things I need that are unique to me, specifically regarding my racial and cultural needs. This makes me feel that I am heard, respected, supported, and have a say in my own life. I feel empowered and like I am treated with dignity.
People have a human right to marry and to found a family regardless of race, nationality, or religion, assuming full consent of both adult spouses. Families are entitled to protection in the country in which they live. Children are to be protected from all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members. Children and families also have the right to access adequate and necessary medical care, education, housing, food, water, and sanitation to ensure proper nutrition and development. Children have the right to be free of abuse and discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

FAMILY & CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IN 2019

The human right to marriage and family, and the rights of children are deeply embedded in the international human rights framework. The United Nations Report of the Human Rights Council in the summer of 2019, called for the acceleration of the elimination of violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse that occurs within marriages and other live-in relationships.[1] Notably, the report urges countries to “support substantive gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights, including within families,” with the understanding that “deep-rooted patriarchal and gender stereotypes” are known to lead to violence against women and girls in the home”[2]. This is “a direct violation of women’s and children’s rights to live lives free of violence”[3]. Upon the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the report encourages countries to use the anniversary to “increase action with respect to the rights of the child,” including but not limited to eliminating child marriage and addressing the “gaps in the protection and fulfillment of the human rights of youth”[4]. In addition, the 2019 report by the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent addresses the intersectionality of marriage, family, and children’s rights, and expresses the need of the United States to end the funneling of children of African descent from the educational system into the criminal justice system, more commonly referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline”[5].

Although the United States has not issued responses to these 2019 international reports, there have been multiple developments in the area of marriage, family,
and children's rights.

**First, a major loophole in several state laws regarding prosecution of rape** among married people have come to light via a case in Minnesota where spouses [mainly men] were legally allowed to rape their marital-partners.[6] Although Minnesota did ultimately close this loophole, it has been reported that seventeen states “still maintain some form of [legal] exemption for spouses who rape partners”[7]. This issue prevails in part due to a lack of awareness of the archaic language of currently enforceable laws from state to state, as well as a lack of research available in this area. [8][9] Although there has been progress in closing this particular loophole when it comes to violence against women, domestic violence ending in homicide increased in 2019.[10] Women in the United States “are 21 times more likely to die by firearm homicides than women in other high-income nations” and African American women in the United States are “twice as likely as white women to be fatally shot by an intimate partner”[11]. The lack of gun control restrictions in the United States can be directly linked to the continued violation of the human right to life and security within marriages and families for women, especially women of color.

Although the marital rights of LGBTQ individuals have now been recognized nationally (though, not always enforced), the violation of the rights of LGBTQ families who wish to adopt children was pervasive in the United States in 2019. Ten states have laws on the books that allow groups to refuse to allow LGBTQ individuals to adopt based on the groups’ religious beliefs.[12] At the end of 2019, the US Health and Human Services department proposed a new rule that would repeal Obama-era discrimination protections for LGBTQ people.[13]

In 2019, African American children and LGBTQ youth continued to be overrepresented in the United States foster care system.[14] Although there has been progress on the federal level in terms of child welfare reform, there have been gaps in states’ ability to implement these measures.[15] For older youth, aging out of the foster care system often means a direct pipeline to prison.[16] The continued investment in policies that place uniformed police officers in schools contributes to the funneling of vulnerable students from schools to prisons. This is particularly true for students of color, notably African American girls and youth with disabilities.[17] “Zero tolerance” policies in public schools continue to support punitive measures that disproportionally affect African American students compared to white students, stripping students of color of their right to education and perpetuating child incarceration.[18] “One in four Native American students referred to law enforcement and subjected to school-related arrests have special education needs and disabilities”[19]. A study by the National Congress of American Indians found that 13 percent of Native boys and 7 percent of Native girls received out-of-school suspensions.[20] Several human rights organizations are working on foster care reform and ending the school-to-prison pipeline, and are advocating for counselors, not cops, to fill America’s public schools.
To me, human rights education is the essential building block to guide students to recognize their commonalities, and at the same time understand what makes them unique from one another. I do not see human rights education as its own separate subject. I strongly believe that the pillars of human rights need to be integrated into each and every school subject.

In 2000, my team in New York City was designing an art-based reconciliation program for Bosnian youth after their recent war and genocide. Then the unimaginable happened; the Twin Towers were struck on 9/11. When schools reopened two weeks later, my team began implementing the curriculum in classrooms in New York that had a view of the wreckage. Classroom teachers were asked not to speak about the tragedy due to fear that it would trigger trauma in students. However, young students were hearing what was being said around them by adults about the attacks, and as they walked to school they were seeing horrific headlines and images of the planes and towers. That fear was causing students to mistrust their Muslim classmates and prejudice became evident very quickly.

Our 9/11 Trauma Relief Program created space for students to reflect and collaborate together, and beyond that, guided students to understand Afghanistan’s recent history as well as learn about Islam. As students gained this knowledge, the fear of “the other” was shattered.
Over the past two years I’ve watched schools go from embracing human rights to choosing not to use those words at all. As a result of current politics, the term “human rights” is seen as political and almost “taboo.” When I speak to district offices and principals I am ready to change my language when needed. In these situations, and also because many education communities don’t know what the term “human rights” means, you need to have your talking points ready. I talk about the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I make sure to mention that the U.S. signed it, and I speak about providing students with the tools to learn to respect one another.

As the United States affirmed when ratifying three international treaties (ICCPR, CERD, and CAT), the federal, state, and local authorities share responsibility for implementing international human rights obligations. In the United States, “subnational government actors are essential to human rights implementation. This includes the over 150 state and local agencies that enforce human and civil rights laws; governors; state attorneys general; mayors, legislators; and law enforcement. State and local actors have jurisdiction over a range of human rights issues, such as housing, education, and criminal justice”[HR12].

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION IN 2019

The United States government has repeatedly emphasized its commitment to ensuring human rights for all. This includes a commitment to undertaking obligations to promote and protect human rights throughout the U.S., through all appropriate measures, including legislation, education and policy. However, since taking office, the Trump administration has withdrawn the U.S. from the UN Human Rights Council, cut funding to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and continues to skirt human rights treaty reporting and reviews.[1][2][3] The administration declined to nominate a human rights expert to serve on the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Inter-American Commission.[4] The administration’s disengagement from its domestic and international human rights obligations threatens human rights at home and risks weakening international and regional human rights institutions.

The U.S. government announced the formation of a “Commission on Unalienable Rights” based on “natural law.” This move to essentially redefine the essence of what human rights is threatens the very foundation on which all human rights rest. Given the administration’s ongoing attacks against women, LGBTI, and gender non-conforming (GNC) people, fears that the creation of a new human rights panel focused on “natural
The creation of these two important United Nations tools would create a specific space for PAD leaders to discuss issues and solutions regionally and globally, and create a document focused on the unique issues facing PAD around the world that can be used to fight for PAD rights internationally.[6]

In 2018, the United Nations General Assembly decided in resolution A/RES/73/262 to establish a permanent forum on people of African descent (PAD). Currently, activists and organizers are advocating for the formation of a Permanent Forum and for a Declaration on the Rights of People of African Descent that includes the voices of PAD leaders from across the globe.

A January, 2019 report from The Guardian claimed that the Trump administration “has stopped cooperating with UN investigators over potential human rights violations occurring inside America”[7]. More specifically, the state department ceased to respond to official complaints from UN special rapporteurs from May 2018 to the date of the article, with at least 13 requests going unanswered. The article also states that the government has not extended any invitations to a UN monitor to visit the country, including the requests by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants. The latest numbers show that from November 2018 to December 2019, there were 28 official complaints file and only 6 of them received any reply.[8] In addition, a statement by ACLU to the UN Human Rights Council states that the United States has failed to submit its periodic reports to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (the report was due November 2017) and to the UN Committee Against Torture (the report was due November 2018).[9]

The UPR Cities Project supports local efforts to document local human rights conditions as part of a United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the United States’ human rights record. UPR Cities works to ensure the development of better connections between people in local communities and international human rights processes. “Work at local levels is critical to building a global constituency of human rights defenders who can help defend rights locally while enhancing our global capacities for protecting and promoting human rights, dignity, and justice for everyone”[10].
ENDNOTES

All endnotes referenced in this report are linked below.

CHAPTERS 1-10: WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?*

*This link provides the resources referenced in the highlighted portions of each chapter, numbered as “[HR1]”, “[HR2]”, and so on. This section explains the human rights framework as pertaining to each chapter’s issue area. To access the remaining endnotes for the research section of each chapter, please click on the chapter-by-chapter links below.

CHAPTER 1: IMMIGRATION

CHAPTER 2: CRIMINAL JUSTICE, LIFE & SECURITY OF PERSON

CHAPTER 3: REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE & HEALTHCARE

CHAPTER 4: ENVIRONMENTAL/CLIMATE JUSTICE

Food, Water, & Sanitation

CHAPTER 5: POLITICAL HUMAN RIGHTS & PRIVACY

CHAPTER 6: SOVEREIGNTY & SELF-DETERMINATION

CHAPTER 7: HOUSING

CHAPTER 8: EDUCATION & WORK

CHAPTER 9: FAMILY & CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

CHAPTER 10: HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION & IMPLEMENTATION