

Human Rights City Alliance 2017 Annual Report

This report summarizes the major activities of the Human Rights City Alliance in 2017. We continue to build upon the lessons and relationships cultivated since we began our work in 2013 to host and participate in events and actions that promote the [Human Rights City Action Plan](#) and create spaces for residents to learn, dream, plan, and organize for a city that prioritizes human rights over profit and economic growth. In addition to these activities, we engage in ongoing efforts to deepen connections with human rights organizations and leaders outside Pittsburgh through the [National Human Rights Cities Alliance](#).

Events

[Summit Against Racism 2017 Workshop](#). Together with organizers who were part of the 2016 [Housing Summit](#), we organized two sessions at this year's Summit Against Racism, "Confronting the Racist Legacies of U.S. Housing Policy and Finding Real Solutions to the Affordable Housing Crisis," and "Building a Local Movement for Human Rights and Racial Justice," which both drew a full room of attendees and raised awareness about affordable housing and the work happening in Pittsburgh to defend the right to housing as well as other human rights. We organized a follow-up meeting to sustain participants' engagement in racial justice activism after the Summit Against Racism, and around 100 people attended.

[Homes for All Housing Justice Campaign](#): We continued helping share information about housing justice work and to encourage residents to be involved in work to support the right to housing, despite limited capacity for the same level of coalition engagement as we saw in 2016. We anticipate more work with a diverse coalition of housing advocates in 2018.

May Day March and Cultural Event for Immigrant Rights/Worker Rights/Human Rights We worked once again with the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), Casa San Jose, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and other groups to plan a May Day march and celebration to draw attention to the human rights needs and demands of immigrant workers and their families. This year's event was especially important opportunity to show community support for immigrant rights. The march was followed by a cultural event and networking gathering at the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers building, and this enabled us to make connections with other organizers and activists.

Fighting Mass Incarceration and Racial Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System. Building on the work for the Housing Summit, in late March 2017 we were able to invite a leading human rights lawyer, [Standish Willis](#), and his wife and fellow-organizer Sali Vickie Willis for a multi-day visit which involved a public lecture at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Law, "[Using Human Rights Law to Fight Racial Violence and Discrimination](#)," on his recent successful defense of the [rights of victims of police torture in Chicago](#) and its implications for human rights work. Chicago human rights lawyer Standish Willis is the founder of Black People Against Torture, past national president and current chair of the [Chicago Chapter of The National Conference of Black Lawyers](#). During their visit, the Willises met with several faculty members from Pitt's School of Law and the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, the Director and a

Commissioner from the City of Pittsburgh's Commission on Human Relations, and leaders from the following community organizations: Alliance for Police Accountability, Casa San Jose, United Steelworkers, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, Northside Coalition for Fair Housing, Homes for All, Pittsburgh for CEDAW Coalition, Hill District Consensus Group, Pittsburgh Food Policy Council, and Pittsburgh's Human Rights City Alliance. In addition, they spoke to a group of high school seniors at Milliones University Prep. We expect to build on this model of inviting a speaker to campus and organizing spaces where the speaker can meet with local leaders working with the Human Rights City Alliance and other activists, university leaders, and partner groups (See [Report, which includes lessons regarding local human rights/racial justice organizing](#)).

Teach-In: Building Unity Against Hate: How the prison industrial complex impacts our communities & what we can do to change it. This event built upon ideas and themes that emerged in the housing summit and again with our work for immigrant rights around the May Day march. We met at the United Steelworkers' building on a Saturday, and youth working with Casa San Jose and Rodger Jay from the Foundation of Hope helped show "*The Human Face of the Prison/Detention/Policing System*," including the school-to-prison pipeline and criminalization of youth of color in Pittsburgh's school system and the challenges faced by returning citizens as they seek to find affordable housing and work. We also heard from Erika Almiron from [Juntos](#), a regional organization based in Philadelphia, to get a state-wide perspective on the experiences of individuals and families in the prison system and work for prison reform. Discussion following panel generated conversations about the intersections of different human rights and the need for more spaces like this to humanize people and groups that are marginalized in mainstream media and policy debates. Community partners for this event included: [Casa San Jose](#), [Labor Council for Latin American Advancement](#), and the Thomas Merton Center.

Annual Human Rights Potluck-Cookout. This year we celebrated the 3rd annual human rights potluck gathering by renting a shelter in Frick Park on the last Sunday in August. We co-sponsored the event with organizations we've been collaborating with, including Pittsburghers for Public Transit, Homes for All, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, Cities for CEDAW, and Hill District Consensus Group. The turnout was strong, and the picnic generated conversations across different groups of activists.

Indigenous Peoples Day. We continued to work to follow up and raise awareness about the [2014 City Council decision to recognize October 12th as Indigenous Peoples Day](#). This year we encouraged residents to read [The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian](#), by Indigenous poet and writer, Sherman Alexie, who visited Pittsburgh in mid-October for the Carnegie Lecture Series. We developed and shared a [discussion guide](#), and encouraged residents to organize local meet-ups or coffee house or library gatherings to encourage discussion of the book, which describes the life of a young man on a native American reservation. This activity should be used for future actions to commemorate Indigenous Peoples Day, since it encourages and facilitates a critical reflection on the history of native peoples and engagement in "historical truth-telling" that can promote healing and reconciliation that is essential for building human rights communities.

Promoting Human Rights-Oriented Development: Resisting Corporate Power and Corruption The Human Rights City Alliance partnered with other groups in our community to create spaces for critical reflection and dialogue about the City's efforts to attract Amazon's 2nd headquarters to our city. We raised several critical points about this initiative, which was put forward by elected officials and private sector elites without any meaningful public input. First, we joined other groups in calling for officials to

follow the state's open records laws and make the details of its bid to Amazon executives public. The city continues to refuse to adhere to our favorable court decision. Second, we demanded a voice for the residents who would be most impacted by this development, and we highlighted concerns about affordable housing, transit, and about the role of universities in shaping inequitable development policies in our city. We [organized public forums and provided resources](#) for residents to learn more about this issue than they could through mainstream media coverage and politicians.

International Human Rights Day—We regularly take some action to mark December 10th, the anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2017 we honored this day by working with the City of Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations (PghCHR) and the Gender Equity Commission to hold a [press conference to commemorate the 69th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Mayor Peduto spoke at the press conference, which took place in the lobby of the City-County Building, 414 Grant Street. In addition, four women leaders who are part of our work for human rights in Pittsburgh spoke to the press, including: Pearl Hughey from Pittsburghers for Public Transit, Aleatha Sims from the Coalition of Organized East Liberty Residents & Penn Plaza Support and Action Coalition, and Jeimy Ibarra, Youth Community Outreach Coordinator for Casa San Jose. In addition to our press conference, we issued a [Letter to Congregation leaders](#) urging them to help raise awareness of this day and its significance for building a community based in human rights and dignity for all.

Cities for CEDAW—We continued to raise public awareness and to otherwise help support the coalition working to implement our 2016 local ordinance to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women. Currently this entails supporting the work of anu jain, who was appointed to the position of Executive Director of the newly established Gender Equity Commission of the City of Pittsburgh.

Organizing and Network-Building Initiatives

National Human Rights Cities Alliance: Since we organized a national meeting of scholars and activists working on human rights cities in June 2015 at the University of Pittsburgh (See the [Conference Summary Report](#)), we have been working with national leaders to build a National Human Rights Cities Alliance as [a project of the US Human Rights Network](#). Jackie Smith serves on the National Alliance's Steering Committee, which is working to plan the third national convening of Human Rights Cities in Jackson, Mississippi in June 2018. This convening will increase participation from the U.S. South as we build the national leadership and capacity. The National Human Rights Cities Alliance is mobilizing leaders across the country to generate resources to support and promote nation-wide human rights cities organizing work. One important emphasis of this national group is to help activists in the U.S. better understand and make better use of international human rights treaties and review processes. To this end, we are developing a resource guide for [local implementation of international human rights](#). In addition, the Steering Committee has developed a [Statement of Principles](#), which will be formally presented, debated, and a final version approved at the convening in Jackson.

University Human Rights Network—We are continuing to cultivate this network, and expect it to grow in the coming year as we engage more university faculty and staff in our work to respond to new human

rights threats and to engage local universities in *meaningful* community work, including cross-campus collaborations. This network should develop further as a result of work being done by our **University of Pittsburgh Human Rights Project** (see below).

University of Pittsburgh Human Rights Project This project received funding from the University of Pittsburgh, and it aims to strengthen working relationships between the University and community leaders working to address human rights in our region. The goal is to amplify human rights on the city's and university's agenda and to raise public consciousness and discourse around human rights. The Human Rights Community Advisory Council is made up of organizational leaders with whom the Human Rights City Alliance has worked in the past. The Advisory Council helps guide the work of our faculty/staff/student Human Rights Working Group, which is made up of faculty, staff and graduate students from various departments, programs, and schools. Together these bodies will develop joint events and projects that promote community engagement, community-based research, community-relevant teaching, and to raise resources to expand human rights work at the University and in the larger community. We are working to develop a workshop in the coming year on "Health, Human Rights, and Cities," and to convene a second Housing Summit, among other projects.

International Human Rights Delegation- In 2016, we coordinated a visit by four delegates from the **Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions** (SALAR), who visited Pittsburgh as part of a 3-city study trip funded by the Swedish government. They met with Mayor Peduto and city council members as well as community leaders. Their report, **Focusing on Human Rights on the Local and Regional Level**, was made available this year in English. In addition, our friends from SALAR shared with us a very useful resource, "**Toolkit for Equality: City Policies Against Racism**," which was a project of the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism that was co-Funded By the European Union (**www.Eccar.Info/Eccar-Toolkit-Equality**). We will be working in the coming year to make sure our elected officials receive these documents, reminding them of their earlier meeting with Swedish delegates.