

HUMAN RIGHTS AND TODAY POLITICAL CONTEXT -LESSONS LEARNED

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The National Human Rights Cities Alliance, American Friends Service Committee-DC Peace & Economic Justice & Human Rights on the Hill Institute presented a Workshop on Human Rights Cities and Today's Political Context, on the 27 July 2018 (see programme in annex). The event was organised at the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law International Human and Peoples Rights Law Program, in Washington DC. The workshop gathered human rights activists, scholars, and policy practitioners to share lessons learned from a growing global "human rights cities" movement. Participants learned about global and national trends, opportunities, and challenges to "bringing human rights home" in the United States. The purpose was to promote the understanding of human rights cities and to advance ideas and models for local human rights practices. The main outcomes are the following:

- There is a critical need to develop a wider community of Human Rights Cities and to build connexion across cities and countries.
- Human Rights Cities would gain to learn from each other and to peer with the global South.
- Sharing best practices to bring human rights at local level, building strategic relationships, innovating approaches to mobilise resources, identifying effective models for the people and preserving natural resources from the planet are essential elements.

From a European perspective and based on best practises, human rights cities movement is still a developing framework with potential to support dynamic cities in making human rights a reality for European citizens. If the framework remains flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of existing approaches, identifying core meanings and practices will contribute to unite human rights cities nationally and internationally. In a wider context of emerging governance, cities are at the forefront of human rights practices and should assert their power. Multi-actor and multi-level strategies are fundamental to localise human rights at city level. Particular focus on community participation allows cities' residents to recalibrate human rights from a socio-economic perspective by addressing and realising them in their daily live.

In the context of the "*platform for policy and operational development of human rights at local and regional level in Sweden*", the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) underlined the importance of the overall process and to develop a common understanding of the human rights cities concept. Using human rights as a common ground, focusing on vulnerable groups, putting individual rights at the centre of policies, or reformulating human rights language and methodology are success factors to change perspectives and promote a human rights culture.

For most presenters including Human Rights Learning Associate American Friends Service Committee DC Peace and Economic Justice, education - focusing on socio economic rights - was recognised as a determining factor in human rights cities development. Address people concerns and build a framework where they understand human rights facilitate educational debate and ensure citizens' ownership of the process. Human rights can contribute to rebuilt social ties within societies and therefore, to restore a participatory democracy where policies benefit to the people.

In the city of Pittsburgh, the movement was built around a right to space where communities experience the feeling of belonging to the place and the land. Such space helps the people to reflect and to assess situation presented by politicians through a human rights framework. It is a matter of changing culture that requires new ways of thinking with a culture of peace.

In Hawaii, "human rights have a state of mind and work as a nation". Building on human rights days activities contributed to set up and use a human rights framework, mobilising grassroots communities and leaders to understand and know their rights. Also, important to connect campus with community and with local governance. In this context, linking SDGs and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations is of added value to implement human rights issues at city level.

Efforts to make Washington a city for the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) is a good example of effective way to bring human rights issues - based on testimonies and stories from discriminated girls and women - from local to international level. It allows to join efforts and bring together a diversity of actors under a stronger coalition for the purpose.

Focusing on key struggles common to all cities contributed to reflect on alternative models for community emerging from various national and international campaign. The National Economic and Social Rights Initiative envisage human rights as a system of prevention. A New Social Contract is promoted to advance comprehensive, transformative, community-led solutions that protect human rights, build equitable systems for everyone and deepen democracy. This new social contract values every human life, treats all people with respect and dignity, recognizes interdependence with each other and the planet, and enables everyone to reach their full potential. The vision calls for community system solutions based on three overarching concepts: 1) solutions are driven by values prioritising human needs and human rights, 2) solutions are universal for all but cantered around the needs of the most vulnerable, and 3) all express new form of participatory democracy, through inclusive local democratic structures. It calls for a radical reorganisation of the society around equity and solidarity, including specific measures such as: corporate solidarity, innovative relationship between natural resources, land and energy; transformative finance and monitoring public funding mechanisms; the growth of workers cooperation; radical decriminalisation and restorative justice process; and/or participatory budgeting.

The National Coalition on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation mobilise communities around alternative models promoting human rights cities concept by calling UN visit to investigate on the situation. It creates synergies with other communities and cities, coalition of grassroot communities with strategic partners such as university, and policies based on accountability.

For the National Human Rights Cities Alliance, and Historical Truth-Telling: Indigenous Peoples Day & the International Decade on People of African Descent, the most important is to create new forms of partnership or cooperation promoting human rights values and principles. As for example, the Freedom school with social justice classes or hospital for people with no social security in Chicago, initiative for social housing in Washington DC or approaching business as a social justice tool are inventive examples allowing communities to connect with their culture and their identity though human rights.

The workshop concluded on today's main challenge to identify the common grounds of local communities and to create new opportunities with more informed choices. It requires communities and public authorities to jointly rethink the society around solidarity values and put equity principles into practice. It entails to stimulate participatory approach and create alternative space to realise human rights; places where people can identify human rights issues through their own stories, reflect how to sustain their communities, and build commitments around the commons. Exchange of best practices are essential to empower communities to take the lead and challenge local authorities in their responsibilities. Enhancing the relevance of human rights at local level allows to creates direct connexion between fair economy prioritising citizen interests and how city government are operating. However, the key challenges remain to localise an international human rights framework and build synergies between local and international grounds; to enhance coordination of coalitions breaking silos and promote intersectionality; to strengthen inclusiveness and community participation in the planning and the governance of the city. In this evolving context, permanent critical reflexion for change is required to work at different levels and develop innovative approaches in view to realise human rights at community level and make a difference for the people. It was also noted to create a database of model resolutions including follow-up policies and practices to realize human rights in cities.

Lessons from this workshop are expected to shape the ongoing work of the National Human Rights Cities Alliance. Moreover, it highlights the strong interest to build up bridges and to further exchange best practices, but also to develop regional and global networks of human rights cities. Moreover, it highlights the strong interest to build up bridges and to further exchange best practices, but also to develop regional and global networks of human rights cities.