

Sixty-five years ago the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). As the foundational document of the modern human rights system, the UDHR was created to fulfill commitments made in San Francisco by the 50 founding members of the United Nations Charter to promote and affirm “their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women,” and to “promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”

Without a doubt, the United States continues to provide global leadership on some human rights issues. For example, the current administration provided vigorous leadership in fighting for LGBT equality, combating trafficking, and championing religious freedom and peaceful assembly rights.

But while some U.S. laws and policies have been comparatively advanced in protecting civil rights and civil liberties, the U.S. has fallen behind in protecting the universal human rights recognized by the UDHR. Our government has only partially and selectively embraced these rights, ignoring international obligations and widening the gap between the United States’ 65-year-old promise and its own current practice.

■ The U.S. is the only country in the world that continues to commit children to die in prison through the imposition of life sentences that lack the possibility of parole.

■ To date, **zero victims** of the Bush administration torture program have had their day in U.S. court.

No senior government official responsible has been charged with a crime.

■ Socioeconomic rights are human rights

The United States has long recognized the government must play a role in ensuring “**freedom from want**,” as coined by F.D.R., invoked by the Obama administration, and incorporated as one of the “four freedoms” in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.

Yet today, along with the **widest income disparity** in the industrialized world, the United States has:

■ **20% of its children living in poverty.**

■ **Over 30 million citizens who consistently lack their right to basic health care.**

■ **Poverty rates of African-Americans and Latinos that are nearly twice that of the general population.**

■ 19 states still permit nearly a quarter million children to be subjected to corporal punishment in public schools each year.

Students with disabilities and African-American students are punished at **disproportionately higher rates**.

This violence can be curtailed with the passage of the **Ending Corporal Punishment in Schools Act**, a bill that would ban corporal punishment in public and private schools with students who receive federal services.

■ As demonstrated by the landmark IACHR Gonzales decision, legal tools for adequately protecting women’s rights are lacking in the U.S.

Every day, **an average of 464** women are either raped or sexually assaulted while **only 40%** of rapes get reported to police.

Ratifying the **Women’s Rights Convention (CEDAW)** would require American law enforcement to take affirmative measures to eliminate gender-based violence in the U.S.

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■ Despite the availability of effective and far less costly alternatives, the U.S. resorts to **mass immigration detention**, a practice plagued by often brutal confinement conditions—including **sexual abuses** and **wrongful deaths**—as well as a lack of **basic due process**.

In 2012, nearly 410,000 people were detained by ICE, up more than 400% from 1996.

To date, under the Obama Administration **almost 2 million people** have been deported from the U.S.—tearing apart families and communities.

■ **Over 2.2 million Americans are currently behind bars, and the U.S. prison population has increased over 700% from the 1970s.**

Discriminatory criminal justice practices and mandatory sentencing laws have driven the **U.S. to have the highest incarceration rate in the world**. Passing the **Smarter Sentencing Act (SSA)** would help reduce lengthy sentences for certain people convicted of non-violent offenses.

■ **The death penalty is a discriminatory and faulty punishment.**

Racial minorities make up only 36% of the U.S. population, but constitute **58% of the 3,108 people on death row**.

The death sentences of 143 people have been reversed based on evidence of their innocence.

■ **Nearly 64% of American LGBT students experience serious harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.**

82% of these students are **verbally harassed**, **38%** are **physically harassed**, and **37%** receive **no help** from the school's administration even when incidents are reported.

Passing the **Student Non-Discrimination Act**, a bill introduced in Congress to protect LGBT students in public schools, would significantly help the victims of discrimination and harassment in those schools by providing a legal recourse.

■ The **United States** has ratified or acceded to fewer **key human rights treaties** than all other countries in the G20 group.

The **U.S.** and **Somalia** are the **only countries in the world** not to have ratified the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, the most critical international children's rights treaty.

■ The U.S. fails to uphold the **ICCPR** and **ICERD** by failing to fully protect the voting rights of minority communities.

Criminal disenfranchisement laws, relics of the Jim Crow era, devastate the political representation of racial minorities.

As a result, 1 in 8 African American men in America are denied the right to vote.

■ While the **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990** has made critically important changes for **citizens with disabilities**, the failure of the U.S. to ratify the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** undercuts our opportunity to advance the equality and full integration of Americans with disabilities.

■ The practice of **racial profiling** by law enforcement at the local, state, and federal levels designates millions of African-Americans, Asians, Latinos, South Asians, Arabs, and Muslims as **suspects first** and **citizens second**.

Passing the **End Racial Profiling Act** would be an important first step toward prohibiting the use of race or ethnicity as a proxy for criminality and would bring the U.S. closer to compliance with the **ICERD**.

The U.S. should create effective human rights monitoring, enforcement and implementation mechanisms and adopt concrete plans to promote and protect human rights on the federal, state and local levels.