June 8, 2020

To Members of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Re: Request for the Convening of a Special Session on the Escalating Situation of Police Violence and Repression of Protests in the United States

Excellencies,

The undersigned family members of victims of police killings and civil society organizations from around the world, call on member states of the UN Human Rights Council to urgently convene a Special Session on the situation of human rights in the United States in order to respond to the unfolding grave human rights crisis borne out of the repression of nationwide protests. The recent protests erupted on May 26 in response to the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which was only one of a recent string of unlawful killings of unarmed Black people by police and armed white vigilantes.

We are deeply concerned about the escalation in violent police responses to largely peaceful protests in the United States, which included the use of rubber bullets, tear gas, pepper spray and in some cases live ammunition, in violation of international standards on the use of force and management of assemblies including recent U.N. Guidance on Less Lethal Weapons.

Additionally, we are greatly concerned that rather than using his position to serve as a force for calm and unity, President Trump has chosen to weaponize the tensions through his rhetoric, evidenced by his promise to seize authority from Governors who fail to take the most extreme tactics against protestors and to deploy federal armed forces against protestors (an action which would be of questionable legality).

Our greatest concern is that the violence and counter-violence are diverting the gaze of the global community away from the pain being expressed by a nation in mourning over the callous manner of the 8 minutes and 46 seconds that ended George Floyd’s life while a group of police stood and watched, about the death of more than 100,000 souls from the coronavirus – disproportionately killing Black, Brown and Indigenous Peoples – and about how injustice never ends and equality never comes. There is serious concern that the tear gas and police-induced havoc will obscure the legitimate passion of these demonstrations. The voices of the demonstrators must be heard. Their demand is that the endemic racism, hatred, fear and disparity finally be confronted.

News media reported that seven people were struck by gunfire at a protest in Louisville; at least one person – David McAtee, who was serving food to protesters at a demonstration – was killed by police gunfire in Kentucky. In Ohio, pepper spray was used on large crowds. Reports by journalists on social media indicate that rubber bullets were used in numerous places, including
Phoenix, Arizona, Los Angeles, California, Atlanta, Georgia, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, there have been “at least 200 reported incidents of journalists covering the protests being physically attacked, intimidated or arbitrarily arrested, despite their press credentials being clearly visible.” The police arrested more than 11,000 people across the United States.

Furthermore, it appears that police departments across the United States, backed by federal government agencies (like CBP, which regularly violate civil and human rights), are escalating the situation with further militarization and excessive use of force against protesters. We note with particular concern the deployment of at least 62,000 National Guard soldiers in two dozen states, the encouragement of the use of violence and mass arrests by President Donald Trump on social media, and his labeling of the protesters as “terrorists.” Several cities around the country have imposed sweeping night curfews that triggered further inflammation of the atmosphere and create yet another justification for additional police violence and arrests.

It is well established that neither the use of violence by a small number of people or damage to property suspend the right to protest of all those gathered and do not provide a license to escalate police responses and use of excessive or deadly force. In all circumstances, the police response must remain within the limits of the law and seek to de-escalate situations rather than inflame them by resorting to life-threatening weapons.

The right to peaceful assembly and demonstration must be protected. This mandate is even more compelling with regard to the rights of minority communities, especially people of African descent, to speak out against racist practices they have endured for centuries. Recent police killings of unarmed Black people as well as police use of excessive force and repression of protests violate United States obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

Finally, the massive use of less-lethal weapons is compounded by the fact that the United States is one of the worst-hit countries by the global pandemic. Health experts warned that the use of tear gas may place individuals at a higher risk of contracting a respiratory illness and can have long-term effects on respiratory function. We are also concerned that mass arrests and detention of protesters will only exacerbate the risk of infection in jails that are already an epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

In light of these grave concerns, the undersigned urge the members of the U.N. Human Rights Council to convene a special session of the HRC in order to respond appropriately to this situation of escalating human right abuses with the aim of mandating an independent inquiry into:

- the recent history of racist policing in cities across the country that continues with seeming impunity from the killing of Michael Brown and the repression of protests in Ferguson, Missouri, to the murder of George Floyd.
- allegations of excessive use of force against peaceful protesters and journalists in the demonstrations in U.S. cities since the murder of George Floyd.
The inquiry should report its findings to the Human Rights Council and should include recommendations on how to ensure that the United States upholds its human rights obligations, including in the context of policing, protests and assemblies. Further, the report should address the responsibility of the United States to end impunity for police violence and other serious human rights violations through appropriate disciplinary actions, prosecutions and fair trials.

The Council should call on the United States to give those conducting this inquiry, as well as other U.N. officials (including special procedures mandate holders), full and unrestricted access to interview witnesses, including members of the police, to inspect places of detention, and to monitor trials related to the protests and their aftermath.

*Family members of victims of police violence who have endorsed this letter:*

Philonise Floyd and Quincy Mason, brother and son of George Floyd  
Tamika Palmer, mother of Breonna Taylor  
Valerie Castile, mother of Philando Castile  
Lezley McSpadden, mother of Michael Brown

*Signatories, in alphabetical order:*

Ability Society of Kenya  
Access Now  
Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights  
ActionAid International  
Adalah Justice Project  
Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel  
Advocacy Without Borders  
Advocates for Human Rights  
Advocating Opportunity  
Africa Solidarity Centre  
Afghan American Center on Global Politics and Human Rights (CHR)  
African Voices Forum Ltd.  
African Youth Abroad Empowerment  
AFROAMERICAS  
AfroFem Koop  
AfroResistance  
Aging People in Prison Human Rights Campaign  
AIDS Information Centre - Uganda  
Al-Awda, Palestine Right to Return Coalition  
Al-Haq Organization  
Al-Marsad - Arab Human Rights Centre in Golan Heights  
All Under One Roof  
Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School  
Alliance Against Racial Profiling  
Alliance for Humane Biotechnology  
ALQST for Human Rights  
Alquimia Global  
Amazon Watch  
American Association of People with Disabilities  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama
American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona
American Civil Liberties Union of D.C.
American Civil Liberties Union of Delaware
American Civil Liberties Union of Florida
American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia
American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii
American Civil Liberties Union of Idaho
American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana
American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas
American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky
American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana
American Civil Liberties Union of Maine
American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts
American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland
American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota
American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada
American Civil Liberties Union of New Hampshire
American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey
American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico
American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California
American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina
American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon
American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania
American Civil Liberties Union of Puerto Rico
American Civil Liberties Union of San Diego & Imperial Counties
American Civil Liberties Union of South Carolina
American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California
American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee
American Civil Liberties Union of Texas
American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont
American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia
American Civil Liberties Union of West Virginia
American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin
American Constitution Society
American Friends Service Committee
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
AMIMO
Another Gulf Is Possible
Appalachian Prison Book Project
Plataforma Latinoamerica de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS)
APRODEH
ARC.Gambia
Arizona Justice Alliance
Arizona State University School of Social Transformation (ASU SST)
Art and Resistance Through Education (ARTE)
ARTICLE 19
Arundel Metrics
Asociación Azul
Asociación de Mujeres Trabajadores Sexuales LIQUIDAMBAR
Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos (APRODEH)
Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España
Association ANNA
Association for Civil Rights in Israel
Association of Elder Complete Count Committees
Association Tunisienne de Défense des Libertés Individuelles
Aucune
August Third Collective NAIM
Autistic Minority International
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
Awaken
AwokeNet
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy
BALI
Best Practices Policy Project
BIWOC Rising
Black Administrators in Child Welfare
Black AIDS Institute
Black and Brown Activism Defense Collective (BBADDC)
Black Lives Matter
Black Lives Matter to Wisconsin Unitarian Universalists
Black Women's Blueprint
Blacks in law Enforcement of America
Blessed Deliverance Missionary Baptist Church
BLMSKC
Bridging the Gap in Virginia
Brown Dog Consulting/Lotus Circle
Buddhist Peace Fellowship
Byrd Barr Place
California Association of Health Facilities
Campaign for Youth Justice
Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform
Canadian Civil Liberties Association
Canadian Lawyers for International Human Rights
Cardozo Law Institute in Holocaust and Human Rights (CLIHHR)
Casa San Jose
Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)
Center for Genetics and Society
Center for Hunger-Free Communities at Drexel University
Center for International Environmental Law
Center for Justice and Accountability
Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)
Center for Media and Democracy
Center for Pan-African Affairs
Center for Reproductive Rights
Center for the Human Rights of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry
Center for Victims of Torture
Center for Women's Health & Human Rights, Suffolk University
Center on Law, Inequality and Metro Equity
Central Arizona National Lawyers Guild
Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy
Centre de Tunis pour la Liberté de la Presse
Centre for Civil and Political Rights
Centre for Human Rights Law, SOAS, University of London
Centro de Capacitación Social de Panamá
Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM)
Centro de Derechos y Desarrollo (CEDAL)
Cultural Survival
December 12th Movement International Secretariat
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
DemCast USA
Desiree Alliance
Dignité Impact
Disability Rights Fund, Inc.
Disability Rights Washington
Disciples LGBTQ + AllianceQ
DITSHWANELO - The Botswana Centre for Human Rights
Domestic Violence Project at the Urban Justice Center
Dôobôot Radio
Drug Policy Alliance
Earth Guardians Bay Area Crew
EarthRights International
East Bay Meditation Center
ECPAT - USA
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
El Centro de la Raza
Empowered at Dusk Women's Association
Entropia Social, A.C.
Environmental Justice Clinic, University of Miami School of Law
Environmental Law and Justice Clinic, Golden University School of Law
Equal Justice Society
Equality Florida
Equality North Carolina
Equality Now
Equity Matters
European Network of People of African Descent (ENPAD)
European Network of Women of African Descent (ENWAD)
European Reparations Commission (ERC)
Ex-Wenela Miners Association of Zimbabwe
Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries
Eyes Right Veteran’s Foundation
Eyewitness Palestine
Faith In New Jersey
Faith in Public Life
Faith in the Streets
Faith in the Streets
First Peoples Worldwide
Florida State University Foundation for Social Development
Frantz Fanon Foundation
#FreeToo Rising
Free Speech For People
Freedom Network USA
Friends of Guest House
Front Line Defenders
Full Circle Strategies
Fund for Global Human Rights
Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos (Inredh)
Fundamedios
GAPIMNY - Empowering Queer & Trans Asian Pacific Islanders
Geneva International Centre for Justice
Global Center for Environmental Legal Studies, Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University
Global Justice Center
Global Justice Clinic, NYU School of Law
Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Global Rights Advocacy
Global Union & Global Houmard & Co. Foundation
GoodWorks: North Alabama Harm Reduction
Government Accountability Project
Grand-Saconnex
Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers
Hawai’i Institute for Human Rights
Higher Ground Change Strategies
Hill District Consensus Group
HIV Modernization Movement-Indiana
Homeless Rights Advocacy Project
Howard Branch Art, LLC
Human Rights Advocates
Human Rights and Gender Justice Clinic, CUNY School of Law
Human Rights Association (IHD)
Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights Campaign - Arkansas
Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley
Human Rights Coalition of South Texas
Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
Human Rights Education Associates (HREA)
Human Rights Educators USA
Human Rights First
Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN)
Human Rights House Foundation
Human Rights in China
Human Rights Network Bangladesh
Human Rights Project at the Urban Justice Center
Humanists International
Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
Idaho Coalition for HIV Health and Safety
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Immigration Justice Clinic, Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University
Implementation Team IDPAD - Spain
Indian Law Resource Center
Initiative for Black People in Germany (ISD-BUND e.V)
Inmate Support Virginia
Innovation for Change - Middle East and North Africa
Institut Equalita e.V
Institute on Inequalities in Global Health, USC
Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas (Ibase)
Instituto de Estudios del Proceso Penal Acusatorio, A.C. (INEPPA)
Instituto Mexicano de Derechos Humanos y Democracia
INTLawyers
Intentional Peer Support
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law
International Association Against Torture
International Association of Democratic Lawyers
International Association of Schools of Social Work
International Black Women's Congress
International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD)
International Corporate Accountability Roundtable (ICAR)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic & Other Minorities (IFPRERLOM)
International Human Rights Association of American Minorities (IHRAAM)
International Human Rights Center, Loyola Law School, Los Angeles
International Human Rights Clinic, Boston University School of Law
International Human Rights Clinic, Duke University School of Law
International Human Rights Clinic, Santa Clara Law
International Human Rights Clinic, Western New England University School of Law
International Indian Treaty Council (IITC)
International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights
International Network of Women Migrant and Diaspora (INWODI)
International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD)
International Service for Human Rights
International Solidarity Movement, Northern California (ISM)
International Tribunal of Conscience of Peoples in Movement
International Women's Health Coalition
International Women's Rights Action Watch, Asia Pacific
International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations (ISMUN)
Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw)
InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia (IRTF)
International Organization for Migration
Irvine United Congregational Church (CA) Advocates for Peace and Justice
Islamic Association of WV
Isuroon: Strong Women, Strong Communities
Jamaican Diaspora UK (JDUK)
Jamii Linguists
Jewish Voice for Peace Charlottesville
Jewish Voice for Peace Pittsburgh
John T. Williams Committee
Judoni Bolden, Attorney at Law
Justiça Global
Justice Revival
Justice Roundtable
JusticiaR-Colectivo de Justicia Racial
Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice
Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Kilomba Collective
KontraS (The Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence)
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La Passerelle I.D.E
La Sala Latinx Artists’ Network
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Lake Oconee Community Church
Lambda Legal
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Latin American Relief Fund
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Latvian Human Rights Committee
LAUSD
Law Office of Astkhik Levantian
Law Office of Geri Lynn Green
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADO), Romania
League for the Defense of Human Rights in Iran (LDDH)
League of Women Voters of the United States
A Legacy of Equality, Leadership and Organizing (LELO)
Legal Aid at Work
Legal Resources Centre
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LEPA Initiative
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LID-Nepal
Life Personal Consulting
Liga Argentina por los Derechos Humanos
Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, (LIMEDD)
Liga voor de Rechten van de Mens (Dutch League for Human Rights)
Ligue des droits de l'Homme - France (LDH)
Ligue des droits humains
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Ligue Suisse des Droits de l'Homme
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Loren Miller Bar Association
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Maggie’s: Toronto Sex Workers Action Project
Main Street Legal Services, Inc., CUNY School of Law
Mainers for Accountable Leadership
Maison des Droits de l'Homme Cameroun (MDHC)
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Many Voices: A Black Church Movement for Gay & Transgender Justice
Marijuana Policy Project
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
Meadow Heights
Meadow Invest B.V.
Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute (MCLI)
Mentai Patients Liberation Alliance
Meta Peace Team
Metropolitan Congregations United (MCU)
Michigan Coalition for Human Rights
Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project
Migrant Labourers Forum
Migrant Workers Association of Lesotho
Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission
¡Milwaukee Evaluation! Inc.
MINBYUN - Lawyers for a Democratic Society
MindFreedom International
Minneapolis Commission on Civil Rights
Minority Rights Group International
Mobbera Foundation
Mobilization for Justice
Monadnock Progressive Alliance
Monitoring Committee on Attacks on Lawyers, International Association of People's Lawyers
Moral High Ground
More Light Presbyterians
Mothers for Justice United
Mothers for Police Accountability
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<td>Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)</td>
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Operation HomeCare
Organisation Marocaine des Droits Humains (OMDH)
Organización de Afrodescendientes Chilenos Lumbanga
Organization for Black Struggle
Organization for Human Rights and Democracy
Our Bodies Ourselves (OBOS)
OutRight Action International
International Observatory of Human Rights
Palestine Legal
Pan-African Council
Parity
Partners in Health
Partnership for Civil Justice Fund
Pax Christi USA
Peace Brigades International – USA (PBI)
Penal Reform International
Penn Plaza Support and Action
People's Advocacy Institute
Physicians for Human Rights
Pioneer Valley Progressive Muslims
Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Planners Network
Positive Women's Network - USA
Pozen Family Center
Human Rights Lab at The University of Chicago
Prevention Access Campaign
Priority Africa Network
Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy (PHRGE), Northeastern University School of Law
Progress for Colorado
Project Blueprint
Public Justice Center
Punjabi Community Health Services
Queer Connect, Inc.
Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace and Justice
Racial Justice Initiative of TBUSA
Racine Dominicans
Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights
Reale Justice Network
ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation
Red Española de Inmigración y Ayuda al Refugiado
Red Nacional de Juventudes Afromexicanas
Rede de Religiões Afro-Brasileiras e Saúde (RENAFRO)
REDRESS
Renaissance Movement - Sierra Leone
Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth
Restore Justice in VA
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park Legacy Council
Rights and Democracy
Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged & the Disenfranchised (RIHD)
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Rockford Anti-Racism Network
Room for All
Rural Women's Health Project
Rutgers AAUP-AFT (American Association of University Professors-American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO)
Rutgers Immigrant Rights Clinic
Rutgers International Human Rights Clinic
Rutgers Muslim Law Student's Association
Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness
Sadiki Educational Safari, Inc.
Saint Paul Branch of the NAACP
Salvation and Social Justice
Samidoun: Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference
San Francisco Zen Center
San Jose State University Human Rights Institute
Sciences Po
Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness
Seguridad en Democracia (SEDEM)
Sero Project
Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship International
Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP)
SWOP Behind Bars (SBB)
SWOP, Minneapolis
SWOP, Seattle
Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center
Sexual Rights Initiative
Shareteah Humanitarian Organization (SHO)
Shirkat Gah: Women's Resource Centre
SinColectivo
SISTA Fire
SisterLove, Inc.
SOFA (Solidarite Fanm Ayisyèn)
Soroptimist International
South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario
South Austin Coalition, Chicago
South City Delivery, LLC
South Potomac Citizens Association
Southern Legal Counsel, Inc.
Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Economic and Social Justice
St. John’s Old Catholic Community
Stella, l'amie de Maimie
Student Press Law Center
Swaziland Migrant Mineworkers Association (SWAMMIWA)
Truah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Taskin Law and Mediation
Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samiti
Temple of Understanding
The Advocates for Human Rights
The Black Coalition of Rights (Brazil)
The Drammeh Institute
The Evans Exoneration Project, Inc.
The Franklin Law Group, P.C.
The Fund for Global Human Rights
The GAP Gyrlz & The GAP Gyz
The Gravity Human Rights Podcast
The Human Trafficking Legal Center
The International Human Rights Clinic, Harvard Law School
The Jordan Davis Foundation
The Law Office of Curtis FJ Doebbler
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Mitchell Legal Group, PLLC.
The National Statistics Institute of Brazil
The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO)
The Nia Foundation
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<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
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<td>The Outlaw Projects</td>
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<td>The Populace Foundation International (TPFI)</td>
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<td>The Race and Gender Equity Project</td>
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<td>The Racial Justice Network</td>
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<td>The Talking Drum Incorporated</td>
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<td>The TransLatin@ Coalition</td>
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<td>UN Human Rights</td>
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<td>UN-Habitat</td>
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<td>UNA Southern New York State Division</td>
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<td>UNA-USA, Whittier Chapter in CA</td>
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Washington Christian Leaders Coalition
Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
Washington Office on Latin America
We Re-Member
WEPOWER, St. Louis
Western States Center
Whites Against Racism
Wisconsin Justice Initiative
WISDOM of Wisconsin
Within Our Lifetime: United for Palestine

WITNESS
Women and Girls of African Descent Caucus with United Nations
Women Enabled International
Women's International's League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
Women's March Global
Women’s All Points Bulletin (WAPB)
Women’s March
Woodhull Freedom Foundation

Working Class and Houseless Organizing Alliance (WHOA GSO)
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
WV Citizens for Clean Elections
Young Bhutanese Coalition of New York
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights
YWCA USA