

## US activists critique government performance at UN Human Rights Review

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**Geneva** – US activists in Geneva observing the government’s first-ever review by the UN’s top human rights body said the government failed to convince the world of its positive human rights record.

“If the US government delegation’s objective was to reclaim the mantel of global human rights leadership, it failed miserably in that effort,” said Ajamu Baraka, Executive Director of the US Human Rights Network (USHRN), immediately after observing the US review.

“What we heard instead was an eloquent defense of US ‘exceptionalism’ – its view of itself as somehow having a ‘special status’ that does not require it to conform to internationally recognized human rights norms and standards.”

“On the positive side, it was gratifying to see the constant drumbeat of criticism from the international community over issues US activists have been raising for years - such as the continued use of the death penalty, racial discrimination, the lack of a US national human rights institution to monitor domestic human rights practice, and the lack of treaty ratification.”

“Fortunately, the US will not be able to dismiss these criticisms as mere ‘political rhetoric’ by its ‘enemies’. The criticism came from a host of states, including US allies such as the UK, France, Australia, and Switzerland.”

The UN Human Rights Council’s “Universal Periodic Review” is the most important review of a countries’ human rights record by the 47-member Council. Every UN member state is obliged to submit to review every four years.

The US Human Rights Network (USHRN), which represents over 300 civil and human rights groups in the US, sent a delegation to Geneva for the review.

Human rights concerns raised consistently during the review of the US record, among others, were:

- the continued use of the death penalty;
- racial disparities in the US criminal justice system;
- the sentencing of child offenders to life without the possibility of parole;
- the US failure to ratify key international treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The US is one of only two countries in the world not to have ratified the Child Right Convention, with Somalia.

“It was clear to all in those listening that the US is not meeting the minimum requirements set forth by the international community when it comes to the human rights of its people – let alone being able to claim the mantel of being a global ‘human rights leader,’” said Ajamu Baraka.

“The US delegation, upon its return home, needs to ensure that this government buckles down to work and engages in a real, constructive process to fix the human rights problems in the US based on the recommendations they heard today.”