

## US response to UN human rights review contains many ‘commitments;’ little substance

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The UN Human Rights Council delivered its recommendations to the US government, following the US review last week under the Universal Periodic Review process all UN member states must undergo every four years.

The UN report contained 228 specific human rights recommendations on issues ranging from racial discrimination to Guantanamo Bay.

Reacting to the response by the US government delegation to the recommendations, Ajamu Baraka, Director of the US Human Rights Network said, “Superficial commitments are not enough – what are needed are concrete and specific pledges to correct the ongoing human rights violations we still see in this country.”

“The US government should not be congratulated for appearing before the UN Human Rights Council – it is not a favour, it is their obligation as a UN member state. They have a legal obligation to correct the flaws in the US human rights record that were clearly pointed out by international community – not just make vague commitments.”

Fifty-six countries made statements regarding the US human rights record. An overwhelming majority of countries highlighted the failure of the US to ratify key international human rights treaties, such as those on women’s rights, children’s rights, and economic, social and cultural rights, and the rights of people with disabilities.

“The US response that they pursue a practice of ‘compliance before ratification’ when it comes to international treaties is utter nonsense and an exercise in obfuscation,” said Ajamu Baraka. “It is basically an admission that these rights are currently being violated in the US.”

“The UN does not expect a country to achieve full compliance before ratification. It simply requires ratifying countries to move progressively towards compliance.”

In its response to the UN, the US committed to:

- ending discrimination by ensuring equal opportunity for political participation by all “qualified voters;”
- ensuring that distinctions such as race, gender, disability, religion, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation do not “interfere with opportunities to live a fulfilling life;”
- addressing concerns about detention, discrimination, and racial and ethnic profiling with regard to immigration;
- closing Guantanamo “as expeditiously as possible;”
- vigilance in the continued protection of fundamental freedoms of expression and religion for all, including laws and policies to protect Muslim, Arab, and other Americans from discrimination;
- pursuing policies that will build an economy and society that “lifts us all.”

“US human rights activists will not be fooled by vague platitudes about ‘fulfilling lives’ that ‘lift us all.’ We are not asking the government to ‘fulfill’ us – we are asking them to respect all of our human rights, and we want concrete proposals with a timeline for action,” said Ajamu Baraka.