



Peace and Justice Commission

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT:

City of Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission

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Who: City of Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission

What: Press Event on Berkeley City Council submission of local compliance reports with international human rights treaties

When: Saturday, **December 6, 11 am to noon**

Where: North Berkeley Senior Center, **1901 Hearst, Berkeley**, corner of MLK Jr. Way

In observance of Human Rights Day (December 10) and Bill of Rights Day (December 15), the Peace and Justice Commission announces the submission of Berkeley municipal reports on local compliance with the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

George Lippman, Vice-Chair of the Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission, said “Ensuring human rights is the highest duty of government at every level. Berkeley has much to be proud of, but it must also be honest about its shortcomings. Only through openness about the state of human rights in our community is there hope of social change.”

A speaker from the Berkeley Law School International Human Rights Clinic, recently returned from UN hearings on the record of the U.S. government with respect to torture, will speak about the UN’s findings. Community organizations will present updates on local human rights issues touched on in the reports, including:

- NAACP: racial discrimination
 - Council on American Islamic Relations: hate crimes
 - Code Pink: military recruitment and propaganda for war
 - Human Rights of the Incarcerated (Cal): mass incarceration
 - Berkeley CopWatch: police accountability
 - Homeless Action Center: treatment of the homeless
 - UN Association of the East Bay
 - Human Rights Advocates
- (Partial list)

Background:

On October 7, 2014, the Berkeley City Council approved two reports on local compliance with human rights treaties. Berkeley is the first local government that has produced a report. The reports were drafted by the City's Peace and Justice Commission.

Under the Constitution, treaties are the supreme law of the land. Every country that ratifies a human rights treaty is obligated to periodically report on its progress on the treaty's requirements. Berkeley has produced local reports under the inspiration of the UN Human Rights Committee, which stated,

"The State party is also encouraged to provide more detailed information on the adoption of effective mechanisms to ensure that new and existing legislation, at federal *and at state level*, is in compliance with the Covenant, and about mechanisms adopted to ensure proper follow-up of the Committee's concluding observations." [Emphasis added]

These reports are offered as a contribution towards meeting the need for local-level data. Some of the topics which the two reports discuss include:

- Over-policing of African Americans and Occupy activists
- Berkeley's law against sidewalk sleeping (Public Commons for Everyone Initiative, PCEI) as an anti-homeless law
- Extensive disparities in human needs between African American and white communities
- Discrimination in city and private employment against African Americans
- Polluted air in West and South Berkeley caused by industrial emissions, affecting communities of color disproportionately
- Council's investigation of acquiring Tasers for the BPD
- Hate crimes against Arab Americans, Muslims, and other communities
- State prison conditions including lengthy solitary confinement, sub-standard healthcare, sterilization of women, and sexual assault
- Use of Suspicious Activity Reports to feed unsubstantiated non-criminal allegations into the national security databases
- UC Berkeley's management of nuclear weapons labs as a contravention of international law and as propaganda for war

References:

Berkeley, California report on local compliance with Convention against Torture:

http://www.ushrnetwork.org/sites/ushrnetwork.org/files/pjc_cat_report.pdf

Concluding Observations the review of the U.S. government record on torture, from the UN Committee Against Torture, released November 28:

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CAT/Shared%20Documents/USA/INT_CAT_COC_USA_18893_E.pdf

CAT treaty text:

<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/39/a39r046.htm>

ICCPR treaty text:

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>