

U.N. Independent Expert On Racism Begins Fact-Finding Mission In U.S.

Official Visit Underscores Ongoing Issues Of Discrimination Throughout Nation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 19, 2008

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WASHINGTON – Several national civil liberties and human rights groups today welcomed a fact-finding mission to the U.S. by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The American Civil Liberties Union, Global Rights, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, the U.S. Human Rights Network, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Rights Working Group and the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty call on the U.S., state and local governments to fully cooperate with the special rapporteur.

"The visit of the special rapporteur is a critical opportunity to shed light on the pervasive and systemic problem of racism and discrimination in the United States," said Jamil Dakwar, Director of the ACLU Human Rights Program. "In this election year, the eyes of the world will be turned toward America and its longstanding promise to end racial and ethnic inequalities."

At the invitation of the U.S. government, Special Rapporteur Doudou Diène is visiting the U.S. from May 18 to June 6 to examine issues of racism and racial discrimination in this country. Diène will visit Washington, New York, Chicago, Omaha, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Miami and San Juan, Puerto Rico over the next three weeks where he will study incidents of contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the governmental measures in place to address them.

Diène is scheduled to meet with federal and local government officials as well as members of diverse communities across the United States and representatives of several non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

"The special rapporteur's visit presents a unique opportunity to give voice to those combating racism in the U.S. and will bring our concerns to the U.N. and its enforcement mechanisms," said Aubrey McCutcheon, Director of Programs at Global Rights. "I am confident Mr. Diène's visit will heighten our efforts towards eliminating racism and its vestiges."

In March 2008, the separate U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) issued a strongly worded critique of the United States' record on racial discrimination and urged the government to make sweeping reforms to policies affecting racial and ethnic minorities, women, immigrants and indigenous populations in the U.S. Several civil liberties and human rights organizations have urged the special rapporteur to critically examine the continuation of racism and racial discrimination in various areas identified by CERD and well documented in extensive NGO reports, including criminal justice, education, housing, juvenile justice, immigration policy, police brutality, hate crimes and racial profiling.

The mandate of the special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance was established in 1993 by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and further extended by the U.N. Human Rights Council. The special rapporteur will submit a final report on the visit to the Human Rights Council in the spring of 2009.

More information about the special rapporteur's visit is available online at:

www.aclu.org/intlhumanrights/racialjustice/sronracism.html and
www.ushrnetwork.org/special_rep

More information about the CERD recommendations to the U.S. is available at:

www.aclu.org/intlhumanrights/racialjustice/cerd.html and
www.ushrnetwork.org/projects/cerd