2016 PHRGE Human Rights Institute

Global Justice Goes Local: The Emergence of Human Rights Cities

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Summary of Proceedings

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The Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy

The Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy (PHRGE) hosts an annual two-day Institute at Northeastern University School of Law (NUSL) on a cutting-edge topic related to economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights. The topics of recent Institutes have included *Rethinking Education Reform: A Human Rights Perspective*, *Human Rights and Violence Against Women: Applying the Due Diligence Principle*, and *Tapping into the Right to Water: Affordability, Quality, Accessibility*.

This year the PHRGE Institute was entitled *Global Justice Goes Local: The Emergence of Human Rights Cities*. The PHRGE staff and Co-Directors were responsible for the development of this year's theme and program. We give special thanks to all who contributed to this year's Institute as speakers and/or active participants in the work. Members of the National Human Rights Cities Network (NHRC Network) steering committee collaborated on the planning and organization of the Institute. Jackie Smith of NHRCN and Rebecca Landy of the US Human Rights Network (USHRN) provided feedback on the concept of this year's Institute and helped promote the event, along with a host of colleagues at Northeastern University, especially its School of Law. NUSL colleagues, especially Sully Báez, Lauren Bourke, Martha Davis, Steven Evans, Siobhan Fanning, Michelle Harper, Alexander Kern, Kendra Millay, Dean Jeremy Paul, Raisha Price, Jasmine Ana Ramón, Rachel Rosenbloom and Lucy Williams contributed critical logistical, programmatic, technical and moral support. Assistant Director Elizabeth Ennen and Program Coordinators Peter Cunningham and Katlyn Downing joined Executive Director Kevin Murray on PHRGE's Institute planning team. This event would not have been possible without the assistance of a fleet of generous, dynamic student volunteers, including: Carissa Aranda, Devan Braun, Eve Deveau, Anna Oomen-Lochefeld, Jasmine Ramón, Mary Ryan, Frederick Serry-Kamal, Abdul Sesay, Brooke Stanley, Kaitlyn Tucker, and Sandi Van Orden, and Lamin Yansaneh.

The 2016 Institute was designed to contribute to the emerging global movement advancing the local implementation of human rights via the idea of human rights cities. As a law-school-based human rights center focused on economic, social, and cultural rights, PHRGE was well positioned to host a gathering of activists, practitioners, and scholars active in this movement. The Institute opened on Thursday, December 8th with two panel presentations, a book celebration, and a keynote address by Professor Martha Davis. On Friday, December 9th, Institute participants engaged in facilitated workshops about the future of the human rights cities movement. This report offers a summary of both days of the Institute.

DAY 1 – EXPERT PANELS, BOOK CELEBRATION, AND KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Welcome and Introduction

Jeremy Paul, Dean of NUSL, welcomed participants on behalf of the law school. He dedicated the Institute to Professor Hope Lewis, NUSL faculty member, PHRGE co-founder and inspiring human rights activist, who had passed away two days earlier on

December 6, 2016. Dean Paul spoke of the importance of human rights in bringing us together in one community and noted that the Institute was timely, given the change in the political climate in the United States.

Kevin Murray, Executive Director of PHRGE, welcomed participants to the Institute on behalf of the Program, and thanked the law school for its continuing support of this event. Murray also paid tribute to Professor Lewis for her lifetime of human rights work, her critical support of PHRGE and her role in the creation of the Boston Principles on the Rights on Noncitizens. These human rights principles become even more important as the federal government threatens to take action against noncitizen immigrants. In the current political context, in which engagement with the federal government concerning its human rights obligations is likely to become more difficult, local human rights advocacy becomes even more important. Murray recognized the indispensable support of NHRCN and USHRN in creating this year's Institute, and expressed his hope that the event would, in turn, help strengthen both of those networks. Finally, PHRGE's Executive Director described the unique structure of the Institute, noting that while the first day would resemble a traditional conference, the second day would provide a highly-interactive space for sharing insights, experience, and knowledge.

Panel Discussion #1 - Why Human Rights Cities?

Cynthia Soohoo, the Director of the Human Rights and Gender Justice Clinic at CUNY Law School and Chair of the Board of the US Human Rights Network, moderated this session, which served as an introduction to the human rights cities movement. Professor Soohoo noted that the human rights cities movement is vibrant and that local activism to protect and promote human rights will be increasingly important during the Trump administration. She affirmed that all people have basic human rights and are entitled to participate in the policies of their cities.

Stan Willis, an attorney and activist from Chicago and a member of the National Conference of Black Lawyers, addressed the issue of how an international human rights framework can be critical in work on local human rights issues. In 1988, Mr. Willis discovered that the Chicago police department had been torturing young black men with electrical currents to elicit confessions. After unsuccessful attempts to secure justice for these men, some of whom were on death row, Mr. Willis decided to go bring his case to the U.N. Committee on Torture. The Committee responded by submitting a statement urging the United States to investigate the issue. In large part because of the publicity that accompanied this human rights intervention, Jon Burge, the police detective responsible for the torture program, was indicted twenty-five years after the original events. For Mr. Willis, human rights sometimes run deeper than civil rights, and help to connect people from around the world. He stated that he had come to the Institute with hope to build a *movement*, not an organization, and that building a supportive and inclusive human rights community is critical for ensuring that legislation is not merely passed, but implemented as well.

Joanne Kamuf Ward, Deputy Director of the Human Rights in the U.S. Project at Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute, provided an overview of the ways cities are implementing human rights. Human rights cities exist all over the world; the United States, which currently has about six human rights cities, is late to the game. Human rights cities aim to prevent discrimination, foster more equitable outcomes with respect to municipal policies, and ensure meaningful participation in municipal government. Human rights cities employ a variety of mechanisms to achieve these aims, including human rights audits of policies and priorities, the incorporation of international human rights principles and documents into local policy, and the fostering of more participatory local governments. Ward argued that human rights awareness is a key starting point. Advocates are pushing for local and state government officials to be included in international human rights work, including UN reviews of human rights reports. Progress on the protection and implementation of human rights at the local level will require a broader understanding of human rights and their relevance to local policy, and a strong network of activists and advocates that transcends the borders that exist among cities, states, and countries.

Rachel Rosenbloom, Professor of Law at Northeastern University School of Law, addressed the issue of sanctuary cities, noting that the sanctuary cities movement complements and intersects with the human rights cities movement. The current sanctuary cities movement has its roots in the commitment of some churches, in the 1980's, to support Central American asylum seekers through the provision of housing and transportation, and in open defiance of the law. Sanctuary cities now embrace two key principles, non-cooperation and inclusion. The non-cooperation principle directs local police departments not to ask detained individuals their immigration status, transmit immigration status information to the federal government, or honor the requests of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to hold detained individuals beyond their release date so that ICE can pick up and deport the individuals. Many cities and several states have adopted non-cooperation policies. For the most part these policies are driven by the goal of protecting immigrants, but they are also motivated by concerns that cooperation between police and federal immigration officials is detrimental to good police work.

The inclusion principle directs municipalities to provide municipal identity cards that do not mention immigration status, so that undocumented individuals can have access to public services that require a government-issued ID. New Haven, for example, offers such a card to its residents and has the salutary effect of bringing undocumented individuals to city hall where they become aware of other available municipal services. Professor Rosenbloom noted that policies that embody the principles of non-cooperation and inclusion advance the idea of local citizenship, but that sanctuary cities cannot ultimately provide undocumented individuals with shelter from federal immigration officials. Sanctuary cities include San Francisco, Boston, and New Haven.

Shelley White, the Program Director of the Master of Public Health Program at Simmons College, began by describing a human-rights research project she conducted with colleagues at Boston College in 2008 and 2009. The goal of the project was to

explore the usefulness of the human rights framework for activists in a variety of social justice campaigns in Boston.

Professor White and her colleagues conducted interviews with leaders of 42 Boston organizations working in the areas of health, gender, youth, the environment, peace, labor, housing, immigration, and LGBT rights. They found that only a third of these organizations explicitly used a human rights framework in their work. The interviews revealed that this general hesitation to adopt a human rights framework may be traced to both political and cultural challenges.

Political challenges to U.S. human right activism include the fact that the United States has not ratified several critical international human rights conventions, and the fact that the human rights framework is viewed by some activists as too partisan to be of general use. The most significant challenges are cultural: many in the U.S. associate human rights with global issues and fail to see their relevance to local issues. In addition, civil and political rights have priority over economic and social rights in this country, and human rights do not resonate with core U.S. values such as exceptionalism and liberalism. The framework can also be divisive because it is often associated with experts and elites.

The early human rights cities movement in Boston, with its emphasis on grassroots organization and people-centered activism, successfully sidestepped some of these challenges and achieved the important goal of having Boston declared a human rights city. However, the human rights city movement in Boston has been struggling with the tasks of moving forward and building effective coalitions after winning the designation. For White, Boston has the potential to create deep synergies between its scholars and its activists, but that a participatory approach would be critical for effective coalition building.

[Jackie Smith](), a Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh and a founding member of the [Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance]() noted that while some have argued that a human-rights based approach to advocacy is too conservative and legalistic, the human rights cities movement offers a valuable people-centered model of advocacy. The human rights cities movement encourages individuals from all walks of life to have open conversations about the meaning of the term "human rights." Such conversations promote bridge-building over social and political divides.

The human rights cities movement pays attention to local and lived experiences and thereby creates a transformative movement space in which citizenship and community can be communally re-defined. In focusing on people, the movement contributes to critiques of capitalism and expands our legal and political imaginations. An emphasis on the local level brings politics back to a place where people can make a difference and work against a divisive and exclusionary economic system.

Smith discussed the example of Pittsburgh, a human-rights city which has recently become a [City for CEDAW]() meaning that the city passed an ordinance committing itself

to the principles of the [Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women](#). This treaty, not yet ratified by the United States, affirmed that women's rights are human rights. Also, human rights cities activists in Pittsburgh recently organized an [affordable housing summit](#) bringing together diverse groups to learn from each other about the causes of the housing crisis. In this context, the human rights cities movement was expressed in a desire to take housing out of the capitalist market system, instead of trying to make housing policy changes within a market system. The human rights cities movement encourages building relationships around collaborative projects and, in fostering equitable commitments to specific places, counters globalization and the prioritization of economic growth and wealth in social policy.

In the discussion period, Institute participants engaged panelists on a number of topics, including:

- How the human rights framework might be used to address the crisis situation of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women in Massachusetts and across the country;
- The challenge of ensuring that the human rights city movement engage "bread and butter" issues that are urgent in the community;
- The potential for using the human rights cities movement to protect undocumented immigrants from abuse by the Australian government;
- The question of whether sanctuary cities have been organized into a network;
- The challenges facing the sanctuary city movement under a Trump administration;
- Human rights cities around the world;
- The capacity of the human rights cities movement to successfully address the issue of extreme poverty;
- The work of the Pittsburgh human rights cities movement on incarceration issues such as solitary confinement, juveniles being charged as adults, the incarceration of the elderly, and the mass incarceration of members of the African American community;

Panel Discussion #2 – Making It Happen: Local Human Rights in the United States

[Rebecca Landy](#), the Human Rights Outreach and Advocacy Manager at the US Human Rights Network, moderated the second panel, during which experts on human rights cities movements in Washington, DC, Eugene, OR, and Jackson, MS, shared their experiences and insights. Ms. Landy introduced each of the speakers and spoke briefly about the important role played by USHRN in relation to the growing human rights cities movement in the United States.

[Mai Abdul Rahman](#), a post-doctoral fellow at Howard University's School of Education and a member of the Washington, DC Human Rights City Steering Committee,

discussed the history of the human rights cities movement in Washington, DC. Washington declared itself a human rights city in 2008 but the broad language of the declaration rendered it ineffective and human rights issues such as poverty, poor public education, and housing displacement persisted. Activists then focused on the project of making the declaration meaningful. A large working group, including individuals involved with the criminal justice system and housing agencies, developed a list of priorities specific to Washington. These priorities included immigration, prison reform, privatization, homelessness, and poverty.

The working group developed a report card through which activists rated the DC government's achievements in all of the priority human rights areas. That report card now serves as the basis of an annual evaluation carried out by the human rights city committee. The card is intended to foster government progress on these issues by praising successful work, highlighting even modest efforts in the right direction, and flagging ongoing violations of human rights principles.

This project has achieved successes in the areas of criminal enforcement, tax priorities, education, immigrants' rights, and discrimination based on sexual orientation and religious affiliation. Each year the Committee presents the results to local media and city officials, including the mayor and the city council members. Dr. Rahman echoed earlier statements that politicians think of human rights as relevant globally, but not locally – and that the report card tool has helped activists educate local government officials, while holding them accountable for implementing human rights.

Michael Santos, an attorney with the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) is also a member of the Washington, DC Human Rights City Steering Committee. He began his presentation by noting that activists in the human rights cities movement in the United States had gathered for a conference in Pittsburgh in June 2015, and another in Washington, in May 2016. He then turned to the work of NLCHP fighting homelessness in Washington, DC. NLCHP uses advocacy, impact litigation, and other tools to fight for the principle that housing is a human right, and homelessness is a gross violation of that right. NLCHP has had a number of important successes encouraging federal officials to incorporate human rights language into housing policies, and is working to add homelessness to the list of conditions and characteristics protected from discrimination in the Washington, D.C. Human Rights Act. In its *Housing Not Handcuffs* campaign, NLCHP advocates for government at all levels to protect homeless individuals from discrimination and violence and ensure housing for vulnerable populations, rather than criminalize the homeless for their plight.

NLCHP also advocates for statehood status for Washington, D.C. seeing the denial of statehood as related to many of the human rights violations that plague the District. Santos and his colleagues also believe that statehood status would open up possibilities for more effective local human rights advocacy.

Ken Neubeck, a Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Connecticut and a long-time member of the Eugene Human Rights Commission, described ongoing work

to make Eugene a human rights city. The city's Human Rights Commission (HRC) has become an engine of change in the city. In 2011, the Eugene City Council added language to its Human Rights Ordinance calling upon the Eugene Human Rights Commission to embrace the full range of human rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Since then, the Commission has made progress on several issues using the human rights framework. HRC was instrumental in passing a paid sick leave ordinance in Eugene and partnered with activists in Portland to pass a state-wide paid sick leave ordinance. After many residents of Eugene expressed concerns about a holiday named "Columbus Day," an HRC commissioner worked with community residents to identify a solution; based on a proposal by the Commission, the Eugene City Council renamed the day, "Indigenous Peoples Day."

After it came to light that a downtown developer was exploiting undocumented workers from Arizona and Texas, HRC demanded that the city council develop a policy that would prevent the city from providing tax credits to developers who violate human rights. HRC is now addressing the issue of homelessness by fighting against the criminalization of homelessness and by cooperating with statewide efforts to pass a homeless bill of rights. Given the crisis human rights crisis facing migrants across the country, the Commission will also be working toward making Eugene a model sanctuary city.

Noel Didla, a Professor of English at Jackson State University and a co-founder of both Cooperation Jackson (CJ) and the Jackson Human Rights Institute in Jackson, Mississippi, described the history of human rights work in Jackson, human rights cities movement in Jackson, and the work of the Jackson Cooperative, an organization of activists that seeks to build a network of worker-organized and worker-owned cooperatives. Professor Didla noted that a rich history of local organizing, including the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Black Liberation traditions, and the Jackson Kush Plan all laid the foundation for human rights work in Jackson. Former Mayor and movement lawyer, Chokwe Lumumba, provided critical leadership to human rights work in the city until his untimely death in 2014.

Jackson has a population of 173,000, 85% of which is African American. The city's Mayor is black, as are five of the seven city council members. Three Council members are under the age of 35, reflecting the youth of the city's population and the leadership of its young people. Underemployment, health issues, poverty, and systemic violence are daily experiences for many in Jackson. The human rights cities movement has created a space for understanding how these experiences impact public education and mass incarceration. Voices emerging in Jackson are in tune with the Black Lives matter movement, and there is an appreciation for the need to work with indigenous people, immigrants, and allies. In Jackson, the human rights conversation is not about the United Nations; it is about a people-centered movement in which individuals work together to make human rights a reality. Jackson's human rights work is deeply

connected to economic issues and the goal of helping people move into sustainable, wealth-building communities.

The Jackson Cooperative is a tool for building and sustaining wealth within communities. On December 16, 2014, the city council of Jackson unanimously passed a resolution green-lighting the creation of a Human Rights Charter and a Human Rights Commission for the city. The resolution was a victory, not just for Cooperation Jackson, but for the activist community and for all the city's people. Cooperation Jackson was also successful in fighting efforts by the State of Mississippi essentially to annex downtown Jackson, the center of the city's economic activity and the city's airport. To take those critical resources out of the hands of local leadership would have been a great blow to the community and its aspirations.

It is a challenge, however, for grassroots organizations to fight both corporations and the government. Nonetheless, progress is being made in Jackson. In the wake of the terrible loss of Mayor Chokwe Lumumba, others have come forward, including the Ex-Mayor's son, Chokwe Antar Lumumba. Also, while Mayor Chokwe Lumumba provided critical leadership to the human rights struggle in Jackson, a people-centered movement does not rest on just one set of shoulders. Cooperation Jackson intends to stay focused on a broad-based human rights movement, drawing from many sources of strength in the community. Moving forward, Jackson will use the people's assemblies as a model and develop a people's tribunal to look at nine categories of human rights violations in the Deep South.

Dorotea Manuela, a registered nurse and activist who is deeply involved in the Color of Water Project in Boston, discussed the human rights cities movement in Boston. Dottie Stevens and Survivors, Inc., a group of low-income women and allies who work on low-income survival issues, fought hard to make Boston a human rights city. In April, 2011 the Boston City Council approved a resolution proclaiming Boston a human rights city. Charles Yancey, the African-American councilor who introduced the resolution, believed in human rights, but the City Council as a whole did not.

Although Boston is a human rights city, the human rights city vision of Boston remains to be realized. Manuela asked what does it mean for Boston to be a Human Rights City when racism is alive and kicking in the city? – and that communities are still fighting for desegregation even though the city has had a desegregation order for 45 years? We need to keep improving and expanding the human rights framework. We must remember how this country was founded, how many of us came as slaves, and how the country belongs to Native Americans. We must not shy away from the idea that capitalism is at the core of human rights violations. We are entitled to housing nutrition, and education. We must educate ourselves, then organize and mobilize. A human rights resolution, by itself, has no teeth. As activists, we must continue to demand that Boston's Mayor and City Council make human rights a reality in our city.

During the post-panel discussion panelists and audience members and panelists highlighted a set of possible priorities for the human rights cities movement and human rights, in general, in the next period, including:

- Proactively preparing for the impact of the Trump administration on local human rights issues;
- Working together to ensure that there is room for all voices in conversations about human rights;
- Focusing on people-centered human rights work that places "human rights law" in its proper perspective;
- Realizing that making meaningful progress on human rights requires taking risks, and is likely to become even more risky in the near future;
- Closely monitoring pending litigation on the issues of transgender rights;
- Pressuring Senators and Representatives during the upcoming confirmation hearings of new executive appointees:
- Remembering that human rights are collective rights, not just individuals rights;
- Challenging the anti-human rights discourse of the new administration;
- Building and fortifying the human rights movement in the United States;
- Using privilege strategically, e.g., using privilege to create spaces where new voices are heard, using academic privilege to foster radically new ways of seeing the world and acting in it; and
- Employing alternative financing for movement building, e.g., use crowd-sourcing methods.

Book Celebration

At the end of the afternoon on the first day, Institute participants gathered for a reception celebrating the publication of *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities*, a collection of articles on human rights cities edited by Martha Davis, a Professor of Law at Northeastern University Law School, and her colleagues Barbara Oomen and Michele Grigolo. Professor Davis was present to comment on the release of the new volume, as were three other contributors to this important project: Joann Kamuf Ward, of Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute, Ken Neubeck of the Eugene Human Rights Commission, and Cynthia Soohoo of CUNY Law School.

Keynote Address

Lucy Williams, a Professor the Northeastern University School of Law and a faculty co-director of PHRGE, initiated the evening program with a tribute to her colleague, Professor Hope Lewis. Professor Williams offered words of remembrance of the many contributions and unique personality of Professor Lewis, and invited the full lecture hall to join her in a moment of silence.

Joann Kamuf Ward then introduced the Institute's keynote speaker, Martha Davis, the Associate Dean for Experiential Education at NUSL, Faculty Director of the NULawLab and a Faculty Co-Director of PHRGE. Ms. Ward described a few of Professor Davis's many accomplishments, including her path-breaking scholarship on the relevance of international human rights framework to social justice advocacy efforts in the United States.

Martha Davis's keynote address, [From Global to Local: The Transformative Potential of Human Rights Cities](#) was a provocative reflection on the ways in which the international human rights framework must "flex" in response to the design challenges posed by local implementation of those rights.

By way of introduction, Professor Davis argued that cities and mayors will play an increasingly critical role in promoting and protecting human rights. Mayors, in crafting city policy governing the delivery of city services, are addressing the human rights of their constituents – rights to water, sanitation, education, fairness, and dignity. Advocates argue that local governments should use an explicit human rights framework in developing city policies, both because such a framework is consistent with our country's values and because it generates effective and responsible policies.

However, the project of local human rights implementation is difficult and beset by challenges, some of which are best understood as "design challenges" on the grounds that they are structural challenges that require changes in the way we conceive of human rights and recognize the obligations to deliver those rights. Davis focused on three specific design challenges - the challenges of hierarchy, unity, and balance - and argued that solving these challenges will transform the landscape of international human rights governance.

The first design challenge, that of *hierarchy*, involves re-designing the vertical relationships of cities to national governments – and to national and international human rights institutions. As U.S. cities increasingly engage with the task of implementing "international" human rights domestically, these vertical relationships have evolved in a way that is problematically ad hoc. The resulting lack of clarity in these relationships is particularly challenging when cities embrace human rights positions that differ from those endorsed by the national government. Perhaps it is time to engage the hierarchical design challenge by, for example, exploring a more formal status for cities in international governance, and by clarifying the law on the role of cities in implementing human rights norms.

The second design challenge, the challenge of unity, involves re-designing the horizontal relationships among human rights cities across the globe. Human rights cities are [already connected in informal networks](#) that have been successful at collaborating on best practices for the local implementation of human rights. Professor Davis asked whether or not it is time to engage the question of whether these informal city-based human rights networks would benefit from adopting some of the key features of the more formal states-based human rights networks, i.e., more formal reporting systems,

collaboration mechanisms, and review structures. Re-configuring the city-based network so that it incorporates some of these features might ensure continued progress in the human rights movement. Moving toward a more integrated human rights system, i.e., one that takes seriously the role of local governments, may also lead to a desirable increase in awareness throughout the system of the types of human rights that are often of central concern to cities – economic, social, and cultural rights.

Addressing the design challenge of *balance* involves several different balancing acts. For example, human right cities may engage a broad range of constituents in a balanced and open way in order to successfully mediate among competing human rights goals and claims. Similarly, human rights work may be more effective when based on a balanced collaboration between civil society actors and government officials. Finally the application of human rights principles might allow cities to develop a more balanced approach to the use of public space. In all these cases, the design challenge of achieving balance calls on advocates to reconsider dogmatic approaches to human rights implementation.

Professor Davis argued in conclusion that adopting the mindset of a designer, and engaging the design challenges of hierarchy, unity, and balance, will inspire innovative approaches to the task of implementing human rights domestically and, ultimately, lead to the transformation of the human rights movement.

DAY 2 – FACILITATED WORKSHOPS

Goals for the Day

Kevin Murray, PHRGE, welcomed 46 participants to the second day of the conference by outlining the goals for the day. Specifically, Day Two sought to:

- Share information and knowledge about the opportunities and threats facing human rights cities in the next period;
- Generate ideas, strategies and questions that might be considered by the human rights cities movement as it charts its future; and
- Increase the possibility of ongoing communication and collaboration among Institute participants.

The day began with a presentation by long-time human rights cities activist, *Shulamith Koenig*. After Shulamith's talk, participants engaged in a set of facilitated workshops designed to generate discussion about the challenges facing the human rights cities movement, as well ideas for meeting those challenges. The speaker offered some specific ideas of how this would be organized, and assured participants that the facilitators of each group would provide additional guidance.

Workshop Plenary:
Shulamith Koenig, People's Movement for Human Rights Learning (PDHRE)

Shulamith Koenig, was among the activists who initiated the idea of human rights cities. From that perspective, she reflected on the early history of the movement. Ms. Koenig and her organization, the People's Movement for Human Rights Education (PDHRE), led efforts to launch the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004). In pointing to the roots of human rights cities, the speaker emphasized the central importance of seeing human rights as a "way of life," and argued that every human being should learn, plan, and act within a human rights framework. Ms. Koenig noted that the human rights learning movement provided a foundation for the human rights cities movement. Human rights learning is learning to live in communities in which the dignity of all is recognized – and human rights cities provide a practical model of such communities. Ms. Koenig regaled the audience with stories of how her early human rights work in Rosario, Argentina gave rise to her work on human rights cities, and then closed by leading the group in a human rights chant that PHRDE and others have been using for decades.

Working Group A: Morning Session

Working Group A (Facilitator, Kevin Murray) consisted of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and countries, including Canada, China, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Sweden, and the United States. Participants introduced themselves and their organizations, and summarized the first day of the Institute for the benefit of the few newcomers in the group. This section was designed to recall some of the main themes of the discussion in Day One, build some common language and knowledge that could be used in our later discussions, and empower new participants to take part in the day's workshops.

The facilitator then laid out the sequence of the conversations planned for the day, and made clear that, while the group was going to attempt to surface ideas to address the challenges faced by the human rights cities movement, in no way was this to be seen as any sort of movement planning exercise. It was an opportunity for the exchange of ideas among a diverse group of people with widely varying degrees of knowledge and experience in the movement. The organizers hope that, out of this diversity of perspectives and experience there might emerge ideas that would be of use to those present in the room who were actually engaged in planning the future of the movement.

After this introduction, the working group turned to a brainstorm of the "opportunities" and "threats" faced by the human rights cities movement in the aftermath of the federal election in the United States. Participants identified a number of specific opportunities, including:

- to engage in intersectional work that draws upon the strength of different sectors of the human rights movement;
- to work at the local level to challenge the systemic forces that led to the election results;
- to build on increased interest in mobilizing and activism that is a likely outcome of the election;

- to focus on a [people-centered human rights movement](#) that recognizes and makes space for those who might otherwise not be heard; and,
- to use the human rights city movement as a vehicle for designing more [just and inclusive local policies](#).

Participant also identified specific threats present in the same context, such as:

- the normalization of [hatred and hateful rhetoric](#):
- the emergence of [destructive federal policies](#) that could undermine social cohesion and human rights in urban communities;
- [increasing political polarization](#), both within cities and among cities, suburbs and rural areas:
- the demonization of [human rights as a foreign conception](#), ignorant of U.S. "exceptionalism" and out to undermine the "greatness" of the United States;
- the devaluation of community and the [elevation of individualism](#), increased fear and anger, and weak political will.

Having learned more about each other's work, recalled some of the main themes and learning of Day One and then considered the opportunities and threats facing the human rights cities movement in the current context, the group then turned to discussion of ideas, approaches and strategies that the movement might consider as it moved into this new reality. Again, there was no illusion that our group was planning the future of anything. Based our own experience, the knowledge we brought to the Institute and what we had learned in Day One, we were brainstorming ideas that a national network of human rights cities might consider. Since this was, in some way, the core of our work together, we present here as complete a list of those ideas as we are able to glean from our notes. The list below takes the liberty of grouping multiple similar observations into a single proposal/idea. There was not sufficient time to either do that grouping as a group exercise, or take the next step of developing any sort of shared prioritization of these ideas. These were suggestions raised by individuals in the group, or combinations of ideas offered by several participants. There was not an effort to reach group consensus on any of these proposals. Day Two's networking lunch occurred in the middle of this discussion.

1. Provide **information for local officials** on the human rights framework and what it can offer to help local governance. This might take the form of a **user-friendly tool kit**, available in the languages most in use locally;
2. Undertake and present **research showing the impact of the human rights cities designation**;
3. **Focus on youth.** Start with youth. Create space for youth to "name the future;"
4. Collect and disseminate **local histories and narratives**, e.g. Jackson Kush Plan;
5. Always work in a way that **fosters collaboration** and **broadens the reach of human rights principles**;

6. [Look closely at the relationship between](#) **human rights and culture** and use human rights as a tool to deepen cultural identity;
7. Organize in ways that **make use of existing resources.** Advocacy that requires lots of outside resources is not sustainable;
8. Position **[human rights as a strategy of development](#)**, not in the sense of only economic growth, but as human development. Connect local activities to the Sustainable Development Goals;
9. Complement **assessment of local needs** with visions of **[multiplying local resources/strengths](#)**. Use strategies like asset mapping and build organizing models based on those resources;
10. Don't neglect the **[media component](#)** of successful advocacy work. Use the media to promote human rights messages;
11. Human rights also has a **self-awareness component**. Dismantle racism and all oppression;
12. Prioritize strategies that **meet the needs of all ages, across the board**.
13. In the face of climate change and other environmental challenges, human rights cities must **[emphasize environmental sustainability and environmental justice](#)**;
14. There must be a strong sense of **walking together in human rights community**. How do we build a sense of accompaniment into the human rights city model?;
15. Human rights cities cannot exist without **[human rights education and learning](#)**. Human rights must be an important part of both formal and informal education;
16. Communications is important, but we cannot rely only on the traditional media. Human rights cities must be effective at [using online social networks and social media](#).

As suggested above, the group was not able to spend time either grouping or prioritizing these ideas. They were, however, able to conduct a short evaluation of the day's work. Among the positive observations about the work of Group A were:

- The discussion surfaced many ideas for the consideration of movement activists;
- The diversity of the group allowed for a different type of discussion than what often occurs at such conferences and gatherings;
- From start to finish, the group had very good participation from all members, including people who were not able to participate in Day One;
- The idea of gathering Boston people to talk about how to move forward a Boston discussion is a good one, and PHRGE should try to make that happen.

In addition, participants had some observations about how the day might have been more useful. These included:

- It would have helped to have the time to do more prioritizing and building on the suggestions made;

- To be really useful to human rights cities, more specifics are needed in the suggestions;
- More time was needed to go over the list and refine it to make sure we were making practical suggestions;
- It is very difficult to bring together a group of relative strangers to come up with a list like this in one day.

Working Group B: Morning Session

Not surprisingly, while the two groups were working with the same objectives and a shared overall approach to the facilitation, Group B chose to pursue its objectives through work somewhat different from that undertaken by Group A. That was in part due to the different composition of the group, and in part to the approach of the facilitator to the task at hand.

Working Group B was led by Jackie Smith, a professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh and an activist with Pittsburgh's Human Rights City Alliance. Professor Smith introduced the discussion by noting that the group would identify opportunities and threats arising from the recent federal elections, brainstorm ideas for the six-month old National Human Rights Cities Network, generate ideas for a fictional grant-proposal, and consider questions related to the role of individuals in human rights cities, the connection between sanctuary cities and human rights cities, the value of human rights cities, and methods for increasing the effectiveness of human rights initiatives in human rights cities.

The group laid the foundation for its discussion by reviewing and discussing themes from the first day of Institute, including the three design challenges identified by Professor Martha Davis in her keynote address. Professor Smith also provided additional background information about the NHRC Network and asked that the working group assist the network's steering committee by thinking collectively about how to support and structure the human rights cities movement in the United States. She also welcomed suggestions for the network's project of developing human rights cities documentation and producing a human rights cities organizing kit.

The group then engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of many aspects of the human rights cities movement. The summary included here captures opinions expressed in the discussion, rather than a consensus of the entire working group.

We should recognize that some brothers and sisters in the movement are trauma survivors and that we should support each other through difficult moments. The group discussed human rights and racial discrimination issues and the necessity of decolonization. March 25 is the international day of remembrance for the victims of slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the criminal justice system is a conduit for the continuation of slavery through the mass incarceration of people of color, prisoners are being exploited through underpaid work, and we need to be aware of human rights

models that are still Eurocentric and therefore inappropriate. An expert working group has compiled a useful report on individuals of African descent in the United States as part of the International Decade for People of African Descent. A participant noted she was aware of "who was not in the room" and urged organizers to reach out to under-represented groups such as students of color to make sure they feel welcome in such conversations.

The group discussed how local activists and movements can effectively engage with the UN review process, particularly with respect to Universal Periodic Reviews, the Convention Against Torture, and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. Individuals mentioned the importance of shadow reports for the UN review process.

Human rights education is extremely important to our efforts to increase the use of human rights by U.S. social justice organizers. There is a growing movement of human rights educators in this country, including in Washington D.C. where students are being trained in human rights as part of that city's human rights cities project.

There is much to be learned from the work of the water protectors on the land of the Standing Rock Sioux. This movement developed a broad range of support and captured the imagination of people in many different parts of the world.

In terms of the work of the NHRC Network, the steering committee might benefit from a pause to consider different and more inclusive ways of approaching human rights issues, different ways of structuring its activities, and different styles of engagement. The human rights movement often ignores the types of rights that are violated day and night in communities that are not included at the organizing table. In some cases, the attitude and structures of human rights organizers leave marginalized groups feeling disrespected, especially when organizers control who is part of the conversation and which types of work will be done. The group discussed what types of resources the NHRC network should develop, and what collaborative processes should be used to generate a declaration of principles.

Stronger collaboration among human rights cities and more sharing of best practices might strengthen the movement in the future. In terms of their internal operations, human rights cities should guarantee open and inclusive public forums for deliberation and discussion, and ensure that grievance mechanisms are available. Activists should continue to urge the U.S. government to ratify CEDAW and support the principles of CEDAW even in the absence of government support.

Working Group B: Afternoon Session

In the afternoon, Working Group B continued its discussion of the current opportunities and threats created by the new political climate in the United States. The group also paused to evaluate its own methods of framing and conducting its discussion.

Concern was expressed about young people who may feel increasingly helpless and hopeless in the new political environment. The leadership of the human rights movement should be sensitive to the possibility that young people will not react well to hierarchical methods of organizing and mobilizing – and suggested that the people-focused approach at Standing Rock should serve as a model. It is critical to recognize different styles of activism and movement-building, and to encourage participation of a diverse group of individuals.

The election of Donald Trump would cause a significant decrease in support for human rights, in general, and for human rights cities, in particular. Participants noted that the United States has a history of using human rights issues to criticize other countries, while failing to address human rights failures of its own. There will be opportunities to use "embarrassing the United States" on human rights issues as a tool for progress. In the next period, increased engagement at both the local and international levels will be extremely important. At this time when there will be no national governmental leadership on human rights issues, the human rights cities movement must become increasingly effective. This new, more oppressive, climate might be paralyzing for those who will live with increased levels of fear for their own safety and for the safety of their loved ones.

Having a common enemy in the new president might provide an opportunity to mobilize and energize more activists, but we must all be careful not to rationalize or overlook human rights violations that seem "less egregious" than those likely to be committed by the new administration. New threats will face the LGBTQ community as a result of the commitment, on the part of the new administration, to recognize a "religious liberty" to discriminate against members of this group.

In the case of Boston, the city has been declared a "human rights city," but this declaration lacks "teeth" and progress has been disappointing. Young people in Boston, however, have made important contributions. After Rosa Parks passed away, young people created Rosa Parks Human Rights Day on December 1; this year the day involved a youth march during which young activists made human rights demands of the local government.

The human rights cities movement cannot impose one vision of the human rights city. We must be open to different types of human rights cities and be committed to being open to individuals on the ground who are experiencing human rights violations. The people gathered for this Institute are not necessarily the leaders of the human rights cities movement.

In a context is which the traditional supporters of urban community organizing in the United States do not always recognize the value of the human rights perspective, finding resources for the human rights cities movement will be challenging.

The group finished the day by engaging in an exercise in which it attempted to generate ideas for a fictional grant proposal for an organization devoted to promoting human rights cities. Among the ideas suggested for such a proposal were:

- the organization should reach out to individuals with experience running political campaigns and include their perspectives when planning mobilization campaigns;
- use technology to reach out to a potential activists and to mobilize and organize them;
- support other movements in a way that communicates a willingness to collaborate – not just an invitation to "join us";
- be wary of centralization;
- reach out to college students and recognize that universities need to be decolonized;
- promote the sanctuary campus movement;
- devote resources to true communication and to face-to-face conversations; and
- engage local groups as much as possible.

The purpose of the National Human Rights Cities Network is not to "direct" the human rights cities movement but to be a resource for supporting the movement.

Synthesis

Day Two participants gathered for a joint moment of synthesis to close the 2017 PHRGE Institute. Volunteers from each of the working groups provided dynamic and informative summaries for the group discussions. Jasmine Ramón, a graduate student at Northeastern, provided a summary for Working Group A, and Brooke Stanley, a first-year undergraduate at the University did the same for Working Group B. Participants then discussed the possibility of agreement on a statement reflecting shared sentiments of the institute participants regarding the challenges and opportunities presented by the current context, and affirming the guidance to local activists offered by the NHRC Network on the occasion of International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2016. After a discussion of the content of such a statement, participants delegated to PHRGE and the NHRC Network the completion and eventual release of a press statement. The statement is included here as an Appendix to this report. The Institute closed with a rendition of the song, "We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest," led by Ms. Vickie Casanova.

APPENDIX ONE—PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS IN 2017 PHRGE HUMAN RIGHTS
INSTITUTE

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

Human Rights Institute at Northeastern University School of Law
Affirms Importance of Local Action to Protect and Advance Human Rights

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 12, 2016

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On December 8 & 9, 2016, over 150 academics, advocates and activists for urban social justice gathered
for the 11th annual PHRGE Human Rights Institute entitled, "Global Justice Goes Local: The Emergence of
Human Rights Cities." Northeastern University School of Law's Program on Human Rights and the Global
Economy organized the event in collaboration with the National Human Rights City Network, a project of
the US Human Rights Network (USHRN).

Local human rights and social justice advocates from cities including Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Eugene,
OR, Jackson, MS, New York, Pittsburgh, Toronto, Washington, DC and Worcester, MA, contributed to this
year's conference. Students and academics from Boston University, Columbia University, Harvard
University, Jackson State University, the University of Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Dartmouth and
Lowell, Northeastern University, the University of Pittsburgh, Santa Clara University and Simmons College
also participated in the discussions.

Institute participants concluded that the current political transition in the United States presents a
number of serious threats to the human rights of a large part of the U.S. population, as well as many
millions of people living outside this country. The next period promises particular dangers for groups
singled out for attacks in the political discourse of the recent election. The space for engagement with the
U.S. federal government on the fulfillment of its human rights obligations promises to shrink significantly
under the incoming administration. In that context, active human rights engagement at the state and,
especially, the local level will become more important to our ongoing efforts to advance and protect
human rights. Organizing models such as Human Rights Cities, Cities for CEDAW, Sanctuary Cities and
many others will, therefore, become increasingly relevant.

In this spirit, the 11th PHRGE Human Rights Institute concluded with an affirmation of the
recommendations to local activists made by the National Human Rights City Network on the occasion of
International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2016:

Become a Sanctuary City: Encourage your local officials to make your community an official Sanctuary
City. If your city already has this designation, encourage public officials to re-affirm their commitment to
protecting immigrants and actively resisting discrimination while upholding all human rights, as Eugene,
OR and Washington, DC recently did.

Recommit to being a Human Rights City: If you live in a Human Rights City, ask your local officials to
reaffirm their commitments to implementing human rights in local government (see this
proposed Resolution language from Washington, DC and Eugene Oregon's Inclusive Community

Resolution). If your community is not a designated Human Rights City yet, you can work to make it one - see the National Human Rights City Network page for resources.

Study & share USHRN's 2016 report card: The US Human Rights Network will issue its annual Advancing Human Rights Report Card on Human Rights Day. The report card will highlight key issues that show the intersections across our movements & struggles. Locally, groups might highlight the Report Card during Human Rights Day events and via social media. Groups may also use it as a basis for discussion and strategizing.

Promote a culture of human rights: Help defend and promote a culture of human rights at this urgent time. Access some resources for youth and adult education from the Human Rights Educators USA network.

Evaluate your city's human rights record: Work with local activists to evaluate your community's human rights record. Be creative in finding ways to make this record visible to both public officials and the larger community. For instance, DC youth produced this "State of Human Rights in a Human Rights City" media project, while in New York City, City Council officials have been given a "Human Rights Report Card."

Speak out against gender-based violence: UN Women has called for 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, between November 25th—International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and International Human Rights Day (December 10). Download the Action Kit or join the Twitter Teachin #GBVTeachin #16Days

Connect with people across the world: Human Rights Day is celebrated around the world! On this Human Rights Day the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has a campaign calling for everyone to: Stand up for Someone's Rights Today. This is a great way to get involved and to activate people of all ages. Use the UN hashtags: #standup4humanrights #humanrightsday

Learn about what is happening internationally to defend human rights and prevent the Trump administration from violating or rescinding global human rights principles. UN officials have indicated that, "if the U.N. doesn't call out its most powerful member for straying from universally accepted human rights norms, the rest of the world will be emboldened to ditch them." The US Human Rights Network helps link human rights defenders in the US with international monitoring procedures, and we'll keep you informed about opportunities for action.