

FACT SHEET: U.N. SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTREME POVERTY & HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICIAL UNITED STATES VISIT

DECEMBER 1-15, 2017

What is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty & Human Rights?

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty (“Special Rapporteur”) is an independent human rights expert elected by the U.N. Human Rights Council to monitor, report and advise on extreme poverty and its relationship with human rights around the world. **Human rights** are rights that belong to all people, regardless of their gender, race, national origin, economic status, or other factors. The government has an obligation to create conditions where all individuals and communities can enjoy their human rights.

The Special Rapporteur visits countries every year to examine laws, policies, and practices that cause or perpetuate poverty; to identify good practices; and to develop recommendations for improvement. You can learn more about the background of the Special Rapporteur [here](#).¹ Professor Philip Alston is the current Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

How does the Special Rapporteur define poverty?

The Rapporteurship has defined extreme poverty to include lack of income, a lack of access to basic services and social exclusion.²

*“Extreme poverty can be a **cause** of specific human rights violations, for instance because the poor are forced to work in environments that are unsafe and unhealthy. At the same time, poverty can also be a **consequence** of human rights violations, for instance when children are unable to escape poverty because the State does not provide adequate access to education.”³*

What will the Special Rapporteur do during its visit to the United States?

During his U.S. visit, which takes place December 4-15, 2017, the Special Rapporteur will meet with federal, state, and local decision-makers; national and local organizations; and impacted communities in California (Dec. 4-6); Alabama (Dec. 7-8); Georgia (Dec. 9); Puerto Rico (Dec. 10-11); West Virginia (Dec. 13); and Washington, D.C. (Dec. 14-15).

The Special Rapporteur is particularly concerned with the protection of the human rights of the poor in relation to the following areas:

- the criminal justice system
- voting rights
- political participation
- homelessness
- social protection, including health care, housing, water, and sanitation
- impact of new technologies in the welfare and criminal justice systems

¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx>

² <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/111/56/PDF/G0811156.pdf?OpenElement>

³ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx>

The Special Rapporteur has already collected [written information](#)⁴ and will continue to collect stories and testimony to aid the assessment of how laws, policies, and practices in the U.S. perpetuate, prevent, or address poverty.

At the conclusion of his visit, on December 15th, the Rapporteur will share his preliminary reflections and recommendations at a press conference at 12pm at the UN Information Center in Washington, D.C, and will issue a press release and written statement. The Rapporteur will present a final report on the visit to the U.N. Human Rights Council in June of 2018.

Why should advocates participate in the Special Rapporteur visit?

Advocates' engagement with the Special Rapporteur visit can support local and national advocacy. In the past, advocates have used similar U.N. expert visits to the United States to:

- Raise the visibility of human rights concerns among community members, media, and the public, as well as within the international community;
- Provide a space for impacted individuals and communities to share their experiences;
- Open the door for policy discussions with local, state, and federal decision-makers;
- Advance particular national and local law and policy reform objectives;
- Build coalitions;
- Influence Rapporteur's recommendations to the US government and other governments around the world.

More information on past visits to the United States and recommendations for engagement can be found in the Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute's 2015 Report [Engaging U.N. Special Procedures to Advance Human Rights at Home: A Guide for U.S. Advocates](#).⁵

How can interested groups and individuals engage and share information with the Rapporteur?

Groups and individuals meeting with the Special Rapporteur can share information on local and national concerns related to the human rights of those living in poverty, as well as recommendations for how to address current challenges. This information will help the Special Rapporteur understand how federal, state, and local laws and policies impact life on a daily basis, factors that contribute to equality, and barriers that people living in poverty face in realizing human rights.

Follow the Special Rapporteur on **Twitter**: @Alston_UNSR

Who should I contact to participate?

Direct inquiries to the Rapporteur can be sent to: srextremepoverty@ohchr.org.

For **media requests**, please contact: Ms Junko Tadaki (tel: [+ 41 22 917 9298](tel:+41229179298); jtadaki@ohchr.org) or write to srextremepoverty@ohchr.org

More background information can be found on the [Special Rapporteur's website](#)⁶

⁴ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/Callforinput.aspx>

⁵ <https://bit.ly/1J1ukR2>

⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx>