FACT SHEET: U.N. WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES
VISIT DATES: NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 11, 2015

What is the United Nations Working Group on Discrimination Against Women?

The United Nations Working Group on Discrimination Against Women (“Working Group”) is a group of five independent human rights experts authorized by the U.N. Human Rights Council to help countries improve women’s 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. Human rights include the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex. The government has an obligation to create conditions where all individuals and communities can enjoy their human rights.

The Working Group generally visits two countries every year to examine laws, policies, and practices that affect women’s human rights – in particular those that have a discriminatory impact on women in both the public and private sphere; to identify good practices; and to develop recommendations for improvement. You can learn more about the background of the working group members here.¹

How does the Working Group define discrimination against women?

The Working Group defines discrimination against women as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex with the effect or purpose” of limiting women’s equal enjoyment of rights. The Working Group is concerned with the rights of women in the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural arenas.

The Working Group is particularly concerned with issues related to discrimination against women in the following areas:

1. Safety and Health
2. Political Participation
3. Economic and Social Conditions
4. Women’s Role in Family and Social life

What will the Working Group do during its visit to the United States?

The United States federal government invited the Working Group to visit the U.S. During its visit, the Working Group will meet with federal, state, and local decision-makers; national and local organizations; and impacted communities in Washington, D.C.; the Rio Grande Valley in Texas; Montgomery, Alabama; and Portland, Oregon.

The Working Group will also collect written information and stories to aid its assessment of how laws, policies, and practices in the U.S. prevent or address discrimination against women. At the conclusion of the visit, it will develop a report that reflects its observations and offers recommendations. The Working Group is scheduled to present the report to the U.N. Human Rights Council in May of 2016.

¹ [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Members.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/Members.aspx)
Why should advocates participate in the Working Group visit?

Advocates’ engagement with the Working Group visit can support local and national advocacy on issues related to discrimination against women. In the past, advocates have used similar U.N. working group visits to the U.S. to:

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


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

Groups and individuals concerned about issues related to discrimination against women can provide written information to the Working Group. This includes individuals and organizations working in the areas of reproductive rights, gender-based violence, employment discrimination, access to housing, political participation, criminal justice reform, the environment, and health, among others. Written information (such as reports, briefing papers, and fact sheets) should detail local and national concerns related to gender equality and discrimination against women. This information will help the Working Group understand how federal, state, and local laws and policies impact women on a daily basis, factors that contribute to equality, and barriers that women face in realizing human rights. The US Human Rights Network offers a suggested template³ for such submissions. Advocates may also have an opportunity to meet with the Working Group during its visit to the United States.

Who should I contact to participate?

The US Human Rights Network (USHRN) is helping to coordinate the visit. Interested organizations should contact the USHRN at wgdiscriminationwomen@ushrnetwork.org.

Written submissions and direct inquiries to the Working Group can be sent to: wgdiscriminationwomen@ohchr.org.

For more background information on the Working Group, visit the Working Group's website⁴ and the USHRN project page.⁵

² bit.ly/1J1ukR2
³ bit.ly/USHRNUNWGDAWTmplate
⁴ bit.ly/OHCHRUNWGDAW
⁵ bit.ly/USHRNUNWGDAWProject