



USHRN 2020 Year in Review: List of Major Accomplishments

January

On January 9, US Human Rights Network [released a statement](#) calling for a National Moratorium on the Death Penalty. It was written in response to the Trump administration's ongoing efforts to resume federal executions for the first time in 16 years.

On January 23 and 24, USHRN coordinated a series of [Consultations with Permanent Missions and Embassies in NYC and Washington, D.C.](#) These consultations were led by the UPR Taskforce and provided an opportunity for grassroots organizations to speak directly with diplomats on issues impacting their communities.

On January 30, [USHRN hosted the year's first Member Call](#), an opportunity for members to provide updates on their work on the ground defending human rights across the nation. We heard updates from Latino Justice, Mauna Kea Education & Awareness, The Woodhull Freedom Foundation, National Lawyers Guild and more.

February

Celebrated Black History Month through the ["Imagining Black Futures" campaign](#), which incorporated Afrofuturist artists and the celebration and visioning of Black futures. We ended the campaign with a [Black History Month statement](#).

March

Womxn's Encuentro

On March 7, over 60 people came together to celebrate womanhood and the recognition and harnessing of matriarchal power as the way forward on the path to decolonization during Womxn's Encuentro. We coordinated this gathering in Arizona with Apache Stronghold Oakflat, Puente Human Rights Network, The Outlaw Project, Poder in Action,

and Black Phoenix Organizing Collective, who all spoke at the event. www.womxnsgathering.org

USHRN co-sponsored Kerry McLean's CSW64 parallel event set for March 9, titled [Reproductive Injustice: Confronting the Black Maternal Mortality Crisis](#). The event was sponsored by The Center for Pan-African Affairs and co-sponsored by the National Lawyer's Guild, the US Human Rights Network, and the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSW has been rescheduled for 2021.

April

USHRN supported and [promoted a series of virtual events](#) beginning April 1 led by USHRN member, Gente&Dignidad. The Spanish language webinar series was intended to help provide information on COVID-19 to Spanish speaking communities.

On April 8, the USHRN UPR Task Force sent a [letter](#) to the Department of State calling on the US government to respect, protect, and promote international human rights during this COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. We asked that the government include information on US responses to COVID-19 in its UPR report to the Human Rights Council. We also supported a second letter to the United Nations calling for civil society to submit supplemental reports for the UPR given the review's postponement and ongoing human rights abuses around the pandemic.

On April 9, [USHRN held its April member call](#) centered on grassroots responses to COVID-19 including challenges, initiatives, and calls to action or for support. We were joined by members who provided updates on how their communities and organizations were responding to COVID-19. They represented vulnerable communities including women of color, sex workers, people in prisons or detention centers, people experiencing homelessness, people with preexisting medical conditions, people experiencing poverty, and others.

The UPR Task Force hosted a [virtual civil society briefing on April 15](#) for UN Permanent Missions and diplomats, which aimed to highlight specific rights violations of the most vulnerable populations in response to COVID-19 pandemic. The briefing provided a space for directly impacted groups to speak directly to over 55 diplomats from 44 countries. The briefing covered human rights issues including housing, water and sanitation, workers' rights, criminal and immigration detention, healthcare, voting rights, rights of Indigenous Peoples, and women's rights.

May

USHRN released our annual [2019-2020 Human Rights Report](#) on May 11, the original date for the UN Universal Periodic Review of the US before its postponement due to

COVID-19. It was released on that date to show that civil society remains committed to holding the US accountable to its human rights obligations. The report highlighted the serious on-the-ground issues that our grassroots members face daily--in their own words. www.upr2020.org/report

On May 17, USHRN [submitted a report alongside the International Coalition for People of African Descent \(ICPAD\)](#) to the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on the impact of COVID-19 on People of African Descent.

On May 27, USHRN released a new Network Response on [COVID-19 in the Navajo Nation](#) and historic + contemporary human rights abuses leading up to the current crisis.

June

On June 11, USHRN [submitted a report to the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism](#) on her recent call for reports on incidents of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and other forms of racism in the wake of COVID-19.

Urgent Debate

After the murder of George Floyd, USHRN worked with the ACLU and Professor Gay McDougall to [write a letter to the UN Human Rights Council](#) requesting a Special Session on police violence against people of African Descent and repression of protests. It was endorsed by family members of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Michael Brown, and other families, and 690 global organizations.

The request was granted, and on June 11 the [UNHRC held a historic 2-day Urgent Debate](#) that included testimony from Philonise Floyd, George Floyd's brother. The Debate concluded with the passing of [Resolution 43/1](#), which called for a report from the High Commissioner. We remain hopeful that the High Commissioner's pending report on systemic racism, police brutality, and violence against peaceful protestors will center the lived experiences of victims of police violence and be a helpful tool in holding the US accountable.

On June 18, Salimah Hankins [joined ISHR in a livestream hosted by Women's March Global](#) entitled "Black Lives Matter at the UN." The goal was to raise awareness for the urgent debate and to gain support for passage of a strong resolution calling for an International Independent Commission of Inquiry.

On Juneteenth (June 19), [USHRN released our Juneteenth statement](#), uplifting the right to rest and leisure for Black people.

July

USHRN [submitted a public comment on the Pompeo Commission's report](#), as well as a [joint comment with Columbia University](#) and other partners.

On July 2, USHRN hosted a debrief meeting alongside Jamil Dakwar of ACLU and Professor Gay McDougall for members to discuss the outcomes from June's advocacy at the Human Rights Council, and next steps in holding the US accountable for its human rights abuses against people of African descent.

On July 23, USHRN [sent a letter to Arizona Governor Doug Ducey](#) demanding better conditions for people in jails, prisons, and ICE detention facilities across Arizona in support of member Puente Human Rights Movement and the #FreeThemAll campaign.

On July 28, [Salimah Hankins participated in a panel for an ABA webinar](#) with Jamil Dakwar and ISHR partners to discuss the June advocacy work with the Human Rights Council.

August

On August 3, [USHRN wrote a letter alongside the ACLU to the High Commissioner](#) regarding her pending report on police brutality and racism. The letter demands that the report be meaningful for Black people in the US through requests for inclusion of various components and processes while the High Commissioner researches and writes the report. It gained 144 sign-ons from family members affected by police violence, and an additional several hundred civil society organizations.

On August 6, [USHRN held a Member Call](#) where member organizations including Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, The Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Guadalupe Community Coalition, UPR Cities Project, Donkeysaddle Projects and Puente Human Rights Movement provided key updates.

On August 13, USHRN [submitted a sign-on letter to California Governor Gavin Newsom](#) on behalf of the #StopSanQuentinOutbreak coalition demanding the release of 50% of SQSP's prison population. The letter was signed by approximately 40 organizations across the state.

USHRN coordinated a [Black Lives Matter virtual healing event](#) which took place on August 22 and aimed to provide family members affected by police violence and racial violence an opportunity to change the narrative and to tell their own stories about how they want their loved ones to be remembered. Healers, artists, musicians, and nine directly impacted family members came together in an event viewed by nearly 2,000 people. The event was cosponsored by USHRN member Ron Davis of the Jordan Davis Foundation as well as The Mamie Till Mobley Memorial Foundation, DonkeySaddle Projects, the Gathering for Justice, Artist and Activist Coalition, and Sankofa.org. [Read more.](#)

September

USHRN collaborated with Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute [to promote the sign-on Human Rights at Home](#) (for Mayors, Governor & Tribal & Indigenous leaders). It was submitted September 30.

Kerry McLean, USHRN's International Mechanisms Consultant, delivered a presentation for European Union representatives during a UPR briefing.

October

IACHR Hearing

On October 7, USHRN co-sponsored an [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights \(IACHR\) hearing](#) on structural racism and police violence in the United States following a [July request](#). A coalition of human rights and social justice groups alongside families of victims of police violence testified about structural racism and police brutality in the United States.

The hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights addressed the urgent need for accountability and redress for the extrajudicial killings of Black Americans by police—establishing a legal basis and framework for reparations. Mothers Against Police Brutality, Essie Justice Group (part of the Movement for Black Lives), Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center at Howard University -- alongside impacted individuals and advocates -- provided testimony during the hearing.

USHRN [organized UPR Working Group chairs for a virtual briefing](#) for the European Union Permanent Missions, which provided an opportunity for missions to hear directly from human rights advocates and racial justice activists, as well as directly impacted individuals from the United States.

USHRN was recognized as recipient of 2020 Hall of Fame MIPAD awards in the Humanitarian & Activism category of the [2020 Most Influential People of African Descent 100 global list](#).

Salimah Hankins hosted a series of conversations on voting as a human right, called ["Voting From the Margins"](#). Guests included voting rights leaders LaTosha Brown of Black Voters Matter and Michelle Bishop of the National Disability Rights Network.

November

Universal Periodic Review

On November 9, the United Nations held the [Universal Periodic Review of the United States' human rights record](#). During the review, UN member states (countries) made recommendations to the US on improving or remedying specific violations of human rights within its borders. The report, which is currently in draft form, and recommendations will officially be adopted by the Human Rights Council during the March 2021 HRC session, leaving the incoming Biden-Harris administration in the position of responding to the UPR recommendations.

Leading up to the Universal Periodic Review, USHRN's UPR Task Force continued to find ways to hold the Trump administration accountable for human rights violations during the pandemic, and to call for the protection of our most vulnerable, marginalized, and historically discriminated against communities. The UPR Taskforce organized briefings exploring the lack of accountability for police violence and the importance of the freedom of expression and assembly across the globe on these issues and supported issue-area working groups through an intense period of advocacy toward government missions. [One briefing on October 20](#) was organized by UPR Working Groups with testimony from impacted families, as well as human rights and racial justice advocates. A [UN side event on November 2](#) also organized by UPR Working Groups included testimony from Philonise Floyd.

On November 17, [USHRN held a special Member Call](#) that focused on debriefing the US General Election, Voting Rights, and the Universal Periodic Review. Marcia Johnson-Blanco, Co-director of the Lawyers' Committee's Voting Rights Project and USHRN Board Chair, Dr. Keith Jennings, President of the African American Center for Global Politics and Human Rights, and Nadia Ben-Youssef, Advocacy Director at the Center for Constitutional Rights all presented.

On November 18, Salimah Hankins joined [ISHR for a virtual webinar: Anti-Black racism and police brutality: Human Rights Defenders' expectations from the UNHRC](#). The conversation took place alongside an international panel of human rights defenders working on police violence and/or systemic racism including individuals from The Frantz Fanon Foundation, Uneafro Brasil and Coalizão Negra por Direitos, Jamaicans for Justice, IDPAD of Spain, and Concerned Nigerians.

USHRN honored Native American Heritage Month through our November newsletter, sent November 25, which highlighted the work of two Indigenous Peoples' rights member organizations and provided resources and toolkits to take action.

Leading up to the December deadline for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) call for input on systemic racism and police violence, USHRN coordinated with ACLU, ISHR and the International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights throughout the month of November to [develop promotional materials in](#)

[French, English, and Spanish](#) raising awareness of the importance of the call for input and respective guidelines.

December

USHRN supported the coordination of an [IACHR Hearing on Systemic Racism and Police Violence in the Americas on December 9](#). Although we provided brief testimony during the hearing, the focus remained on Latin America and served to present to the Commission the patterns and practices of systemic racism by law enforcement against communities of African descent in various countries in the Americas.

USHRN [submitted a brief report to the Office of the High Commissioner](#) for Human Rights in response to the call for input: for specific information pertaining to all other aspects of the mandate set out in resolution 43/1. Our report offers information concerning women of African descent, children of African descent, and people of African descent with mental illness, in the context of their experiences with police violence.