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OVER 120 U.S. ACTIVISTS AND EXPERTS IN GENEVA TO MONITOR UN HEARING ON U.S. RECORD ON RACE

UN Committee to Question Top Level U.S. Government Delegation As Activists Accuse U.S. of Whitewashing Reality of Race Discrimination in America

February 20, 2008, Geneva, Switzerland – Over 120 activists and experts associated with the **U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN)** are in Geneva to monitor U.S. Government’s statements about its compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), an international treaty ratified by the U.S. in 1994, and therefore carries the force of law in the United States.

On February 21 and 22, the United Nations Committee that monitors compliance with ICERD will question a high level U.S. delegation on the contents of a report submitted to the Committee by the U.S. that activists have called a whitewash of race realities in the U.S. This marks only the second time since the U.S. approved the treaty in 1994 that it has produced a report on its compliance and subjected its domestic record on human rights and race to review. The U.S. report, which was quietly released in April 2007, precipitated a torrent of criticism from organizations, including many associated with the 250-member USHRN, that brings together social justice and human rights groups across the country. In December 2007 the Network released an independent shadow report that details how the Bush Administration has failed to comply with the treaty. The shadow report was submitted to the UN Committee, which reviewed it prior to developing the questions it will ask the U.S. delegation. Earlier this week, 12 members of the USHRN delegation testified before the committee on several of the issues covered in the shadow report.

“These hearings will reveal that U.S. exceptionalism has resulted in a situation where the U.S. government has been able to avoid its obligations to directly confront the realities of racial discrimination and oppression in the U.S.,” said **Ajamu Baraka, the Executive Director of the USHRN.**

Lisa Crooms, a co-author of the USHRN shadow report and Professor of Law at Howard University, called the hearings *“an opportunity to begin to hold the U.S. accountable to its Constitutional principles,”* and urged the delegation to heed the concerns of the human rights community.

In its critique of U.S. report the Network highlighted the following:

- The U.S. government's report does not mention the internationally recognized race and poverty related impacts of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath.
- The report completely ignores the issue of policy brutality, recognized by many Americans as one of the most blatant and common forms of ongoing differential treatment based on race.
- The report does not discuss the well documented “school to prison pipeline,” in which discriminatorily applied “zero tolerance” policies and criminal justice based responses to overcrowding and under resourcing of public schools drive children of color out of schools and into the prison system
- The government's report suggests that stark racial disparities in incarceration rates (African Americans and Latino/as make up 60% of the over 2 million people incarcerated in the United States, but less than a quarter of the population) may be “related to differential involvement in crime” rather than a result of the cumulative impacts of racial disparities in the treatment of minorities at every stage of the criminal

justice process. Adding insult to injury, the U.S. report fails to cite evidence that rates of involvement in many criminalized activities, including drug use, are actually very similar across race.

- The report highlights training and outreach programs for law enforcement agencies encouraging sensitivity to Arab and Muslim communities developed in the aftermath of 9/11, while completely failing to acknowledge widespread racially and ethnically targeted law enforcement practices such as the special registration program and aggressive round-ups and interviews of thousands of non-citizen Muslims, Arabs and South Asians.
- Indigenous people continue to suffer profound and ongoing effects of the legacy of colonialism and racial discrimination in the U.S.

120 activists and experts associated with the Network are in Geneva to attend the hearings to observe and monitor the U.S. presentation. Delegates range in age from 15-75; represent diverse communities, including the Western Shoshone, Navajo, Teton Sioux, Pauma-Yuima, Cherokee and other Indigenous peoples, African descendents, Latino/as, South Asians, Asians, and people from the Middle East; and hail from Arizona, California, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Wisconsin. They intend to use the Committee's recommendations to the U.S. government to put pressure on federal, state and local officials back home to address racial discrimination in housing, education, health, and criminal justice.

To view a copy of the shadow report submitted by the US Human Rights Network, please visit:
http://www.ushrnetwork.org/cerd_shadow_2008

The **US Human Rights Network** was formed to promote US accountability to universal human rights standards by building linkages between organizations and individuals. The Network strives to build a human rights culture in the United States that puts those directly affected by human rights violations, with a special emphasis on grassroots organizations and social movements, in a central leadership role. The Network also works towards connecting the US human rights movement with the broader US social justice movement and human rights movements around the world. To learn more, please visit: <http://www.ushrnetwork.org>