

Human Rights: From the Local to the Global

Laura Roskos

Among the many interesting points raised by Ann Fagan Ginger during her highly informative talk at the WILPF U.S. Congress was the observation that economic, social and cultural human rights exist in their nascent form within the United Nations Charter itself, ratified by the United States in 1945. She stressed the importance of referencing, in particular, Chapter 9, article 55 of the Charter in any local human rights ordinance or state legislation. (See page 22 for a review of her book on this subject.)

While several local jurisdictions have adopted some form of human rights legislation (for example, 47 municipalities and 19 U.S. counties have some sort of CEDAW resolution on their books) many more have passed resolutions resisting, in particular, compliance with the U.S. Patriot Act. The two intersect in the recent request circulated to U.S. civil society organizations by the U.N.-sponsored Human Rights Committee for documentation of human rights violations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), committed by the U.S. government under the auspices of Patriot Act compliance.

In response to this request, the HRC received several submissions including a joint submission from over 20 U.S. non-governmental organizations. This document is outstanding for its depth, breadth and activist interpretation of the various articles of the covenant. While noting the author's concerns that (a) the fight against terrorism is enabling the U.S. government to retreat from its human rights commitments in the name of security concerns; (b) that anti-terrorism legislation has been used by the U.S. government to detain or punish individuals and groups of people not related to the "war on terror" such as Haitians entering the U.S.; and that (c) laws, policies and administrative regulations have been promulgated which particularly impact non-citizens in discriminatory and unfair ways, the document goes on to state:

"There are many more issues which are equally important regarding U.S. compliance with the ICCPR. . . such as disenfranchisement of voting rights for minorities and convicted felons, failure of police to prevent violence against women, sentencing of children in conflict with the law to life without parole, mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines for criminal cases, labor rights and freedom of association for immigrant workers. . ."

The U.S. government is expected to file its long overdue second report under the ICCPR sometime during the next few months. The period between the submission and the committee's review will be a window during which a shadow reports on U.S. compliance with the ICCPR are likely to be written and filed with the HRC. It is likely that WILPF members will be solicited for their input into such reports, at which time concerns that range far beyond the administration of the Patriot Act can and will be raised. WILPF members can facilitate this process by identifying and documenting human rights violations in their localities. If you have a strong local coalition of human rights defenders, think about compiling and filing your own "shadow report." And/or watch the WILPF listserve and blog for information on how to participate in a broader reporting process. If you would like additional information about how to collect data for a shadow report or copies of the documents referenced above, please e-mail roskos@masscedaw.org.

Laura Roskos is a member of the National WILPF Board, co-chair of the WILPF Advancing Human Rights Issues Committee and co-founder of the Massachusetts CEDAW Project (www.masscedaw.org).

Those who would like a DVD copy of WILPF's Tucson Raging Grannies visit to an Army Recruitment Center (where they asked to enlist) and their subsequent citing by the Tucson Police force (all filmed by a guerilla Granny), plus the nine-minute sequence from the TODAY Show "in depth" interview with the grannies, e-mail Robin Lloyd at robinlloyd@greenvalleymedia.org. Cost is \$5 for shipping and handling.

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Should your name be on this list? If we have left you off here, please contact Sandy Silver at silver@cruzio.com