

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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U.N. Committee Condemns U.S. Criminalization of Homelessness *Second Time this Year Criminalization Condemned by U.N. Human Rights Monitors*

WASHINGTON, DC - The U.N. [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) in Geneva today stated it is “concerned at the high number of homeless persons, who are disproportionately from racial and ethnic minorities ... and at the criminalization of homelessness through laws that prohibit activities such as loitering, camping, begging, and lying in public spaces” and called upon the U.S. government to take corrective action.

The Committee further included criminalization of homelessness in a short list of topics it wants the U.S. to “provide detailed information in its next periodic report on concrete measures taken to implement these recommendations.” The U.S.’s next report is due in 2017.

The Committee’s statement is part of its [Concluding Recommendations](#), following a two day review of U.S. government compliance with the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), a treaty ratified by the U.S. in 1994.

The [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#) (“NLCHP”), which has submitted a [report](#) to the Committee as part of the review process, applauded the Committee’s findings.

“Criminally punishing people simply for having no legal place continues to put the U.S. on the wrong foot on the international stage,” said Maria Foscarinis, NLCHP Executive Director. The organization issued a [major report](#) on the criminalization of homelessness in July, and litigates to challenge the practice. “We welcome the Committee’s Concluding Observations and call on our government to take swift action to solve homelessness with homes, not jails and prisons.”

Jeremy Rosen, Director of Advocacy at NLCHP, was in Geneva for the hearings and stated, “The Committee’s review also addressed the broader criminalization of race, highlighted by recent protests in Ferguson, MO around the killing of Michael Brown. Because homelessness disparately affects racial minorities, and because homeless persons are often more visible on the streets, this often compounds their profiling and ill-treatment by police. Until the U.S. reduces racial disparities in housing, we’re going to continue to see them in criminal justice, and vice versa.”

Echoing the [recommendations of the U.N. Human Rights Committee](#) in March, the

Committee's called on the U.S. to: "(a) Abolish laws and policies making homelessness a crime; (b) Ensure close cooperation among all relevant stakeholders, including social, health, law enforcement and justice professionals at all levels to intensify efforts to find solutions for the homeless in accordance with human rights standards; and (c) Offer incentives to decriminalize homelessness, including by providing financial support to local authorities that implement alternatives to criminalization, and withdrawing funding from local authorities that criminalize homelessness."

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The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty is the only national organization providing high-level, comprehensive legal and legislative expertise resolving national homelessness issues through advocacy, advocacy training, public education, and impact litigation.