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WELCOME!

UN Committee Reviews US on Police Brutality and Gender-Based Violence

by FEMINIST NEWSWIRE on Nov 14, 2014 • 4:52 PM

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Police brutality, military sexual assault, and gender-based violence in the US came under scrutiny this week as the United Nations Committee Against Torture conducted its periodic review of the United States' compliance with the international Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).



via [cometstarmoon](#)

In preparation for the review, the [UN asked the United States to provide the Committee with specific information](#) on what steps the US has taken to "prevent and punish violence and abuse of women," in particular women of color. The Committee also requested information on "brutality and use of excessive force by law enforcement officials and ill-treatment of vulnerable groups, in particular racial minorities, migrants and persons of different sexual orientation."

To assist the Committee [with its review](#), US-based advocates, organized by the [US Human Rights Network](#), provided information, reports, and testimony earlier this week.

The Black Women's Blueprint, which will be honored by *Ms. magazine* with a Wonder Award next week, provided the Committee with its report, "[Invisible Betrayal: Police Violence and the Rapes of Black Women in the United States](#)." The report highlights how Black women's experience of rape and sexual assault constitute a form of torture. The group also focused on the continued minimization of sexual violence as it relates to Black Women. As an example, the group cited the recent arrest of white Oklahoma City, Oklahoma police officer Daniel Ken Holtzclaw. Despite [facing 16 felony counts of sexual assault](#) and misconduct – including the sexual assault, rape, stalking, fondling, and indecent exposure of himself to at least eight black women while on duty – Holtzclaw

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was released on \$500,000 bond, after having an initial \$5 million.

The report goes on to note: "Despite the facts that 22 percent of Black women and 50 percent of racially mixed Black women experience rape in higher amounts when compared to white women, the long-standing legacy and continued devaluing of Black women as legitimate victims of rape and assault generally compound Black women's continued victimization and likelihood to get a conviction against a police officer no less."

Women's All Points Bulletin (WAPB) provided the Committee with information on the [hyper-policing of transgender women](#) of color. "Transgender women are four times more likely to experience police violence compared to all victims of police violence," according to WAPB, and 22 percent of all who've had an interaction with law enforcement reported they were harassed, physically assaulted, or sexually assaulted by an officer. More than one-third reported "they were harassed by correctional staff while a sizeable portion had reported being physically (16 percent) and sexually (15 percent) assaulted" with rates increasing for people of low-income or racial minority backgrounds.

Appearing before the Committee on Wednesday, Lesley McSpadden and Michael Brown, Sr., parents of unarmed African-American teenager Michael Brown who was slain by a Ferguson, Missouri police officer in August, testified about the excessive use of force that ended their son's life. Martinez Sutton, the brother of 22-year-old Rekia Boyd spoke on behalf of his family as well. [Boyd was killed when an off-duty Chicago police officer fired his gun at another unarmed man in 2012](#). No member of law enforcement has been fully prosecuted in either case. The family of Israel "Reefa" Hernandez Llach, along with the Dream Defenders and the Community Justice Project of Florida Legal Services, also testified about a Miami Beach, FL police officer's reckless use of a taser that ended 17-year-old Llach's life.

Abortion and military sex assault were also brought before the UN this week. [The Global Justice Center and the World Organization against Torture \(OMCT\) asked the UN to regard the US policy that denies safe abortion services to people raped in conflict zones](#) as a violation of the Convention. The groups reiterated the Committee's repeated stance that "access to abortion, at least in certain circumstances, implicates the rights guaranteed by the Convention" and that "impediments to safe abortion access, in particular for rape victims, lead to 'grave consequences, including unnecessary deaths of women.'"

The Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at Cornell Law School, in conjunction with the American Civil Liberties Union, Equality Now, the Global Gender Justice Clinic at Cornell, the Military Rape Crisis Center, and the Service Women's Action Network also submitted testimony [calling on the UN to recognize military sexual assault as a reality that "violates service members' right to be free of torture"](#). The groups acknowledged some effort by the US Department of Defense to address the prevalence of sex assault in the military, however, they said, "By failing to adequately prevent and address incidents of sexual violence in the US military, the DoD fosters a culture of impunity."

The US has been a party to CAT since 1994. The Committee Against Torture conducted its review of the United States on Wednesday and Thursday of this week. The Committee will continue to meet through November 28.

Media Resources: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; US Human Rights Network; UN Committee Against Torture 1/20/10; Huffington Post 9/5/14; ABC WLS-TV Chicago 3/22/12

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