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US Human Rights Report's Focus on More Perfect Union Leads to Imperfect Reporting on the Human Rights Situation in the United States

The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI), and the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) welcomed the release of the United States' first Universal Periodic Review Report (US UPR) to the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. The report highlighted Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech and in particular the freedom from want. The freedom from want is echoed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, most directly in Article 25 which underscores the right to a standard of living adequate to meet the basic needs of individuals and their families.

The commitment to freedom from want requires the government to take specific action in its fiscal and monetary policies to prioritize full employment as a primary goal. In the US, the ability to meet basic needs is closely tied to access to employment. A recent federal study on food insecurity by the USDA finds "that rates of food insecurity among children were much higher for households with unemployed or disabled adults (and with non-employed) than for those with employed adults. Together, the unemployed and disabled categories made up 15 percent of households with food insecurity among children and 23 percent of households with very low food security among children." According to Radhika Balakrishnan, Executive Director at CWGL, "at a fundamental level, access to a decent job is an essential foundation for economic survival. An unexpected set back—such as those caused by the economic crisis—including the loss of a job can lead to a loss of basic social and economic rights for the rest of a person's life. That is why an analysis of the human rights situation in the United States must take into account the severity of the current recession and its impact on the population and its most vulnerable sectors."

In addition, the obligation to protect individual rights requires government to ensure that third party behavior does not compromise basic rights including the freedom from want. US civil society groups are encouraged by the new financial regulatory reforms and the creation of new oversight committees and other instruments for regulating finance. Unfortunately, the details have been left to the discretion of regulatory bodies which are susceptible to corporate pressure through lobbying efforts and other channels of political influence. "This is of utmost concern to US civil society organizations because the US government has an obligation to ensure that the regulators take the obligation to protect people seriously since the regulations will have a direct impact on the protection and realization of human rights," stated James Heintz, PERI's Associate Research Professor.

CWGL, PERI, and ESCR-Net along with a number of other human rights organizations are involved with the UN's first Universal Periodic Review of the US, which is scheduled to take place in November 2010. The UPR assesses each country's adherence to its human rights obligations under the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), human rights treaties ratified by the country, its voluntary commitments, and applicable international law. During the review, in addition to the "national report" provided by the country under review and the reports of UN bodies, the Working Group considers reports from other "stakeholders" such as civil society and national human rights institutions. CWGL, PERI, and ESCR-Net wrote a cluster report on Macroeconomics - [Towards a Human Rights-Centered Macroeconomic and Financial Policy in the U.S.](#)