



The  
CENTER for  
VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

## U.S. Human Rights at the United Nations

Advocates in the United States have attempted for decades to bring issues facing Black, indigenous and persons of color communities to the United Nations, often with little to no success. Below are summaries of significant actions taken since the UN was established.

### 1945

**Dr. Ralph Bunche** advises the U.S. delegation that collaborates in the charter of the United Nations. He joins the UN officially in 1946 and plays a major role in the creation and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1950, Dr. Bunche wins the Nobel Peace Prize (the first African-American to do so) for his efforts to mediate peace between Arabs and Jews in Palestine.

### 1947

**W.E.B. Du Bois** and the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** (NAACP) present: "[An Appeal to the World](#): A Statement of Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress" to the United Nations. The appeal discussed issues like voting rights, personhood, police brutality, and other human rights violations.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations at the time, Eleanor Roosevelt, [refused to present](#) "An Appeal to the World." She feared that the U.S.'s opponents would use this evidence of racial discrimination and violence against the country politically and in multilateral conversations, which in turn would force her to have to defend the U.S.'s racist policies publicly. Overall, she was afraid this possible controversy would force her resignation from the UN.

### 1951

Political activist **Paul Robeson** presents "[We Charge Genocide](#): The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief From a Crime of The United States Government Against the Negro People" to the UN Committee Against Torture. An anti-lynching petition, it charged the United States guilty of genocide under Article II of the [UN Genocide Convention](#). Robeson focused on the systemic nature of abuse to Black Americans in the U.S., highlighting that the violence, segregation, discrimination and targeting of Black Americans constituted genocide.

Though the UN has never labeled the human rights violations faced by Black Americans as genocide, the concept of Black Genocide is still [discussed](#) and is a popular framing reference we hear from our community advocates.

### 1960s

**Malcolm X** travels across Africa, meeting with leaders and representatives to rally support and allies as he advocates for the UN to condemn the U.S. human rights violations against Black people. X was assassinated before he was able to present his speech to the UN.

**2014**

**Michael Brown, Sr. and Lesley McSpadden**, testify to the UN Committee Against Torture after their son, Michael, was killed after a police encounter in Ferguson, MO. They argue that the use of excessive force by American police officers qualifies as a torture.

**2020**

**600 civil society organizations and families of those killed by police**, send a "[Request for the Convening of a Special Session on the Escalating Situation of Police Violence and Repression of Protests in the United States](#)" to the UN Human Rights Council, advocating that they immediately convene a Special Session on the Escalating Situation of Police Violence and Repression of Protests in the United States. CVT was one of these organizations.

**2021**

The **UN Human Rights Council** adopts [a resolution](#) called "Promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers through transformative change for racial justice and equality." The report "found credible allegations of unnecessary and disproportionate use of force against some protests, and differences in how racial justice protests were policed compared with other demonstrations," and argued that "the clampdown on anti-racism protests in some countries should be seen within a broader context in which the voices of people of African descent, and people combatting racism, are stifled, and human rights defenders of African descent face reprisals, including harassment, threats, criminal prosecutions, violence and killings."

**2021**

**Human rights organizations**, joined by **CVT**, send sending [this letter](#) to UN officials and the U.S. secretary of state, expressing "deep concerns about reports that the Biden administration has submitted to human rights treaty monitoring bodies, and to urge the administration to take the steps necessary to comply fully with its international human rights treaty obligations." This action begins CVT's formal policy advocacy work concerning police brutality, criminal justice and other related issues.