



**INTERVENTION BEFORE THE UN COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
ON EQUAL D.C. VOTING RIGHTS  
By Timothy Cooper, Worldrights  
Geneva, Switzerland  
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Madame Chairperson, distinguished Committee members:

Our intervention refers to Articles 25 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We'd like to make the following points about perhaps the oldest continuing human rights violations taking place in the United States today.

**Background:**

- ❖ Remarkably, 550,000 residents of the District of Columbia—America's federal capital-- are denied equal voting representation in the U.S. Congress.
- ❖ No other residents living in any other capital federal enclave in the world today are deprived of equal representation in their own national legislature. Only D.C. residents are banned from enjoying this fundamental human right.
- ❖ Without equal representation, they are subjects of the state—not participants in the state. They are constantly subjected to the arbitrary will of a Congress in which they have no vote. Congress attempts to impose death penalty legislation and terminate the city's strict gun control laws. It even prohibits, under penalty of law, local tax dollars being spent to finance campaigns for equal voting rights. Constitutionally speaking, we are non-persons.

**International Interventions to date:**

- ❖ In 2004, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights declared DC's status to be a violation of international law, and referred to the UN Committee General Comment 25 for guidance in defining equal political participation.
- ❖ The Commission wholly dismissed the constitutional justification offered by the US to sanction DC.'s continuing disenfranchisement. It noted that "international law must be fulfilled in good faith and that domestic law may not be invoked to justify nonfulfillment, even in cases involving constitutional provisions."
- ❖ It also rejected the historical justification the US has repeatedly used to defend the indefensible. It found no objective and rationale basis barring DC equal voting rights today.
- ❖ In 2005, both the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly noted that US policy toward D.C. residents was inconsistent with OSCE Democratic Election Standards. Those standards are entirely consistent with articles 25 and 26 of the ICCPR. The Parliamentary

Assembly passed a unanimous resolution calling on Congress to grant DC residents equal voting representation.

**Recommendations:**

- ❖ We therefore respectfully request that the Human Rights Committee issue the Government of the United States similar recommendations in its concluding observations.

Thank you.