



October 31, 2017

Professor Philip Alston  
United Nations Special Rapporteur on  
Extreme Poverty and Human Rights  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneva 10  
Switzerland

**Re: Examining the Intersection of Extreme Poverty and Human Rights in South Florida and Beyond**

Dear Professor Alston,

I write on behalf of several community-based organizations in South Florida and the students in my *International Human Rights Law and Advocacy* class at the University of Miami School of Law to present you with several reports on the intersection of extreme poverty and human rights in South Florida and beyond, in anticipation of your official visit to the United States in December. These reports reflect partnerships between my students, working in collaboration with the Miami Law Human Rights Clinic, and leading regional public interest/social justice organizations, to address pressing matters of poverty in our community.

The Miami Law Human Rights Clinic (HRC) works for the promotion of social and economic justice globally and in the U.S. The Clinic uses international human rights laws and norms, domestic law and policy, and multidimensional strategies, such as community organizing, political activism, and global networking, to draw attention to human rights violations, develop practical solutions to those problems, and promote accountability on the part of state and non-state actors.

Below and in the detailed reports that follow, we have highlighted the key takeaways from our collaborative efforts with and/or representation of the following organizations:

**1. The Women’s Fund of Miami-Dade County**

The Women’s Fund of Miami-Dade is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Miami-Dade County. The organization’s core belief is that “all women and girls have the right to economic security, freedom from violence, equal access to leadership and education, and the right to choose regarding their healthcare.” This report specifically highlights systemic issues in Miami-Dade County that prevent impoverished women from gaining economic security and offers recommendations on how to fix these problems. Some issues addressed include: childcare, domestic violence, human trafficking, pay equity, education, housing, transportation, right to abortion, and sex education.

## **2. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers**

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (“CIW”) is a non-profit community-based organization located in Immokalee, Florida that champions the human rights of migrant farmworkers and other low wage workers. CIW focuses on social responsibility, human trafficking, and workplace violence. Founded with the intention of organizing the farmworker community, CIW enlists a national consumer network to further the rights of farmworkers across the country. This report highlights CIW’s Fair Food Program and Fair Food Standards Council, examines what keeps migrant farmworkers in poverty, and discusses issues such as wage theft, sexual violence, and modern day slavery in the fields.

## **3. The American Civil Liberties Union of Florida**

The American Civil Liberties Union (“ACLU”) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that defends and protects individual rights and liberties that are guaranteed to all citizens by the United States Constitution and its laws. The ACLU of Florida seeks to end policies that cause widespread constitutional and human rights violations. This report addresses the following issues recognized by the ACLU of Florida that have contributed to unprecedented levels of discrimination, incarceration, and other harms to low-income members of the community: homeless rights, bail reform, indigent defendants’ right to counsel, and voting rights. This report will demonstrate how these issues contribute to and exacerbate the struggles of impoverished citizens in the state of Florida, and specifically in South Florida.

## **4. Catholic Charities Legal Services**

Catholic Legal Services, Archdiocese of Miami, Inc. (“CLS”) provides professional immigration services to the South Florida’s refugee and immigrant community. CLS helps poor immigrants obtain asylum, establish legal residency, become citizens, and reunite with their families. This report examines specific immigration topics in Miami, such as “Temporary Protected Status” for Haitian migrants, unaccompanied minors, contemporary issues related to sanctuary cities, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”). These issues are especially pressing in the current political environment, which immigration advocates characterize as perhaps the most hostile toward immigrants in recent memory.

## **5. Catalyst Miami**

Catalyst Miami is an anti-poverty nonprofit organization with a mission to develop and support individual leadership in Miami communities. Utilizing a comprehensive approach to fight systemic poverty, Catalyst builds and activates collaborative community-based networks aimed at eliminating poverty in every aspect of community life. The organization envisions a thriving Miami where residents, community leaders, and organizations work collaboratively toward the goals of improved health, education, and economic opportunity. This report addresses issues in Miami related to transportation accessibility, inadequacies regarding disaster relief, protection of the elderly, and access to healthcare coverage.

## 6. Legal Services of Greater Miami and Community Justice Project

Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc. (“Legal Services”) provides civil legal services for the poor in Miami-Dade and Monroe County. Legal Services offers advice and representation in individual cases, addresses systemic issues, and empowers clients through community education and self-help clinics. The organization also helps clients with legal issues such as evictions, foreclosure, the loss of government benefits, and affordable housing. The Community Justice Project (“CJP”) is a nonprofit organization comprised of community lawyers who collaborate with community organizers and low-income communities of color. CJP provides legal support to grassroots community organizers and low-income communities of color on a range of racial justice and human rights issues, from housing, worker’s rights, immigrant rights, and community economic development. This report addresses the lack of affordable housing options in Miami for low-income communities, particularly those of color, highlights the substandard housing that is available, and explores the negative consequences of Florida’s rent deposit statute on tenants in these communities.

Collectively, our submissions describe numerous instances of human rights violations that are both causes and consequences of extreme poverty in South Florida and beyond. It is incumbent upon our local, state, and federal governments to take proactive steps toward alleviating poverty in impoverished and underserved communities. International human rights laws and principles can inspire solutions in our region.

We invite you to visit Miami during your official visit to the United States in December, to take a closer look at the manifestation of extreme poverty in our community and to meet with local leaders who are combatting these issues.

Please feel free to contact me at (305) 281-9856 (cell) or [clopez@law.miami.edu](mailto:clopez@law.miami.edu) with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,



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