

**United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent
1st Session**

**Remarks of Tiffany Roberts
Public Policy Director of the Southern Center for Human Rights
Anchor Partner of the JUSTGeorgia Coalition
Steering Committee Member of the Human Rights Cities Alliance**

December 8, 2022

I am the public policy director at the Southern Center for human rights, a non-profit law firm committed to decriminalizing race and poverty through litigation, policy and direct advocacy in America's deep south. I offer you peace from we who are the descendants of those who in our executive director Terrica Ganzy's words decided to stay in America's south and fight. Thank you for the sacrifice required to organize this convening, for carrying on the legacy of our honorable ancestors. I give thanks for permission to speak from the elders in this space. Finally, I bring you greetings from the JustGeorgia Coalition, a Black-led coalition founded after the 2020 killing of Ahmaud Arbery to flank indigenous leadership in rural and small town GA .

My remarks are intended to express solidarity with comrades who have voiced the need for continued robust DOCUMENTED ENGAGEMENT WITH locally led civil society on the issues addressed by this forum because in many governmental structures, change at the national level rarely trickles down, especially when local actors block benefits that would come to the descendants of enslaved Africans on stolen land.

Quite often, officials from our cities come before bodies like this and misrepresent the material conditions of people in our cities, towns and rural communities. This reality is especially harmful in cities when people of African descent are not in the numerical minority—like my city of Atlanta where our leaders are Black yet often perpetuate systemic anti-black harm because of elitism, respectability politics and cowardice. In Atlanta, too many Black folks are renting but will never own the master's tools.

As of last week, Atlanta remains number one for racial, income disparity in the United States. Georgia is number one for the number of people under correctional control. Our county sends more people to Georgia prisons than any other. If you are assaulted by a police officer, there is more than an 80% chance

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that the officer was Black. We are also the country's most surveilled city and it is only getting worse.

At SCHR, we commit to interrogating proposed policies, ensuring that they do not further entrench the state's power to kidnap, kill and cage Black people. When we do this, we mitigate the harms of things like e-carceration and racist algorithms which are wrongly held out as solutions. We also constantly ask ourselves whether we are centering people on the ground, who are closest to the trauma and therefore solutions. Comprehensive, cohesive and courageous responses must not further entrench the power of the state to kill us, by merely tinkering around the edges of structural violence.

Prolific organizer, Ella Baker said that during the civil rights movement were the necessary dramatization of movement highlighting the plight of the people. While the murder of George Floyd and attendant uprisings served as yet another catalyst for us to bring liberation to our people, I am grateful that we do not find final comfort in the dramatization.

This may in Atlanta, human rights city alliance of which I am on the steering team are planning a summit in ATL to convene civil society and local governmental actors to provide pathways toward our cities extending human rights to all. We invite anyone interested to join us. And are interested in ways we can bring our labour back to this forum.