



Women Enabled international Condemns U.S. Decision to Leave Human Rights Council

On June 19, 2018, the current government of the United States of America (U.S.) chose to withdraw its membership from the Human Rights Council, an intergovernmental body of the United Nations (U.N.) that is responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. Women Enabled International (WEI), a U.S.-based human rights organization dedicated to advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities worldwide, is deeply concerned about this decision, as it further illustrates a declining commitment to human rights, including the rights of women and girls with disabilities, by the U.S. government.

"The Human Rights Council is not perfect, but it is one of the most important forums for discussing and addressing human rights violations around the world," said Stephanie Ortoleva, Executive Director and founding President of WEI. "Although the U.S.'s human rights record is flawed, it has historically been a powerful voice for a range of rights within the Human Rights Council. Its absence from the Council will leave a significant gap that will ultimately threaten the rights of all people, including women and girls with disabilities, worldwide."

Women and girls with disabilities in the U.S. face unique and disproportionate violations of their rights, due to both their gender and disability, among other factors. As compared to men with disabilities and nondisabled women, they endure higher rates of violence including sexual violence, receive lower levels of education, are more likely to be unemployed or receive lower wages, and face discrimination in access to health care. WEI highlighted these issues in a [short report to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights](#) before his country visit to the U.S. in 2017. This Special Rapporteur introduced his findings from this visit in report to the Human Rights Council on June 22, and he has expressed concern that the U.S. would not be present at the Council to react to those findings.

"There is already a steadily worsening human rights situation for many groups—including women and girls with disabilities—in the U.S.," said Amanda McRae, WEI's Director of U.N. Advocacy. "When a country engages in good faith with the U.N., this can help it ensure the human rights of all people, at home and abroad. But it is clear that the current U.S. government is afraid of being held accountable."

Since withdrawing from the Human Rights Council, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Nikki Haley, has blamed non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to advance human rights—including many based in the U.S.—for the decision to leave. This reaction further illustrates a significant step back for human rights in the U.S., as the U.S. has historically been a strong advocate for freedom of assembly and speech worldwide, said WEI. Ambassador Haley has also called the report by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights "[misleading and politically-motivated.](#)"

"Every time the U.S. government refuses to acknowledge or take responsibility for the human rights violations it is committing, we should all step back and take notice," said Ortoleva. "Blaming its bad decisions on human rights NGOs—those fighting to better the lives of people around the world—means that the U.S. government has reached a new low."

For more information about WEI's work on the U.S. and at the Human Rights Council, visit <https://womenenabled.org/publications.html>.

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