



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION  
*of the United States of America*  
A PROGRAM OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION  
Southern New York State Division

## United Nations Association of the USA Southern New York State Division News

Serving chapters, groups, and members-at-large in the five boroughs of New York City and in the counties of Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Nassau, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester and reaching friends across the country.  
UNA-USA is a Program of the UN Foundation.

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### UNA-SNY and Human Rights

Between March 2014 and early 2015 three UN Human Rights groups will review the conduct of the United States concerning its responsibilities under relevant international treaties. The Division has participated in two of these reviews and on July 25 submitted a "Shadow Report" (one prepared by a civil society organization) to the Committee to Eliminate Racial Discrimination (CERD). See below to learn how YOU can become involved in this. We plan to follow the reviews and recommendations and to publicize these to stimulate awareness and action by Americans. If you have questions, email to [unasouthernny@gmail.com](mailto:unasouthernny@gmail.com)

#### [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(March 2014\)](#)

All documents from the U.S., other countries, civil society organizations are available at that URL. Click here for the [Final Report on the CPR](#).

**[Universal Periodic Review \(2015\) \(Reports from Civil Society for the U.S. are due September 15, 2014\)](#)**. The UPR is a full review of the human rights record of all countries that are members of the UN. It takes place every four years and offers an important opportunity to measure how countries meet human rights obligations, including those related to economic, social and cultural rights.



UNA-USA will submit a shadow report on four topics: LGBT rights; status of ratification of treaties; rights of women and girls; and combatting human trafficking. On May 21 the Division held a consultation to contribute to this report. After introductory remarks by distinguished speakers from Planned Parenthood Federation of America and ECPAT USA, followed by an introduction to the UPR process, the Division considered two

areas: women and girls and human trafficking. More information is available on the Division website: [www.unasouthernny.org](http://www.unasouthernny.org)

While selecting the topics the Division would contribute to the UNA-USA report, the

Board decided that the criminal justice system and its relation to race was a critical human rights issue that should be addressed, and decided to hold its own review and contribute a report to the "CERD".

**[International Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination \(ICERD\) \(August 12-13, 2014\)](#)** The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) will meet in Geneva to consider the U.S. official report and shadow reports. Please click here for the Shadow Report on **["Race and the American Criminal Justice System"](#)** which the Division submitted to the committee. On the days of the committee meeting you can view a webcast of the deliberations at <http://www.treatybodywebcast.org/>. This will take place from 3 to 6 pm Geneva time on the 12th and from 9 am to noon on the 13th. Geneva is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time. Organizations and individuals may want to host viewing parties! The webcasts will later be available in an archive.

In mid-July The Division held a seminar with more than 30 participants, including educators, law enforcement officers, social workers, non-profit executives, human rights specialists, political scientists and health professionals, as well as the executive producer of the long-running TV series, Lockup. Several participants had themselves been incarcerated and described that experience and how, through education, they had successfully emerged from what they basically saw as an unjust system. See [Part 1 of the plenary session](#) and [Part 2 of the plenary group reports](#) on the Division's YouTube channel. [Photos of the event are available on Flickr.](#)



Sean Pica



William L. Carter



Joshua Cooper



Damon K. Jones

Joshua Cooper, a UNA member and Geneva Coordinator of the US Human Rights Network Universal Periodic Review, noted

*"These treaty review bodies (such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) are important in that they allow people in our country to provide information on what we believe is the true situation on the ground."* In addition to Cooper, the distinguished speakers included Sean Pica, Executive Director of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, Damon K. Jones, New York State Representative of Blacks in Law Enforcement of America, and William L. Carter, Commissioner of the Theodore K. Young Community Center in the Town of Greenburgh.

Seminar participants explored issues and made recommendations, especially in

relation to (1) education in prison and means to reintroduce formerly incarcerated persons into the community; and (2) youth, including those incarcerated, school discipline, drugs and related issues. Beyond this, and bearing in mind the employment challenges, poverty, disenfranchisement, and recidivism typical of prisoners after release from confinement, the group considered the current situation to be a costly waste of human and economic resources.



The report highlights (1) that in New York State (and elsewhere) officials use elementary school test results to help predict future needs for prison cells; (2) that the state's inmate population is three-quarters African-American and Hispanic; (3) that the state's recidivism rate is currently 40 percent; (4) that Gov. Cuomo estimated college courses in prison to cost about US\$5,000 a year versus \$60,000 a year to house each prisoner; (5) that programs that focus on education for prisoners sharply reduce likelihood of repeat criminality; and (6) that support for reintegration and employment is similarly vital. They considered education and opportunities to be investments, not costs, and urged collaboration between liberals and conservatives in government for policy and budgetary shifts that could result in improvements to lives and benefits to taxpayers.



Among the recent government initiatives the group discussed and applauded were the U.S. Senate Bill "**Record Expungement Designed to Enhance Employment Act of 2014**" or the "**REDEEM Act**"(S-113s2567, July 8, 2014), introduced by Senators Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) and Cory Booker (D-New Jersey); the "**Work for Success**" initiative launched by New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, launched as a pilot in February 2012 to help formerly incarcerated men and women find jobs; and the Governor's formation of the "**New York State Council on Community Re-Entry and Reintegration,**" announced in July 2014.

Collaborators in the final UNA-SNY report, "Race and the American Criminal Justice System," include Black Westchester Magazine, Blacks in Law Enforcement of America, the Correctional Association of New York, The Fortune Society, Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, the Theodore D. Young Community Center of the Town of Greenburgh, NY, and the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office.

