



## US cited for police violence, racism in scathing UN review on human rights

US' second review before UN Human Rights Council dominated by criticism over police violence against black men

May 11, 2015 5:04PM ET  
by **Natasja Sheriff**

The United States was slammed over its rights record Monday at the United Nations' Human Rights Council, with member nations criticizing the country for police violence and racial discrimination, the Guantánamo Bay Detention Facility and the continued use of the death penalty.

The issue of racism and police brutality dominated the discussion on Monday during the country's second universal periodic review (UPR). Country after country recommended that the U.S. strengthen legislation and expand training to eliminate racism and excessive use of force by law enforcement.

"I'm not surprised that the world's eyes are focused on police issues in the U.S.," said Alba Morales, who investigates the U.S. criminal justice system at Human Rights Watch.

"There is an international spotlight that's been shone [on the issues], in large part due to the events in Ferguson and the disproportionate police response to even peaceful protesters," she said.

Anticipating the comments to come, James Cadogan, a senior counselor to the U.S. assistant attorney general, **told delegates** gathered in Geneva, "The tragic deaths of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Michael Brown in Missouri, Eric Garner in New York, Tamir Rice in Ohio and Walter Scott in South Carolina have renewed a long-standing and critical national debate about the even-handed administration of justice. These events challenge us to do better and to work harder for progress — through both dialogue and action."

All of the names he mentioned are black men or boys who were killed by police officers or died shortly after being arrested. The events have sparked widespread anger and unrest over the past year.

Cadogan added that the Department of Justice has opened more than 20 investigations in the last six years — including **an investigation into the Baltimore Police Department** — as well as the release of a report of the **Presidential Task Force on 21st Century Policing** in March, which included more than 60 recommendations.

But advocates like Morales say the U.S. could do much more.

"Use of excessive force by police was a major part of this year's UPR, and the fact that we still don't have a reliable national figure to know how many people are killed by police or what the racial breakdown is of those people is a travesty," she said. "A nation as advanced as the U.S. should be able to gather that number."

The Justice Department did not respond to requests for comment.

Although the problems are not new, the death of young men like **Gray** and **Brown** and the unrest that followed their killings in U.S. cities over the past year has attracted the attention — and criticism — of the international community.

"Chad considers the United States of America to be a country of freedom, but recent events targeting black sectors of society have tarnished its image," said Awada Angui of the U.N. delegation to Chad.

The U.S. responded to questions and recommendations from 117 countries during a three-and-a-half-hour session in Geneva on Monday morning, with the high level of participation leaving each country just 65 seconds to speak.

Among the various concerns raised by U.N. member states was the failure to close the Guantánamo Bay detention facility, the continued use of the death penalty, the need for adequate protections for migrant workers and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples.

Member states also called on the U.S. to end child labor, human trafficking and sexual violence against Native American and Alaska Native women and to lift restrictions on the use of foreign aid to provide safe abortion services for rape victims in conflict areas.

Pakistan, Russia, China and Turkey were among the most vociferous of the member states, with Russia informing the U.S. that "the human rights situation in the country has seriously deteriorated recently" before presenting seven recommendations to the U.S. delegation.

Pakistan Ambassador to the U.N. Zamir Akram **told the delegation** that Pakistan has "serious concerns about the human rights situation in the U.S."

Akram's eight recommendations included calls for the U.S. to **use armed drones in line with international norms** and to compensate innocent victims of drone strikes with cash. He also said the U.S. should end police brutality against African-Americans, cease illegal detentions at Guantánamo Bay and prosecute CIA operatives responsible for torture.

**The March findings of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence** on torture were not overlooked by international delegates. Many echoed the concerns of the Danish delegate, Carsten Staur, who recommended that the U.S. "further ensures that all victims of torture and ill treatment, whether still in U.S. custody or not, obtain redress and have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation and as full rehabilitation as possible, including medical and psychological assistance."

Under the UPR, every U.N. member state is subject to the same peer-review of its human rights record on a four-year cycle.

The UPR was created as part of the mandate of the Human Rights Council, established by the U.N. General Assembly in 2006 to replace the widely discredited Human Rights Commission, which included among its members some of the world's most egregious human rights abusers.

The council consists of elected members which, when electing new members, according to the **resolution** that created it, should "take into account the candidates' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto."

Still, according to **Freedom House** — an organization advocating for democracy and human rights — repressive regimes nonetheless gain council membership and can weaken the effectiveness of the council and the UPR. And the process is not without hypocrisy, as countries that frequently abuse the rights of their citizens line up to offer their critiques of and recommendations for other member states.

"Obviously, everybody has improvements they can make to their human rights record. We do believe that everybody from the most powerful country on down should be called to task on their rights records, and we value the opportunity to do so," said Morales.

"We like to focus on the substance of the comments rather than the source of them," she added.

The U.S. faced its first review in 2010, when member states presented the delegation with 240 **recommendations**; it accepted 171. According to Human Rights Watch, the U.S. has failed to act on many of those recommendations.

About a fifth of the 2010 recommendations urged the U.S. to ratify or withdraw reservations on a slew of international human rights treaties and conventions.

After that review, the U.S. accepted recommendations to consider ratifying key human rights conventions, including the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** and the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**. But according to Human Rights Watch, no new human rights treaties have been signed or ratified.

A representative for the State Department was unavailable to comment on U.S. progress on ratification of these treaties.

Recommendations accepted by the U.S. in 2010 include a commitment to "find a solution for all persons detained at Guantánamo Bay" — yet **122 men** are still detained at the facility.

The execution of three Mexican nationals in Texas since 2011 also appeared to undermine a U.S. agreement to "resolve the obstacles that prevent the full implementation of the Avena Judgment," which requires a review of death sentences handed to foreign nationals who were denied their right to consular notification of their detention.

A majority of countries pushed the U.S. to establish a moratorium on the death penalty at the federal level, with a view to full abolition. While the number of executions taking place in the U.S. has **been declining**, member states raised concerns about the use of lethal injection in light of **botched executions** over the past year.

While rejecting recommendations to establish a moratorium, the U.S. agreed to "take all necessary steps to comply with minimum standards **under international law** relating to the death penalty." However, people with serious mental shortcomings continue to be executed — most recently in March 2015, when 74-year-old Cecil Clayton, who had lost part of his brain in a sawmill accident, **was executed** via lethal injection.

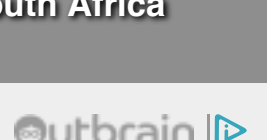
SHARE THIS:

### SPONSORED CONTENT

Promoted by TheDecoristas

Uganda's first Oscar-nominated film tells story of Bobi Wine persecution | Sebastiao Salgado: From stark realities to vivid conservation | [Pics] At 61, Obama Moves Out Of His Lavish House, Here's Why

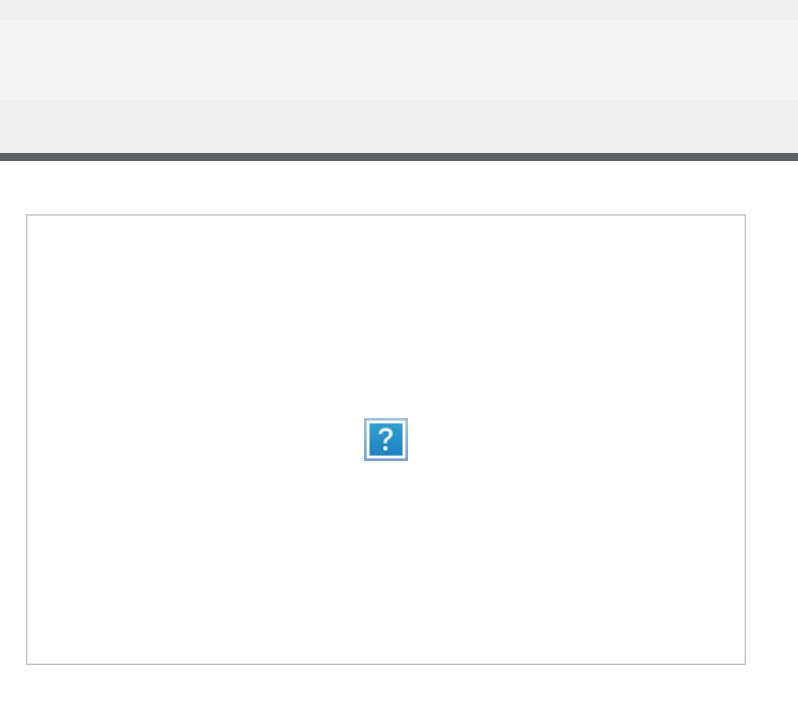
Israel's war on Gaza: Are boycotts hurting US brands? | Turkey's Erdogan names new central bank chief after Hafize Gaye Erkan quits | How Kagiso Lediga became the most sought-after filmmaker in South Africa



### WATCH

Watch more videos

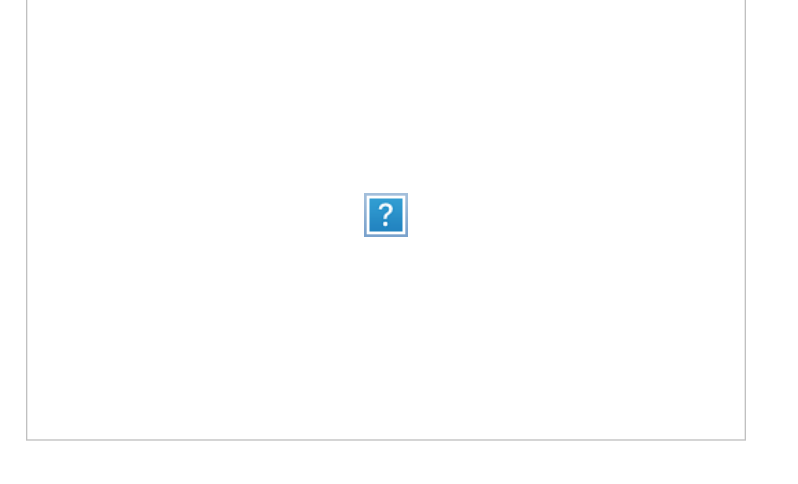
|  |  |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|
|  |  |   |   |   |
| <b>YOUR WORLD THIS MORNING</b><br>Clinton, Sanders spar over specifics in Iowa | <b>YOUR WORLD THIS MORNING</b><br>Yoga used to help kids cope with violence in Chicago | <b>AL JAZEERA AMERICA NEWS</b><br>Seeking charges against a Chicago officer | <b>AL JAZEERA AMERICA NEWS</b><br>Filipina 'comfort women' seek official apology from Japan | <b>AL JAZEERA AMERICA NEWS</b><br>Canada's missing indigenous women |



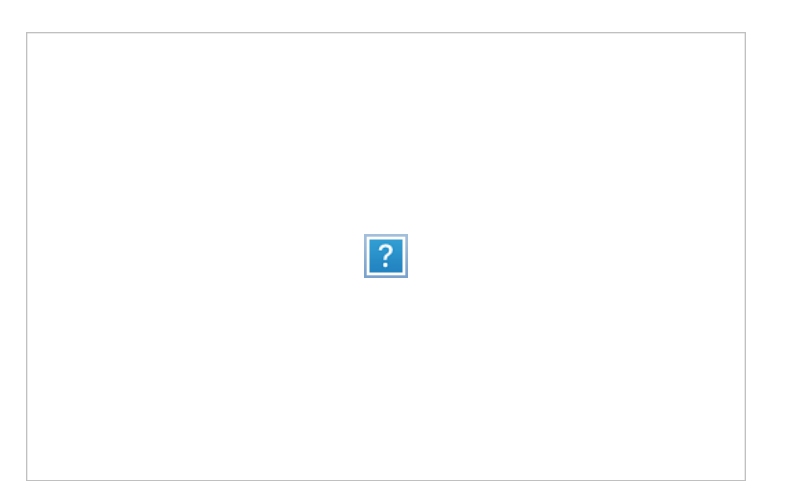
**United Nations watchdog blasts US for persistent racism**  
Panel rejects US government's positive assessment of progress



**United Nations blasts US plans for child migrants**  
Majority of Americans say US should provide temporary support for minors crossing the Texas border, poll shows



**We need a privacy rapporteur**  
Snowden showed the world that digital surveillance is an international problem that threatens human rights



**US govt accused of not doing enough to solve racially-motivated murders**  
Lawyers and professors took the accusation to the UN, believing some white supremacy killers got away with murder



**A tale of two cities: Protests expose economic divide in Baltimore**  
Baltimore is 60 percent African-American and 30 percent white. The divide is traced to jobs, race, and wealth

### RELATED

- PLACES**  
Guantanamo Bay
- TOPICS**  
Human Rights, Law & Justice, Police, Race & Ethnicity

### EDITOR'S PICKS

- Scalia's death could affect court decisions long before his seat is filled**
- Deadly strikes on Syrian schools, hospitals denounced as 'war crime'**
- New black mayors make a difference, one Georgia town at a time**
- OPINION: Renewed deficit hysteria based on flimsy CBO projection**
- A blurry line divides addicts and dealers in heroin underworld**