DC Youth Human Rights Summit

American Friends Service Committee

2015 DC Youth Human Rights Summit

June 22-June 26
We are the Human Rights Generation
We will accept nothing less than human rights
We will know them and claim them,
For all women, men, youth and children
From those who speak human rights
But deny them to their own people
We will move power to human rights.

Shula Koenig, Human Rights Pledge
Written by: Jodie Geddes
With contribution from: Jean-Louis Ikambana, D.C. Staff and Elizabeth Brunello, West Virginia Staff.
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 3
  Summit Goals and Learning Objectives ......................................................................................... 3
About Participating Youth ............................................................................................................... 4
  Core Issues Identified .................................................................................................................. 4
Advocacy Readiness ....................................................................................................................... 5
  Outcomes ...................................................................................................................................... 5
Staff Involvement ........................................................................................................................... 6
  Outcomes ...................................................................................................................................... 7
Follow up ......................................................................................................................................... 8
Introduction

On June 22 a group of young people and AFSC staff from the District of Columbia and West Virginia gathered for a week, in order to discuss human rights and prepare for a day of lobbying. This is the third year AFSC has hosted the DC Youth Human Rights Summit. AFSC donors, including Bethesda Friends Meeting and the Barret Foundation supported the weeklong summit. The participants engaged in multiple discussions that challenged their worldview while broadening their ideas on civic engagement. The wide variety of age groups provided a richness and depth to dialogue.

Summit Goals and Learning Objectives

Many of the youth have been exploring human rights and its framework as a part of their local community actions. The summit served as a way to expand upon their prior knowledge while challenging their thinking. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948 served as the foundation for a week of exploration challenge, and learning. With this base students began to discuss issue of homelessness, police brutality, human trafficking, and access to equitable education.

- Introduce youth to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a framework for addressing basic issues of conflict and social justice
- Increase youth knowledge of human rights
- Connect participants with other youth activists
- Train youth on how to effectively organize, and advocate before their elected officials at various levels of government in order to influence social change in their community
About Participating Youth

Youth were selected from two groups: One group of young people were invited from AFSC-West Virginia, while the remainder were from M.O.M.I.E.S’s TLC base in Washington D.C. Almost half of the participating youth were able to list at least three human rights highlighted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Among those listed were \(^2\)freedom of speech and \(^3\)freedom of religion.

Civil rights activist Dr. Frank Smith Jr. speaks to the youth about his experience and how they can take action.

Core Issues Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Equal Opportunity to Obtain Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>Human Trafficking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 D.C based not for profit focused on serving at risk youth of color. M.O.M.I.E’s provides opportunities for the community and parents to also be engaged.
2 Article 19- Freedom of opinion and expression
3 Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
Advocacy Readiness

Youth prepared for each visit in a variety of ways. Local organizations and D.C. Peace and Economic Justice volunteers facilitated workshops that provide youth with various forms of organizing around multiple issues. This method provided an opportunity for exploration of strategies and brainstorming. While workshops served as the primary form of education, each step of the way icebreakers and hands on activities were implemented. Participant explored the RPP Matrix through developing their own scenarios in order to build a deeper understanding of the various ways organizing can be done both in community organizing and in their daily lives. For example, one group used a weeklong festival scenario to explore capacity building and momentum.

As one of the participants put it, “it is amazing to know that the entire world (the UN state members) came together to write this Declaration with the unique purpose of affirming human dignity and achieving peace and justice for all, but it is also sad to see all kind of violations leading to lack of peace in our world today. Did we forget about human rights?”.

Very relevant and fundamental question coming from a teenager, as he was about to find from a series of well knowledgeable speakers the next couple of days that human rights violations are undermining
peace even here in the Nation Capital and West Virginia with news of on-going police brutality, homelessness, human trafficking, lack of quality education, poverty, etc.

Staff Involvement

- **Joshua Cooper** (Human Rights Lawyer and Professor at Hawaii University) and **Jean-Louis Ikambana** introduced all summit participants to the Universal declaration of Human Rights. Cooper provided the youth with an extensive history and information. He also challenged the youth to think about the human rights that are most important to them.

- AFSC-DC Human Rights Intern, **Jodie Geddes** helped participants to understand the 4RPP Matrix model. She used the model as a way to teach the youth how to mobilize and maximize their influence. Geddes also facilitated morning ice breakers and activities such as a guided Metta mediation. Before meeting with officials youth were able to center themselves and begin a day of action.

- **Nykisha Cleveland**, Public Affairs Specialist, of the D.C. Office of Police Complaints enlightened our young people with a presentation which provided an overview of the Office of Police Complaints, talked about 4th amendment rights, and presented scenarios that deal with what to do if you’re stopped, searched or arrested by the police.

- **Dr. Mai Abdul Rahman** of the D.C. Human Rights Commission, facilitated a discussion on youth and homelessness in D.C.

- **Melanie Robinson** (program volunteer) introduced youth to the key elements of good advocacy. They were able to practice with each other and as a group some of these strategies.

- **Jessica Farley**, program volunteer and Alternatives to Violence Prevention (AVP) facilitator and **Carrie Rothenbacher** (program committee member) co-led a workshop about promoting peace as a human right through a series of AVP tools.

- Civil Rights Activist **Dr. Frank Smith** Jr gave a historical oerspective on youth organization based upon his experience and wisdom.

- **Deltha Cousar-Jeffries**, program committee member helped with daily logistics, including small group activities.

---

4 Reflecting on Peace Practice
Community Engagement

- On Friday June 26, participants attended the *Fifth Annual DC Youth Summit*. The event aimed to address youth violence and how to break the silence. The summit was organized by the District of Columbia U.S. Attorney’s Office and sponsored by multiple community organizations. The event consisted of a skit demonstrating violence and its extension across the community. Community youth also performed a selection of dances, commentary, and poetry. As the youth spoke truth to power they were supported by claps and sounds of affirmation. The event was heavily focused on the collective voice in order to change systems of violence on the national, community (local) and other levels of power. A combination of community members, officials, and law enforcement agents were in attendance. The summit provided youth with another lens for organizing outside of the political arena and into the community space.

Outcomes

Thirteen youth completed the pre and post-test. The evaluation developed was intended to identify the knowledge of participants on the subject of human rights and how that knowledge developed over the week and led or not to a commitment towards social justice. The majority of the evaluation was multiple choice with one short answer question.

The pre test showed that 12 out of the 13 who completed the evaluation defined human rights as, *Rights people inherently have as human beings.* 10 out of 13 identified civic engagement as, *Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concerns.*

In pre and post evaluations all youth who participated in the summary reported that they are likely to be involved in civic engagement further. It can be concluded that the wealth of information possessed by youth grew from AFSC-DC’s long-term commitment to human rights. This is demonstrated through partnerships with community organizations, schools, and its dedication to the dignity of and for all.

With the newly acquired advocacy and lobbying skills, it was clear that our young leaders were eager and determined to engage their lawmakers to make their voices heard and effectively influence social change.
Human trafficking of minors in the District was the topic they decided to keep working on, since they successfully advocated for a City Council Resolution in December 2014 on the same issue. With help from our Georgetown Law School interns, our participants conducted research on loopholes in existing laws, and then decided to meet with the judiciary committee of the City Council to propose a few concrete amendments to the D.C. ACT-20-560. Below are a two proposals submitted by our young leaders to the judiciary committee:

- **Prohibit Defense of Consent for Human Trafficking:** our young leaders requested that the City Council enacts a provision specifically prohibiting a defense to any commercial sexual crime against minor under 18 based on consent of the child to the sex act.

- **Internet use:** our young leaders requested that the City Council amends trafficking in children and CSEC offenses (related current codes to allow law enforcement to use the Internet to investigate these offenses, or enact a separate law authorizing use of the Internet for investigations of those offenses)

The members of the Judiciary Committee were highly impressed by the thorough work of our young leaders.

We are also pleased to announce that as a result of our collaboration with the D.C. Office of Police Complaints, AFSC-DC was asked to become a partner. As such, American Friends Service Committee-DC would agree to display and make available OPC’s complaint forms and brochures for the public. OPC would also list our program name on their website as a place where a person could go to get an OPC brochure and/or complaint form.

**Follow Up**

Throughout the next year youth will continue to explore human rights in their local communities and at the national and international level. For example, **D.C. youths** have continued their push for a legislation on human trafficking. At the international level, our D.C. youths have contributed to the on-going U.S. Civil Society consultation on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), with messages showing their support for certain UPR recommendations related to young people.

**Christina,** who had never been farther than Ohio from her home in **West Virginia,** went into the week feeling intimidated, VERY anxious, and insecure about her abilities to raise her voice. She left DC on Friday feeling more empowered than she had ever felt before, and she immediately followed up on her own with Congressman Jenkins’ WV office to find out what they could do to help her with paying for college. Christina will be starting her freshman year of college this month, and will also be attending our Freedom School and joining up with a new student advocacy group (within the network of “student power” chapters we are forming throughout the state) at Marshal University in Huntington. She’ll have the opportunity there to get politically involved and take action on any number of issues, including (and very likely) college affordability. **Justin** has taken on the role of student chapter leader for the BAPS student advocacy group in Logan County. He is more energized and empowered than ever to be an outspoken, strong leader in his community and state. He will be attending the Freedom School at the end of the month as well, and will be a part of multiple issue teams as we enter the 2016 legislative session, including the Pay it Forward program addressing college affordability, a team addressing the need for more afterschool programs and funding, youth mental health services, and probably more.

Also, **D.C. youths** currently are preparing a human rights art exhibit planned to be displayed and presented to City officials and the Community on December 10, 2015, International Human Rights Day. Titled “**Human**
Rights in a Human Rights City. A Critical View from D.C. Youth”, the exhibit will be a continuation of our work. To celebrate the 67th anniversary of the UDHR on December 10, 2016, our young leaders would like to look at human rights progress made by D.C. a Human Rights City. Do they view their City as a Human rights City? This group of young people from different neighborhood has embarked in a fact-finding project that will allow them to critically look at how D.C. is living up or not to the ideal of a Human Rights City.

Our aim is to create a space for dialogue among young people, community activists, scholars and city officials both to promote a human rights culture in our human rights city. How has D.C. human rights has been living up or not to its expectations of a human rights city? In doing so we hope to support the work of human rights city advocates, youth, D.C. residents and city officials in realizing the aim of having human rights become a way of life in our human rights city.

A program participant makes a strong case for the revision of a D.C. Code related to human trafficking on lobby day.