How Does the World View Violations of Equal Political Participation for DC Citizens?

Timothy Cooper, Executive Director of Worldrights, has provided invaluable service to the citizens of the District of Columbia over the years. He has brought the issue of the disenfranchisement of Washington DC residents before the world’s leading human rights bodies, including the Organization of American States, Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Cooper summarizes the issue this way:

Since 1801, the United States government has systematically denied the residents of the District of Columbia the right to enjoy equal political participation in their own national legislature.

After due deliberation, all three bodies have expressed concern about the disenfranchisement of Washington DC residents. [Editor’s explanatory comments included in brackets):

- The U.N. Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), in 2006, “…remains concerned that the residents of the District of Columbia do not enjoy full representation in Congress, a restriction which does not seem to be compatible with article 25 of the covenant” [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights—ICCPR].

- The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights [for the Organization of American States] (OAS), in 2003, “…concludes that the State [USA] is responsible for violations of the Petitioners’ rights [citizens of DC] under Articles II and XX of the American Declaration [American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man] by denying them an effective opportunity to participate in their federal legislature.” The Commission goes on to recommend that the USA provide “…the Petitioners with an effective remedy, which includes adopting the legislative or other measures necessary to guarantee to the Petitioners the effective right to participate, directly or through freely chosen representatives and in general conditions of equality, in their national legislature.”

- The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) “Parliamentary Assembly, composed of 320 members from 55 parliaments, in 2005, assembled in Washington, D.C. and passed a unanimous resolution calling on the U. S. Congress to grant equal congressional voting rights to Washingtonians, i.e., one member of the U.S. House of Representatives and two representatives in the U.S. Senate. These organizations, charged with monitoring human rights treaty violations around the world, continue to express concern over the plight of DC residents.