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

Between 2003 and 2006 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Organization of American States, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission all expressed concern about the disenfranchisement of Washington DC residents. They based their concerns on the “United Nations inaugural human rights declaration and subsequent human rights conventions which recognize that everyone has the right to take part in the government of her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.” (Human Rights Special Interest Group, humanrights.sig@gmail.com)

For example:

• Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, Article 21 (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

• The United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1976), Article 25: Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.

• ICCPR, Article 26 – All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. (Underline added for emphasis.)

• 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.

The DC Statehood Toolkit is designed for citizens across the country to learn more about the District of Columbia and why DC Statehood matters to the residents of our nation’s capital.

The Toolkit is a joint project of the League of Women Voters Education Fund and the League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia, thanks to a generous grant from the government of the District of Columbia.