

## **Indigenous Peoples' Day & Human Rights Organizing in Pittsburgh**

Pittsburgh officially became the fifth Human Rights City in the United States by proclamation of the city council in April 2011, following a proposal by students working in the local American Friends Service Committee's Racial Justice through Human Rights Program.

The Human Rights Cities initiative was launched by the Peoples Decade for Human Rights Education (PDHRE) in the wake of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The initiative aims to mobilize people in communities to "pursue a community-wide dialogue and to launch actions to improve the life and security of women, men and children based on human rights norms and standards." Currently there are more than two dozen Human Rights Cities around the world, with growing numbers in the United States.

The Human Rights City Alliance is a network of residents and organizations in the Pittsburgh region that calls people to imagine how our city would look if it were organized around the promotion of universal human rights and that works to help realize the vision laid out in the city's proclamation.

The idea for Indigenous Peoples' Day first arose in 1977 at the International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas.\* In 2014, Seattle adopted a resolution renaming October 12 Indigenous Peoples' Day, explicitly linking the decision to its status as a Human Rights City.

Inspired by Seattle's action and by the efforts of local community activists, participants in the Human Rights City Alliance in Pittsburgh urged the City Council to adopt a similar measure. On the eve of Human Rights Day in 2014, the Council responded by passing a [Will of the Council recognizing the 12th of October as "Indigenous Peoples' Day"](#). This incorporates a demand made by local activists for "the teaching of Indigenous peoples' history as recommended by Indigenous communities in our public schools." (For a link to this document visit [www.pghrights.org](http://www.pghrights.org)).

Promoting Indigenous Peoples' Day encourages greater public recognition of the rich culture and traditions of indigenous peoples. It also encourages more critical reflection on the historical and continuing impacts of colonialism on indigenous communities and other communities of color. Truth-telling is essential to promoting a culture of human rights and to imagining a future that advances *'dignity and justice for everyone.'* As part of our commitment to being a Human Rights City, we therefore need to challenge the celebratory accounts of Christopher Columbus' encounter with the Americas and the subsequent European settlement of North America and to acknowledge the roles of colonialism, imperialism, and genocide in the histories of Americas in general and the United States in particular.

The Human Rights City Alliance encourages you to join in its work on this and other issues through your own organizations and activities or by becoming involved in one of the Human Rights City Alliance task forces. For more information contact us at [pghrights@riseup.net](mailto:pghrights@riseup.net) or [www.pghrights.org](http://www.pghrights.org).

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\* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous\\_Peoples%27\\_Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_Peoples%27_Day)