

January 25, 2018

Councilmember and Mayor-Elect LaToya Cantrell
Councilmember James Gray II
Councilmember Jared Brossett
Councilmember Nadine Ramsey
Councilmember Susan Guidry
Councilmember-at-Large Jason Williams
Councilmember-at-Large Stacy Head

Dear Councilmembers and Mayor-Elect:

We write to commend the New Orleans City Council for adopting [Res. R-18-5](#) (“The Resolution”), which affirms New Orleans’ commitment to civil and human rights, and encourages the “creation of a process to review direct investments and contracts for inclusion on, or removal from, the City’s list of corporate securities and contractual partners.” We also write to caution against withdrawing the resolution or amending it to make any exception or waiver to allied foreign countries.

The Resolution reflects New Orleans’ obligation to protect and promote civil and human rights for all, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and enshrined in New Orleans’ human rights law.¹ The Resolution itself states that the city has a “social and ethical obligation to take steps to avoid contracting with or investing in corporations whose practices consistently violate human rights, civil rights or labor rights.”²

The Resolution also furthers national goals and United States international commitments, especially in the context of business and human rights. For example, the 2016 U.S. National Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct states that “the U.S. government aims to accelerate the pace at which [responsible business conduct] practices are developed, adopted, and sustained globally by improving awareness of best practices related to human rights among the tens of thousands of companies with which [the U.S.] does business each year, and encouraging contractors to exercise due diligence and take steps where existing practices can be strengthened.”³

The Resolution places New Orleans in the company of other U.S. cities – and cities around the world – that are wielding their financial influence to encourage ethical business practices in human rights and the environment. For example, several U.S. cities have voted to divest from Wells Fargo, in part due to its role in financing private prisons and the Dakota Access Pipeline.⁴

¹ See New Orleans Code of Ordinances, Sec. 86-2, New Orleans Human Relations Commission.

² Ibid.

³ *Responsible Business Conduct: First National Action Plan for the United States of America (2016)* available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265918.pdf>.

⁴ See Edward Booth, “City Council Unanimously Passes Wells Fargo Divestment Plan”, THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN (May 31, 2017), <http://www.dailycal.org/2017/05/31/city-council-unanimously-passes-wells-fargo-divestment-plan>; Lynda V. Mapes, “Seattle City Council Votes to Cut Ties with Wells Fargo over Dakota

Other cities have taken steps to divest from fossil fuels,⁵ and at least 68 U.S. states, cities, and counties have adopted procurement policies and resolutions prohibiting sweatshop labor in their apparel supply chains.⁶

Importantly, the Resolution does not single out human rights abuses perpetrated by any specific country, entity, group or category of people; it is drafted in the spirit of universal human rights. Condemnation from organizations that seek to limit the scope of the resolution or create exceptions for particular contexts should therefore be rejected.

As local lawmakers, we urge you to uphold the principles of universal human rights, as you did when you voted for Res. R-18-5 on January 11. We stand by you and the values expressed in this important resolution.

Sincerely,

Adalah Justice Project
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)
Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute
Corporate Accountability Lab
Eyes Right Veteran's Foundation
Hawaii Institute for Human Rights
International Corporate Accountability Roundtable (ICAR)
International Human Rights Clinic at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles
National Economic & Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)
National Human Rights Cities Alliance
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
Palestine Legal
People's Movement for Human Rights Learning (PDHRE)
Program on Human Rights in the Global Economy (PHRGE)
Responsible Sourcing Network
The Dream Defenders
US Human Rights Network
Woodhull Freedom Foundation

Access Pipeline Lending”, THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN (Feb. 7, 2017), <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/seattle-city-council-to-vote-on-pulling-billions-from-wells-fargo>.

⁵ List of institutions that are divesting from fossil fuel. <https://gofossilfree.org/divestment/commitments>.

⁶ See SweatFree Communities, INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUMS, <https://www.laborrights.org/our-work/sfc> (“Policies” Tab).