

NAACP Urges U.N. to Investigate U.S. for 'Racially Discriminatory Election Laws'

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(CNSNews.com) – Charging that millions of citizens, two-fifths of them black, have been denied the right to vote because of felony convictions, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People called on the United Nations this week to investigate America's "racially discriminatory election laws."

An NAACP delegation visiting Geneva hosted a panel on the "disenfranchisement" of U.S. citizens and addressed the U.N. Human Rights Council, which is in session in the Swiss city.

A delegate told the HRC that the right to vote was a cornerstone of democracy and that in the U.S. a patchwork of divergent laws and procedures have posed barriers to voting.

The NAACP urged the U.N.'s "special rapporteur" on racism to investigate "racially discriminatory election laws," and said the HRC should then make recommendations that would restore the political and voting rights of all citizens.

On Tuesday, the delegation hosted a panel on the subject at the U.N.'s Geneva headquarters.

"Today, nearly 5.3 million U.S. citizens have been stripped of their voting rights on a temporary or permanent basis, including more than 4.4 million citizens who are no longer incarcerated," said Lorraine Miller, who chairs the NAACP national board's advocacy and policy committee.

"More than two million are African American, yet African Americans make up less than 13 percent of the U.S. population," she said.

Miller said the NAACP commended Attorney-General Eric Holder for his efforts to "prevent the implementation of recent challenges to voting rights."

"However, we remain deeply concerned with the continued practice and discriminatory impact of felony disenfranchisement."

Among the delegation is a woman named Kemba Smith Pradia who, according to the organization, was convicted of a drug-related offense in 1992, granted clemency by President Clinton, but is barred from voting in Virginia under legislation prohibiting those formerly incarcerated to vote in the state.

"Nationally, I represent more than five million citizens that are disenfranchised from being a part of the political process simply because of past felony convictions," she said.

NAACP Senior Vice President for Advocacy Hilary Shelton told the panel that the restrictions on voting "prevent those most in need of an advocate from the ability to elect someone who will represent their concerns: the need for a decent public education, for a health care system that addresses their specific demographic needs, as well as the creation of decent jobs, a functional criminal justice system and other basic human needs."

This is the second NAACP visit to the HRC in six months. [Last March](#) NAACP president Benjamin Todd Jealous addressed the council on voter ID and other laws, which he said would "disproportionately block members of minority groups from voting."

"These voter-suppression laws include so-called strict voter-ID laws, cutting of Sunday voting, early voting and same-day voter registration, and the reimposing of notoriously racist bans on formerly-incarcerated people voting," he said.

As CNSNews.com reported at the time, among those listening to Jealous' appeal for HRC support were representatives of countries whose citizens have no right to vote freely, including one-party states Cuba and China; and Saudi Arabia, where men can only vote in municipal elections and women have been barred from even that limited right.



Members of a NAACP delegation visiting the United Nations in Geneva in September 2012. (Photo: NAACP)

In a Rasmussen [poll](#) last December, 70 percent of likely voters agreed that voters should be required to show photo ID before casting ballots. Only 22 percent of respondents opposed such a requirement.

Although support for voter ID was significantly higher among Republicans (92 percent), 54 percent of Democrats also favored the requirement, according to the poll.

Sixty-nine percent of respondents said the laws were not discriminatory, while 22 percent said they were.

The 2012 Democratic Party platform is critical of voter-ID laws, stating that they “can disproportionately burden young voters, people of color, low-income families, people with disabilities, and the elderly, and we refuse to allow the use of political pretexts to disenfranchise American citizens.”