

For Immediate Release

Contacts

Paul Wright ([561](tel:5613602523)) [360-2523](tel:3602523), Executive Director, HRDC  
Judy Cohen, (561) 360-2523, Office Manager, HRDC

## **Celebrating Human Rights Day on Dec 10th by calling for an end to mass incarceration**

### **Community Event in Palm Beach County hosted by the Human Rights Defense Center and Prison Legal News**

**Lake Worth, FL** – Activists advocating human rights, criminal justice reform, civil liberties, immigrant amnesty and prison abolition will gather in Lake Worth on Wednesday, December 10, 7pm, at the Friends’ Quaker Meeting House, 823 North A Street. The date of December 10 originates from a proclamation of the United Nations in 1950 aimed at bringing attention to the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights.

The event will feature a presentation by staff of the Human Rights Defense Center (HRDC) on the human rights dilemma of mass incarceration in the U.S., which has grown in epidemic proportions, citing statistics that show the U.S. prison population has had a 500-percent increase over the last three decades.

HRDC, the host of the event, is best-known for their monthly magazine, *Prison Legal News* (PLN), which is a premier resource for jailhouse lawyers and prisoner rights advocates around the country. Aside from distributing resources to incarcerated people, HRDC also engages in litigation related to First Amendment rights of prisoners and pre-trial detainees. As a result, the organization has changed unconstitutional mail policies at prisons and jails across the U.S. At present in Florida, HRDC has pending lawsuits against the St. Lucie County Jail and the Florida Department of Corrections.

Representatives from other local and regional organizations will also be in attendance to introduce the work they are doing to address the epidemic of mass incarceration and related human rights abuses in the criminal justice system.

While HRDC and PLN newly relocated their offices from Vermont to south Florida in 2013, they are not new to the human rights movement—next year, for example, the organization will celebrate 25 years of publishing PLN. Nor are they entirely unfamiliar with south Florida, where the executive director of the organization, Paul Wright, was born and raised. The magazine’s publisher was in Lake Worth between 1990 and 1996.

Among the reasons for their move from Vermont to south Florida in 2013, Wright says, “Florida, like most of the Deep South, is a mass incarceration state, and Palm Beach County specifically is home to GEO Group—one of the leaders of the for-profit prison industry.”

What does Wright mean by *mass incarceration in the deep south*?

HRDC's promotional material for this event notes that the U.S. has 5 percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the world's prisoners. Recent studies have also broken this down further to show that, if the U.S. states were considered to be individual nations, they would comprise the top 36 "nations" in highest per capita prisoner populations—seven out of the top ten of those being in southern states. (The others on the list besides Florida include Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina and West Virginia. With Texas being a debatable eighth to the list based on its status as "southern" or not.)\*

According to the UN, this year's slogan for Dec. 10 is *Human Rights 365*, encompassing the idea that "every day is Human Rights Day ... and that each one of us, everywhere, at all times is entitled to the full range of human rights, that human rights belong equally to each of us and bind us together as a global community with the same ideals and values."

<http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/>

The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains several articles which would apply broadly to prisoners and former prisoners in the U.S., but unfortunately remain unrecognized by the U.S. government; specifically, Articles 4, 8, 9, and 21.

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

Further background on HRDC, Prison Legal News and prison issues in general can be found at: [humanrightsdefensecenter.org](http://humanrightsdefensecenter.org) and [www.prisonlegalnews.org](http://www.prisonlegalnews.org).

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\* Source: <https://news.vice.com/article/the-mass-incarceration-problem-in-america>