

Maat for Peace' Report to The UPR Mechanism

Regarding The United States of America

Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights submits this report to the Universal Periodic Review mechanism to highlight key concerns regarding the respect and protection of civil and political rights, economic and social rights, as well as the rights of specific groups, since the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of the United States of America.

1. Ratification of International Agreements

Maat expresses concern over the United States' continued failure to ratify several fundamental international human rights instruments. As of April 2025, the U.S. has ratified only three out of nine core treaties, namely: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.¹

Despite the United States' accession to the optional protocols of the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children and their exploitation in prostitution and pornography, it remains the only country among UN member states that has not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is a significant source of concern given the importance of this convention in comprehensively and integrally protecting children's rights.

The United States has also not shown any tangible steps toward joining several other fundamental international treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Therefore, Maat recommends that the United States seriously consider joining these core international instruments and provide official and transparent explanations for its non-ratification, in line with its international obligations and its stated efforts to protect human rights and promote the rule of law.

¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Treaty UN,
https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&clang=en

2. Cooperation with International Mechanisms

Maat expresses deep concern over the notable decline in the United States' cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms, especially following the executive order issued by the U.S. President on February 4, 2025, which suspended U.S. participation in meetings and activities of the Human Rights Council, in addition to refraining from seeking future membership. Moreover, the U.S. has also halted funding allocated to the Council from its contributions to the United Nations' regular budget. This shift represents a clear setback in the U.S. administration's stance toward UN human rights mechanisms and exacerbates tensions between the United States and the international human rights system, particularly under the new administration that took office on January 20, 2025.²

Conversely, although the United States has issued a standing invitation to the special procedures of the Human Rights Council since October 2021,³ its engagement with these procedures remains inadequate. In 2024, the United States received a significant number of communications from rights holders, totaling 73, yet it only responded to 22 of them, representing about 30.1% of the total communications.⁴ This reflects a weakness in communication and cooperation with special procedures and undermines the effectiveness of this vital UN mechanism.

Therefore, Maat recommends that the United States enhance its cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms by responding promptly and effectively to communications from special procedures and reconsidering its decision to suspend participation in the activities and meetings of the Human Rights Council. This would help rebuild trust and reflect a genuine commitment to the principles of the international human rights system.

3. Death Penalty

According to available data as of March 2025, the number of individuals on death row in the United States stands at 2,654. Despite the hope raised by the announcement from the former U.S. President—who completed his term on January 19, 2025—to commute the death sentences of 37 out of 40 federal inmates to life imprisonment,⁵ the actual enforcement of the

² See, <https://tinyurl.com/2t9nj86b>

³ Standing Invitations, united states, <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/StandingInvitations.aspx>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, United States, <https://worldcoalition.org/pays/united-states/>



death penalty continues, with five U.S. states carrying out executions in 2023.⁶

The U.S. Congress continues to reject federal legislation to abolish or even temporarily suspend the death penalty. The U.S. vote against the UN General Assembly resolution passed on December 17, 2024, calling for the abolition of the death penalty,⁷ is an additional indicator of the current lack of political will to end or limit its use.

Therefore, Maat recommends considering the adoption of a moratorium on the death penalty and replacing it with more humane sentences, such as life imprisonment. It also calls for the discussion and adoption of federal legislation to halt the execution of the death penalty for crimes that are not classified as extremely serious, paving the way for the eventual abolition of the penalty.

4. Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Numerous cases of arbitrary arrest and detention of individuals for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression have been reported, which contradicts the international obligations the United States has undertaken under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

For instance, on March 26, 2025, agents from the Department of Homeland Security arrested a Turkish PhD student named "R.A," aged 30, as she was leaving her home in Boston. Surveillance camera footage reviewed by Maat showed six masked individuals seizing the student's phone and handcuffing her before taking her to an undisclosed location. According to her lawyer, neither the defense team nor her family has been able to ascertain her whereabouts or communicate with her since her arrest, representing a serious violation of fair trial guarantees and the rights of detainees.

In a similar incident, the Department of Homeland Security detained Palestinian activist "M.K.", a graduate of Columbia University, on charges of involvement in "terrorism-supporting, anti-Semitic, and anti-American activities," based on his student participation supporting the Palestinian cause.⁸

⁶ The Death Penalty in 2023: Year End Report, Death penalty information center, 1 Dec 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2p9tc3np>

⁷ Two thirds of the United Nations General Assembly vote in favor of the 10th resolution for a moratorium on the death penalty, <https://tinyurl.com/25fxdtvs>

⁸ U.S. must immediately release Palestinian rights-activist and stop threats of deportation against foreign residents, say UN experts, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/us-must-immediately-release-palestinian-rights-activist-mahmoud-khalil-and>



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Attempts to restrict opposition media to the current U.S. administration were also reported in March 2025. On March 31, three members of Congress affiliated with the Democratic Party requested documents from the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, as part of an investigation into what they described as "Sham investigations" targeting opposition media organizations that began during the first term of the current U.S. president.⁹ Maat fears that these actions could create a climate of media intimidation that undermines press independence and the public's right to access information.

Therefore, Maat urges U.S. authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the Palestinian activist "M.K." detained for his peaceful student activities, and to provide full legal guarantees for the detained Turkish student held arbitrarily. The foundation also calls for an immediate end to all forms of intimidation directed at the media and to ensure that it enjoys complete freedom to operate without interference or harassment, in accordance with international standards for freedom of expression and the press.

5. Arbitrary Detention, Forced Arrest, and Conditions of Detention

Maat has documented a worrying case of arbitrary detention involving community activist "J.F.", a mother and prominent local leader in the defense of migrant rights, who was arrested on March 17, 2025. The arrest occurred at her workplace in Colorado by agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and force was used without an active deportation order against her.

Complaints regarding detention conditions within U.S. prisons continue, often characterized by overcrowding, lack of sanitary conditions, and absence of adequate mental and medical care. The state of Alabama serves as a glaring example of this situation, with prison occupancy reaching 168% of its capacity,¹⁰ posing a direct threat to the lives and health of detainees.

Unreported deaths have been noted in certain prisons, particularly in Pennsylvania. In 2022, at least 25 individuals died within the state's prisons; however, these deaths were not recorded in public records, indicating a serious shortfall in transparency and accountability.¹¹ Evidence confirms that suicide and mental health disorders represent the primary cause of deaths in detention facilities, reflecting the failure of the prison system to provide a safe and supportive

⁹ House Democrats open probe into FCC media investigations under Trump, <https://shorturl.at/dhDwn>

¹⁰ Imprisoned Workers in Alabama Continue Legal Fight to Abolish Prison Slavery, <https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/imprisoned-workers-alabama-continue-legal-fight-abolish-prison>

¹¹ The Hidden Deaths in American Jails, <https://www.vera.org/news/the-hidden-deaths-in-american-jails>



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environment for inmates.

In this context, Maat calls on the U.S. government to reconsider policies and practices related to arrest and detention, ensuring that they align with international obligations of the United States. Maat also emphasizes the importance of conducting transparent and independent investigations into all cases of death within prisons, accurately recording them in official records, and reviewing previously unreported cases to ensure accountability and prevent impunity.

6. Right to Privacy

On April 7, 2024, members of the U.S. House of Representatives introduced a draft federal privacy bill that enjoys broad support, known as the "American Privacy Rights Act." This bill aims to empower individuals to control their personal data while also standardizing privacy standards at the federal level as an alternative to the varying laws among states. Although the draft bill was positively discussed during a legislative hearing on April 17, 2024, it has not yet been passed by Congress.¹²

Independent human rights organizations have demonstrated that the existing legislative framework does not prohibit unlawful searches conducted by U.S. border authorities, which include searches without a judicial warrant. While this right was previously limited to luggage searches, the U.S. administration is expanding this scrutiny to include mobile phones and laptops, constituting a violation of the right to privacy.¹³

In light of the above, Maat recommends the urgent enactment of a unified federal law that guarantees the protection of the right to privacy for individuals in the United States and enhances adherence to international standards in this area.

7. Migrants and Refugees

Upon assuming the presidency, the former U.S. president took a positive measure by revoking the decision that banned citizens from several Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S. However, after taking office for a second term on January 20, 2025, the current president issued a series of executive orders that raised concerns, including an attempt to end birthright citizenship, a right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

¹² Proposed American Privacy Rights Act seeks to establish a comprehensive national framework for data privacy,

<https://www.whitecase.com/insight-alert/proposed-american-privacy-rights-act-seeks-establish-comprehensive-national-framework>

¹³ ACLU urges 2nd Circuit to rethink no-warrant cellphone searches at US border, <https://shorturl.at/SOVwf>



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Additionally, under the executive order titled "Reorganizing the Refugee Admission Program in the United States," the refugee admission program was suspended indefinitely, exacerbating the situation for individuals who relied on this program for safety in the U.S. The situation did not stop there, as flights for migrants who had already been approved for entry into the United States were canceled, posing significant challenges for many families and individuals who were hoping for a new beginning.

In February 2025, the United States transferred 140 migrants described as "undocumented" to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, a move that drew widespread international criticism. Although the president initially issued an executive order limiting the reception of refugees, he issued a new order just 18 days later that exempted one group: white Africans from South Africa,¹⁴ thereby reinforcing racial discrimination in the refugee reception policy.¹⁵

Furthermore, certain practices that grant law enforcement agencies additional powers continued, as seen in March 2025, when the state of Idaho passed a bill allowing local law enforcement to act as federal immigration agents without oversight, thereby enhancing the likelihood of implementing mass deportation policies for migrants, aligning with the current U.S. administration's agenda.¹⁶

In light of the above, Maat recommends reconsidering the suspension of the refugee admission program and committing fully to protecting the rights of current migrants in the United States, in accordance with international human rights standards.

8. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The U.S. government has failed to respect the right to peaceful assembly, as evidenced by multiple incidents following the third review of the Council that clearly restrict this right. Restrictions on peaceful assemblies, particularly on American university campuses, have increased. In March 2025, Columbia University announced the expulsion of a group of students who participated in a protest movement calling for divestment from Israel and supporting a ceasefire.¹⁷ This raised numerous questions regarding the respect for the right to peaceful assembly in the United States.

¹⁴ Exception to Refugee Ban: Addressing Egregious Actions of South Africa, <https://shorturl.at/DZdhi>

¹⁵ 'No thanks': White South Africans turn down Trump's immigration offer. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/no-thanks-white-south-africans-turn-down-trumps-immigration-offer-2025-02-09/>

¹⁶ Idaho signs new immigration law as lawsuit swiftly follows, <https://shorturl.at/L5iJc>

¹⁷ Columbia University expels, suspends and revokes degrees of 22 students, <https://tinyurl.com/virzrvvf>



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During the year 2024, Maat observed numerous peaceful protests at American universities, yet these demonstrations were met with repressive practices that contradict the right to peaceful assembly. On April 25, 2024, a group of students at the University of California organized a peaceful protest, prompting campus security forces to call in the police to disperse the protesters and threaten them with arrest if they did not end their sit-in voluntarily. Ultimately, the protest was dispersed, and the university announced the closure of the campus until further notice. In a related occurrence, the Los Angeles police arrested 93 demonstrators within the University of California campus in April 2024 on charges of vandalism after riot police used batons to break up the protest.¹⁸

On April 29, 2024, students at the University of Texas held a demonstration on campus in support of a ceasefire in Gaza and against continued economic relations with Israel. In response, the police, in cooperation with campus security, removed tents set up by the protesters and used "less-lethal" weapons such as tear gas grenades to disperse the demonstrators. Additionally, authorities in Texas prohibited protesters from establishing camps within the state.

Furthermore, on May 7, 2023, the University of Massachusetts witnessed a similar protest against Israeli violations in Rafah. Although university management requested that the protesters conclude their sit-in, security forces intervened forcefully, leading to the arrest of 130 individuals, including faculty members. Testimonies indicated that many of the arrested faced mistreatment while in custody.

The U.S. government justified these restrictions on student gatherings by claiming they posed a threat to U.S. national security. Reports also suggested that the Department of Homeland Security provided the U.S. Department of Defense (Pentagon) with information about students participating in campus protests.

In light of these violations, Maat calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all students detained due to their participation in demonstrations advocating for a ceasefire in Gaza.

9. Right to Work

¹⁸ LAPD arrests 93 people at USC amid Israel-Hamas war protests, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-04-24/usc-pro-palestinian-encampment>



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U.S. Constitution protects the right to work, and there has been a long-term trend towards reducing unemployment rates and achieving economic stability. However, there has been a noticeable increase in the unemployment rate in the United States, which rose to 4.1% in February 2024.¹⁹ This rise in unemployment has been accompanied by a trend from the U.S. administration to reduce the number of government employees, with approximately 24,000 government workers laid off by March 2025. The current administration aims to lay off even more government employees, citing the need for government cost-cutting measures.²⁰

These decisions contradict workers' rights and jeopardize their job stability. They may also contribute to an increased unemployment rate, negatively impacting the economy and limiting job opportunities. Furthermore, these actions raise questions about the legal rights of government employees, particularly in light of federal court rulings that may mandate the reinstatement of these employees.

In this context, Maat recommends reconsidering the decisions regarding the termination of government employees and fully adhering to federal court rulings that order the reinstatement of these employees.

10. Right to Education

U.S. Constitution protects the right to education; however, recent policies implemented by the elected administration that took office after January 20, 2025, have adversely affected the right to access education. The previous administration, led by Donald Trump, issued an executive order to abolish the Department of Education, which is responsible for several key functions, including ensuring that students with disabilities receive a quality and equitable education, as well as ensuring educational equity for all children regardless of their racial backgrounds.²¹

According to reports reviewed by Maat, the abolition of the Department of Education could result in millions of students lacking the assistance and educational services guaranteed by law. It is also expected to lead to a reduction in funding for more than half of the public schools serving students from low-income families.²² These policies stand in stark contrast to the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination in Education,

¹⁹ U.S. Added 151,000 Jobs As Unemployment Rose To 4.1% In February, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereksaul/2025/03/07/us-added-151000-jobs-as-unemployment-rose-to-41-in-february/>

²⁰ Two judges in mass firings cases order Trump administration to rehire probationary workers for now, <https://apnews.com/article/mass-firings-federal-workers-trump-administration-7cc7320f469cc65529367a2fd9dcb>

²¹ Trump's Attack on the Department of Education, Explained, ACLU, <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/trumps-attack-on-the-department-of-education-explained>

²² Ibid



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which guarantees students equal rights to education without discrimination.²³

In light of this, Maat recommends reconsidering the decision to abolish the Department of Education and ensuring that all children have access to quality and equitable education, in accordance with international human rights standards.

11. Rights of Children

On the same day that the current U.S. president began his second term, January 20, 2025, he signed an executive order ending birthright citizenship for children of immigrants born in the United States.²⁴ This executive order was set to take effect on February 19, 2025, but courts in several states, such as Maryland, Massachusetts, and Washington, have blocked its implementation. This executive order contradicts the U.S. Constitution, which states that "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."²⁵

This policy change places the rights of migrant children at risk and violates their right to obtain U.S. citizenship, contravening international standards regarding children's rights.

Consequently, Maat recommends the repeal of the executive order restricting the right to citizenship for children by birth and respecting the court rulings issued in this regard.

²³ Convention against Discrimination in Education, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-discrimination-education>

²⁴ Trump takes US birthright citizenship to Supreme Court, <https://shorturl.at/nME7A>

²⁵ 14th Amendment, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiv>



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