Prof. Agnieszka Szpak
Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland
Faculty of Political Science and Security Studies
e-mail: aszpak@umk.pl

From Multilateral Retreat to Local Engagement: The Role of Cities in the Universal Periodic Review

This research was funded in part by the National Science Centre, Poland, grant number 2024/55/B/HS5/01968. For the purpose of Open Access, the author has applied a CC-BY public copyright licence to any Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) version arising from this submission.

Artykuł opublikowany jako: Agnieszka Szpak, *From Multilateral Retreat to Local Engagement: The Role of Cities in the Universal Periodic Review*, "Journal of Human Rights Practice" nr 18 (2), ss. 1-6, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huag023

Abstract: This commentary examines the implications of the United States' 2025 withdrawal from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for the future functioning of international human rights monitoring. It considers whether, and to what extent, the UPR could continue to operate in situations of State non-cooperation by relying on information submitted by "other stakeholders", including local governments, under the existing framework established by Human Rights Council Resolution 5/1. Drawing on the experience of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) developed to monitor implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the commentary argues that many cities possess the institutional capacity, administrative expertise, and reporting experience necessary to contribute structured evidence on the local implementation of human rights. The VLR precedent demonstrates municipal reporting capacity rather than authority to assume functions reserved for States, making the analogy functional rather than legal. An initiative by nearly 150 American state and local elected officials urging the Human Rights Council to proceed with the UPR despite federal non-cooperation illustrates the practical relevance of this proposal. The commentary concludes that incorporating city-generated reports as stakeholder submissions could strengthen the evidentiary basis and resilience of the UPR while preserving its State-centred institutional architecture and contributing to a more multilevel approach to international human rights accountability.

Keywords: Universal Periodic Review; human rights; multilevel governance; Voluntary Local Review; multilateralism

Practitioner points

- In the absence of State cooperation, the Universal Periodic Review should actively welcome submissions from cities as "other stakeholders", allowing them to report on how human rights are implemented on the ground.
- City participation can strengthen the resilience of international human rights monitoring when national governments withdraw from or limit engagement with multilateral institutions.
- Municipal experience with Voluntary Local Reviews shows that cities already possess the data, administrative capacity, and policy expertise needed to contribute meaningful evidence to global human rights reviews.

1. Introduction

On 28 August 2025, the United States withdrew from the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a human rights monitoring mechanism in which States assess each other's human rights performance. Since its launch in 2008, the UPR has been characterized by almost universal participation. The US decision to step back from the process, therefore, disrupts this essential universality and weakens mechanisms of accountability at both the national and international levels (Lane & Storey 2025). Unfortunately, this is one example among several of the US's "multilateral retreat" (Kaya & Temin 2025), indicating a broader trend – a crisis of multilateralism.

Multilateralism is increasingly under strain, while nationalism is on the rise, as reflected in Israel's wars in Gaza and the wider region, the continuing illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, findings by international bodies of a serious risk of genocide, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, escalating tensions over Taiwan in the South China Sea, the construction of border barriers such as those between the US and Mexico or Poland and Belarus and US attack against Iran. Brunk Wuerth and Hakimi (2022) contend that Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 represents one of the most profound disruptions to the international order since World War II. States have withdrawn from key treaties, including foundational instruments such as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, with Burundi (2017) and the Philippines (2019) exiting.

The United States, particularly under President Donald Trump, exemplified a shift toward isolationism through the "America First" doctrine, signaling a retreat from multilateral commitments. This included withdrawals from the World Health Organization, the Paris Climate Agreement, and UNESCO – institutions the US had played a key role in establishing. Domestic legislation further curtailed international engagement, as exemplified by the $9 billion rescission act, which eliminated over $1 billion in funding for multilateral institutions, including potential cuts to the OECD, World Bank, and International Labor Organization (US

Congress 2025; Kaya & Temin 2025). However, even prior to the Trump administration, the US has historically adopted a cautious approach to international treaty commitment, generally refraining from joining a range of major binding instruments, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Until recently, multilateral cooperation was progressing steadily, helping to address a range of global problems. However, today, national governments worldwide are progressively retreating from their leadership roles in the multilateral system and withdrawing from responsibilities in key policy domains, including climate governance, public health, and migration management. However, cities and sub-national regions are increasingly asserting themselves as independent actors in international governance and policy-making (Herrschel & Newman 2017: 1). Cities have increasingly become important international actors through their participation in transnational city networks and the conclusion of inter-city agreements on issues such as climate change (for example, Chicago Climate Charter 2017), migration (for example, Marrakech Mayors' Declaration. Cities working together for migrants and refugees 2018), and human rights (for example, European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City 2000). Networks like the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability enable cities to coordinate policies and align local action with global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement. Cities also engage in bilateral and multilateral cooperation on migration and human rights, for example, through city partnerships facilitated by the Mayors Migration Council or through "human rights cities" such as Utrecht and Gwangju, which embed international norms into local governance. In some cases, cities implement standards derived from international treaties that their States have not ratified, such as some US cities adopting gender equality policies inspired by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which the US has not ratified. In this way, cities function as both norm entrepreneurs and implementers of international law beyond the State.

Concurrently, pressing global challenges – such as pandemics, climate change, migration, democratic decline, widening social and economic inequalities, and limited access to affordable housing – are intensifying. National governments often struggle to respond effectively or innovatively to these crises. In this context, cities are increasingly stepping into roles traditionally held by nation-States, sometimes acting independently of, or even in opposition

to, central authorities. By doing so, urban governments are expanding their influence and credibility both domestically and internationally, contributing to a shift in conventional understandings of global politics and international law (Swiney 2020: 228).

In the case of the United States, the key question is whether the UPR process should proceed on the basis of information provided by "other stakeholders", including cities, in the absence of State engagement. The commentary does not primarily ask whether cities can participate in the Universal Periodic Review, but rather examines how the mechanism functions in situations of State non-cooperation, and whether it could rely more systematically on information provided by subnational actors. This commentary does not argue that cities should replace States within the UPR or exercise State functions under international law. Rather, it argues that under the existing "other stakeholders" framework established by Resolution 5/1, local governments could provide structured evidence that would enable the Human Rights Council to maintain a meaningful review even when the State refuses to cooperate. Cities already play a meaningful role in the Universal Periodic Review by participating as "other stakeholders" under the Human Rights Council's existing procedures. But in contexts where national governments withdraw from or disengage with multilateral human rights mechanisms, city-level reporting could help preserve the practical continuity of the UPR. Drawing on the experience of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) developed within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, the article demonstrates that cities already possess both the institutional capacity and the political incentives to contribute structured human rights reporting at the international level in a way enabling the UPR to proceed.

However, the recent response of the Human Rights Council to a case of US non-cooperation – namely, postponing the review and urging the State to re-engage – indicates that, in practice, the mechanism does not proceed solely based on existing documentation, even when extensive stakeholder submissions are available. In the specific case of the United States, the Council rescheduled the review to a later session and explicitly called on the State to resume cooperation with the process rather than proceed in its absence (OHCHR 2025).

After briefly outlining the UPR process, I will highlight a precedent set by the VLRs, which report on cities' implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Against this background, I will examine an initiative by local elected officials to supplement the US nation-State within the UPR mechanism.

Situating cities within the Universal Periodic Review also contributes to broader debates on municipal internationalism (Knop 2012; Swiney 2020), multilevel governance (Szpak et al. 2022), and the localization of human rights (Ezer 2022; Durmuş 2020). Scholars increasingly

recognize cities as emerging actors in global governance, capable of engaging directly with international norms and institutions. At the same time, the implementation of many human rights obligations occurs within complex multilevel governance structures, where responsibilities are distributed among national and sub-national authorities. The concept of human rights localization further emphasizes the importance of translating international standards into local policies and everyday administrative practices. From this perspective, municipal participation in the UPR could enhance the mechanism by incorporating insights from the level of government most directly responsible for delivering many human rights-related services.

2. Universal Periodic Review framework and stakeholder participation

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council that requires each Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights record approximately every 4.5 years. It provides States with an opportunity to report on measures taken to enhance human rights and address challenges, and to receive recommendations from other Member States, informed by multi-stakeholder input and pre-session reports, to support ongoing improvements. Established in 2006 under UN General Assembly resolution 60/251 (2006), the UPR seeks to promote, facilitate, and strengthen the protection of human rights globally. Since its first cycle in 2008, all 193 Member States have undergone three reviews, with the fourth cycle commencing in November 2022 at the 41st session of the UPR Working Group (Universal Periodic Review 2025).

The UPR seeks to enhance human rights across all countries, with far-reaching implications for people worldwide. Its purpose is to stimulate, facilitate, and broaden efforts to promote and protect human rights at the national and local levels. This is achieved through systematic evaluation of States' human rights records and the identification of violations wherever they occur. In addition, the UPR aims to provide technical support to States, enhance their capacity to address human rights challenges effectively, and foster the exchange of best practices among States and other relevant stakeholders (Human Rights Council 2007: point 4(d); Universal Periodic Review 2025).

The UPR relies on a range of sources to evaluate a State's human rights performance. These include information submitted directly by the State under review, often in the form of a national report, as well as findings and analyses from independent human rights experts, treaty bodies, and other UN entities. Additionally, input is drawn from other stakeholders, such as national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations, to provide a comprehensive

assessment of the country's human rights situation (Human Rights Council 2007: point 15(c); Universal Periodic Review 2025). Within the "other stakeholders" category, one may include cities/local governments.

"Other stakeholders" are mentioned in a few other contexts: they may attend the review before the HRC (Human Rights Council 2007: point 18 (c)) and have "the opportunity to make general comments before the adoption of the outcome" of the UPR (Human Rights Council 2007: point 31). Finally, the outcome should primarily be implemented by States and other relevant stakeholders (Human Rights Council 2007: point 33). Needless to say, cities – the level of government closest to citizens – play a major role in implementing human rights.

Considering the potential role of cities in the UPR framework when their State does not cooperate, an expanding body of practice demonstrates that local government leaders are increasingly engaging in international forums to advance their communities' interests. Following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, networks such as America Is All In, C40, and the US Climate Alliance emerged as key arenas through which cities and states continued to uphold the Agreement's objectives. These sub-national actors – often working across party lines – have participated directly in global climate negotiations, fully aware that emissions produced abroad shape their own capacity to cope with climate-related risks (Kaya & Temin 2025).

This sub-national engagement provides a replicable model for other policy domains. The pattern first established in response to federal disengagement from the Paris Agreement suggests that local actors can help sustain international commitments in areas such as human rights. In many instances, municipalities give practical effect to international norms even when their national governments have declined to ratify the relevant treaties. They do so not only to advance the welfare of their own residents but also, in many cases, to contribute to broader global values. In this sense, cities can help compensate for State inaction and, at times, encourage States to re-engage in shared normative frameworks. A notable example is the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative, which operationalizes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the local level – including within cities in the United States (like Houston and Minneapolis), despite the federal government's failure to ratify the Convention. Likewise, municipalities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco have incorporated principles from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women into their local governance structures (Lin 2018: 47-51; Knop 2012; Resnik 2012; Wexler 2006).

Should a federal administration decline to participate in the UN Human Rights Council's UPR, cities could fill the gap by submitting their own assessments of human rights conditions in the

United States. Such an approach already enjoys support: nearly 150 state and local officials have urged the Human Rights Council to proceed with the UPR irrespective of federal-level participation (which will be discussed below). Together, these developments indicate that sub-national actors are not merely compensating for weakened multilateralism but are actively redefining the architecture of global governance (Kaya & Temin 2025).

3. SDG Voluntary Local Reviews as a precedent

There is a precedent in the field of implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The experience of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) provides a useful precedent for city engagement in global governance mechanisms traditionally addressed to States. Since 2018, dozens of cities – including New York, Helsinki, Barcelona, and Los Angeles – have produced VLRs assessing their progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. VLRs are non-binding reporting instruments that carry no formal legal status. Rather than replacing Voluntary National Reviews, they are intended to complement them within a cooperative and non-adversarial framework of multilevel governance. Although the SDGs formally apply to States, cities have demonstrated that local governments can collect relevant data, monitor implementation, and communicate results in formats compatible with international reporting processes. This experience does not establish that municipalities may assume functions reserved for States within international monitoring procedures. Rather, it demonstrates that many local governments possess practical experience in collecting disaggregated data, coordinating multiple stakeholders, monitoring policy implementation, and preparing structured reports consistent with internationally recognized reporting formats. The analogy between Voluntary Local Reviews and stakeholder submissions to the UPR is therefore functional rather than legal. VLRs illustrate municipal reporting capacity rather than municipal authority to act in place of States.

By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), United Nations member States pledged to collaborate closely with local and regional authorities in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Since 2015, cities, metropolitan areas, regions, and their networks have actively localized the Agenda, bringing the SDGs closer to communities and using the framework as a practical tool for planning and implementation. The 2030 Agenda's follow-up and review provisions encourage member States to conduct regular, inclusive, and nationally led assessments of progress at both national and sub-national levels (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 2015: para. 79), while para. 89 calls on major groups and other stakeholders, including local governments, to report on their contributions to the 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development (2015). In line with these commitments, sub-national actors are increasingly conducting Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) to assess the implementation of the SDGs within their jurisdictions. Although VLRs carry no formal status, they offer multiple benefits, enhancing local planning, strengthening vertical alignment, and complementing national Voluntary National Reviews, thereby contributing to a more coherent and effective overall implementation of the SDGs (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs n.d.).

New York was the first city to conduct such a VLR. New York City's initiative was catalyzed in part by its commitment to global climate action. When the United States announced its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the city interpreted this as an opportunity to demonstrate municipal leadership (UN-Habitat 2022: 18). The day after the federal decision, Mayor Bill de Blasio issued Executive Order 26 affirming New York's adherence to the principles of the Paris Agreement, and shortly thereafter, the city released *1.5°C: Aligning New York City with the Paris Climate Agreement*, becoming the first globally to publish an action plan aligned with the Paris Accords (UN-Habitat 2022: 18). Against this backdrop, New York examined the Voluntary National Review mechanism and adapted its logic to the local level, presenting the world's first VLR during the 2018 High-Level Political Forum at the United Nations (UN-Habitat 2022: 20). New York's 2018 VLR, therefore, marked a strategic attempt to harness city networks, localize the SDGs, and leverage its unique position as host city to the UN (UN-Habitat 2022: 4).

Recognizing the need to formalize and amplify this approach, New York launched the NYC Declaration on the Voluntary Local Review during the 2019 UN General Assembly. By that time, more than 20 cities from nearly every continent had endorsed the Declaration, committing themselves to a structured approach to SDG reporting (UN-Habitat 2022: 22). The Declaration articulates three obligations: aligning existing local strategies, programs, data, and targets with the SDGs; convening at least one forum to facilitate stakeholder exchange of lessons, experiences, and information; and submitting a VLR to the United Nations during the High-Level Political Forum (UN Habitat 2022: 22). Inspired by the New York model and following detailed consultations with the NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs, Helsinki became the first European city to commit to a VLR in September 2018 (UN-Habitat 2022: 21). Since then, the VLR movement has expanded significantly, with more than 330 cities and states now exchanging practices and collectively advancing local SDG implementation (UN-Habitat 2022: 25; see also the VLR website: https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews).

At the same time, municipal reporting capacity varies considerably across jurisdictions. Large metropolitan governments often maintain dedicated international affairs offices and

sophisticated statistical systems and participate in transnational municipal networks, whereas smaller municipalities may face financial, technical, and administrative constraints. Consequently, the proposal advanced here should not be understood as assuming uniform municipal capacity worldwide. Rather, city participation should remain voluntary and depend upon the institutional capabilities available within individual jurisdictions.

4. Cities and UPR: American cities local officials' initiative

As mentioned, in September 2025, nearly 150 state and local officials urged the Human Rights Council to proceed with the UPR irrespective of federal-level participation. The most important elements of the letter included:

- State legislators and local elected officials expressed serious concern about the US federal government's unprecedented withdrawal from the UPR process, noting that this action constitutes a retreat from international human rights obligations.
- The officials urge the UN Human Rights Council to proceed with the peer-review assessment of the US human rights record, irrespective of federal-level participation.
- Elected representatives at the state and local levels affirm their willingness to appear before the Council and engage in substantive, constructive dialogue with member States to discuss the US human rights situation.
- They emphasize that the obligation to uphold and implement UN human rights recommendations is not limited to the federal government; state and local authorities possess both the authority and duty to advance human rights within their jurisdictions.
- Officials emphasize their ongoing commitment to addressing violations and promoting human rights for all residents, viewing the UPR as both a mechanism for global accountability and an opportunity to enhance domestic adherence to international norms.
- The letter reiterates that governments at all levels share a fundamental responsibility to protect and fulfill the human rights of everyone within their borders.

In the context of this initiative and the relationship between federal and local governments, the VLR precedent demonstrates considerable variation across contexts. In some instances, municipalities pursue Voluntary Local Reviews despite national governments' skepticism toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Several Brazilian cities, including Barcarena, Santana de Parnaíba, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro, endorsed the VLR Declaration, even as President Jair Bolsonaro rejected the scientific consensus on climate change. Their proximity to the Amazon fires underscores the urgency perceived by local leaders directly

confronting environmental impacts. Conversely, in other countries, the localization of the SDGs is actively supported by national authorities. Japan, for example, established an SDGs Promotion Headquarters in 2016, and cities such as Fukuoka, Yokohama, and Tokyo subsequently joined the Declaration. In many Scandinavian and Northern European states, SDG targets are already closely integrated with municipal competencies, rendering cities central actors in national implementation efforts. Helsinki's VLR illustrates this cooperative model: Finland's Permanent Mission to the United Nations publicly supported the process, hosted its international launch, and included Helsinki in the country's official delegation to the UN General Assembly in July 2019 (UN Habitat 2022: 24). Still, the lack of support from federal authorities should not prevent American cities from taking action and conducting voluntary local reviews within the UPR mechanism.

The letter from nearly 150 state and local officials demonstrates that the federal government's retreat from multilateral human rights mechanisms does not eliminate the United States' capacity to participate meaningfully in the UPR; instead, it redistributes that capacity to other levels of governance willing to act. Viewed against the broader context of the crisis of multilateralism, the initiative by American officials demonstrates how local actors can help sustain global accountability structures precisely when national governments withdraw from them. Notably, the VLR experience shows that cities already possess the institutional tools, administrative capacity, and international networks necessary to generate credible, evidence-based assessments of their human rights performance.

Incorporating cities into the UPR framework under the category of "other stakeholders", and recognizing their constructive role in documenting human rights conditions, monitoring implementation, and countering the centrifugal effects of federal disengagement, could allow the UPR to proceed even in the absence of State participation. In this sense, city-driven reporting is not a substitute for States but as a complementary contribution to the evolving architecture of multilevel global governance. Empowering cities to contribute structured stakeholder information when States decline to participate would strengthen the evidentiary basis of the UPR and help sustain meaningful international scrutiny while preserving its State-centered institutional architecture.

The proposal nevertheless raises legitimate questions concerning democratic representation. Stakeholder submissions prepared by one or several municipalities cannot be regarded as representative of the entire population of the State under review, particularly where participating cities differ significantly in political orientation, demographic composition, or administrative capacity. For this reason, city reports should not be understood as speaking on

behalf of the State or its entire population. Rather, they constitute one source of evidence among several already considered within the existing stakeholder framework.

5. Conclusions

This commentary argues that the UPR should proceed based on the information provided by "other stakeholders", in particular cities. Allowing cities to contribute to the UPR as stakeholders in the absence of State engagement would enable the UPR process to proceed. It would not challenge the State-centric structure of international law. Rather, it would complement it by providing additional information on the local implementation of human rights obligations. Many human rights commitments – such as housing, education, policing, or environmental protection – are implemented primarily at the municipal level. City-level reporting could therefore improve the empirical basis of the UPR while reinforcing accountability for policies that directly affect residents' everyday lives. However, it must be clarified that the role of local governments is not uniform across jurisdictions. In more centralized governance systems, municipalities typically perform predominantly administrative functions, whereas policy competencies in areas such as housing, education, policing, and environmental protection remain concentrated at the national level. As a result, the scope and value of municipal contributions to international reporting mechanisms necessarily vary across countries.

The initiative undertaken by nearly 150 American state and local officials suggests exactly such a possibility – that the UPR could proceed based on information provided by American cities and states. It represents a structurally significant development in the architecture of global human rights governance. By urging the Human Rights Council to proceed with the Universal Periodic Review notwithstanding federal non-cooperation, these actors show international accountability mechanisms do not depend exclusively on national governments. Their proposition demonstrates that the capacity to engage with multilateral institutions is not monopolized by federal authorities but may be exercised across multiple levels of governance (the objective is not statistical or democratic representation of the national population, but ensuring that the UPR continues to receive credible evidence from subnational authorities where available). In doing so, the initiative reframes the UPR not merely as an intergovernmental peer-review exercise but as a potentially multilevel accountability platform that accommodates sub-national participation within the existing "other stakeholders" framework.

Several practical steps could facilitate city participation in the UPR. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights could clarify that submissions from local governments fall within the category of "other stakeholders". Municipal associations and transnational city networks could coordinate joint submissions where appropriate. Finally, cities could integrate human rights indicators into existing sustainability reporting practices, thereby linking SDG monitoring to the UPR process. Such measures would help ensure that the mechanism remains resilient even when national governments reduce their engagement with multilateral institutions.

The broader impact of this proposition lies in its potential to mitigate the centrifugal effects of contemporary multilateral retreat. At a time when national governments are increasingly withdrawing from international commitments, the willingness of cities and state-level actors to assume reporting and dialogue functions helps preserve the UPR's practical continuity. The implementation and impact of the UPR would be far from universal, given that only a limited number of cities participate. Nevertheless, such participation would nonetheless reinforce the argument for the UPR's universal normativity, or at least its broader universal relevance.

Drawing on the precedent of Voluntary Local Reviews in the SDG context, American municipalities demonstrate that they possess both the administrative capacity and the political will to generate credible, evidence-based human rights assessments. If institutionalized, such engagement could strengthen the UPR's resilience by embedding it within a multilevel governance structure, thereby ensuring that international human rights oversight remains operational even in the face of federal disengagement. The growing involvement of cities suggests that they could play a more substantial role in sustaining the Universal Periodic Review in cases of State disengagement. Cities should therefore be viewed not as substitutes for States but as complementary contributors capable of strengthening the factual record upon which the Universal Periodic Review relies. Their growing involvement may enhance the resilience and continuity of international human rights monitoring while leaving the UPR's intergovernmental nature unchanged.

References

Brunk Wuerth, I., Hakimi, M. 2022. Russia, Ukraine, and the Future World Order. *American Journal of International Law* 116 (4): 687–697.

Chicago Climate Charter. 2017. https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/Press%20Room/Press%20Releases/2017/December/2017ChicagoClimateCharter.pdf (referenced 30 June 2026).

Durmuş, E. 2020. A typology of local governments' engagement with human rights: Legal pluralist contributions to international law and human rights. *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 38 (1): 30–54.

European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City. 2000. https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/en/european-charter-safeguarding-human-rights-city-0 (referenced 30 June 2026).

Ezer, T. 2022. Localizing Human Rights in Cities. *Review of Law and Social Justice* 31: 67–134.

Herrschel, T., Newman, P. 2017. *Cities as International Actors. Urban and Regional Governance Beyond the Nation State*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Human Rights Council. 2007. Resolution 5/1. Institution-building of the United Nations Human Rights Council, https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/e/hrc/resolutions/a_hrc_res_5_1.doc (referenced 30 June 2026).

Kaya A., Temin J. 2025. Washington's Multilateral Retreat Creates an Opening for State and Local Leaders, https://www.justsecurity.org/120345/trump-multilateral-orgs-local-leaders/ (referenced 30 June 2026).

Knop, K. 2012. International Law and the Disaggregated Democratic State: Two Case Studies on Women's Human Rights and the United States, Rapoport Center Human Rights Working Paper Series, https://law.utexas.edu/humanrights/projects/international-law-and-the-disaggregated-democratic-state/ (referenced 30 June 2026).

Lane, M., Storey, A. 2025. Opting Out of Accountability: The United States and the Implications of Withdrawal from the Universal Periodic Review, www.ejiltalk.org/opting-out-of-accountability-the-united-states-and-the-implications-of-withdrawal-from-the-universal-periodic-review (referenced 30 June 2026).

Letter from US Elected Officials to HRC Addressing Non-cooperation of the US federal government in the UPR of 8 September 2025. 2025. https://sixrepro.org/article/u-s-elected-officials-urge-un-to-continue-universal-periodic-review-upr/ (referenced 30 June 2026).

Lin, J. 2018. *Governing Climate Change. Global Cities and Transnational Lawmaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marrakesh Mayors' Declaration. Cities working together for migrants and refugees. 2018. https://migrationnetwork.un.org/resources/global-mayoral-forum-2020-marrakech-mayors-declaration-cities-working-together-migrants (referenced 30 June 2026).

OHCHR. 2025. Human Rights Council reschedules human rights review of the United States of America; regrets "non-cooperation" with UPR mechanism. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-

releases/2025/11/human-rights-council-reschedules-human-rights-review-united-states-america (referenced 30 June 2026).

Resnik, J. 2012. Comparative (in)equalities: CEDAW, the jurisdiction of gender, and the heterogeneity of transnational law production, *I Con* 10 (2): 531–550.

Swiney, C. 2020. The Urbanization of International Law and International Relations: The Rising Soft Power of Cities in Global Governance. *Michigan Journal of International Law* 41 (2): 227–78.

Szpak, A., Gawłowski, R., Modrzyńska, J., Modrzyński, P., Dahl, M. *The Role of Cities in International Relations: The Third-generation of Multilevel Governance?*, Edward Elgar Publishing (2022).

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development. nd. SDG Localization and the Voluntary Local Reviews. https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews (referenced 30 June 2026).

UN General Assembly resolution 60/251. 2006. Human Rights Council. https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n05/502/66/pdf/n0550266.pdf (referenced 30 June 2026).

UN-Habitat. 2022. Leading Locally. The Origins and Impact of the Voluntary Local Review, https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/01/vlr_legacy_report_final_2_fixed_tagging.pdf (referenced 30 June 2026).

US Congress. 2025. H.R.4 - Rescissions Act of 2025, https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/4?__cf_chl_f_tk=rZvFfuuUl1oSxIqeRj5.MD6gV.jRNJgUjCqK7xBOrbw-1782823050-1.0.1.1-duIAKUiz42fzgiYw786KW_p8xRpqwVeg2AzcTDzl254 (referenced 30 June 2026).

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 2015. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda (referenced 30 June 2026).

Universal Periodic Review. 2025. https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/upr-home (referenced 30 June 2026).