

'American Dream' quickly becoming an 'illusion,' says UN human rights expert

15 December 2017 – The number of Americans living in poverty and the already high income inequality could worsen further in the days to come, making the United States the most unequal society in the world, the United Nations expert on extreme poverty and human rights warned Friday.

"The [American Dream is rapidly becoming the American Illusion](#), as the US now has the lowest rate of social mobility of any of the rich countries," said the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, Friday, at the end of a fact finding mission to the country.

"Instead of realizing its founders' admirable commitments, today's United States has proved itself to be exceptional in far more problematic ways that are shockingly at odds with its immense wealth and its founding commitment to human rights," he added.

Assumption that poor come from minorities is wrong – UN expert

In his statement, the Mr. Alston also stated that the assumption that poor came from ethnic minority groups is not correct and in fact there are eight million more white people than African-Americans living in poverty.

"The face of poverty in America is not only black or Hispanic, but also white, Asian and many other colours," he said.

He went on to add that he was "struck" by the extent to which construed narratives about supposed distinctive differences between the rich and poor have been "sold" to the electorate by some politicians and the media.

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Special Rapporteur Philip Alston

Such misconceptions included notions that "the rich are industrious, entrepreneurial, patriotic and the drivers of economic success [while] the poor are wasters, losers and scammers," he explained.

"Despite the fact that this is contradicted by the facts, some of the politicians and political appointees with whom I spoke were completely sold on the narrative of such scammers sitting on comfortable sofas, watching colour TVs, while surfing on their smartphones, all paid for by welfare."

"I wonder how many of these politicians have ever visited poor areas, let alone spoken to those who dwell there," he noted.

Proposed policy and welfare cuts could 'essentially shred' safety nets – UN expert

Further in the statement, the Special Rapporteur also expressed the fear that proposed changes in US tax and welfare policies could have “devastating consequences” for the poorest in the country and make it the “most unequal society in the world.”

“The dramatic cuts in welfare, foreshadowed by President [Donald] Trump and [House of Representatives] Speaker [Paul] Ryan, and already beginning to be implemented by the administration, will essentially shred crucial dimensions of a safety net that is already full of holes.”

“Several administration officials told me that as far as welfare reform is concerned, states are, in Justice Louis D. Brandeis’ famous phrase, ‘laboratories of innovation.’ Recent proposals to drug-test welfare recipients in Wisconsin and West Virginia, along with Mississippi’s recent purge of its welfare rolls, raise concerns that the administration would happily look the other way while states conducted what were in essence unethical experiments on the poor.”

Mr. Alston’s final report on his US visit will be available in Spring 2018 and will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2018. The statement he delivered in Washington DC today can be [found here](#).

During his [two-week mission](#), at the invitation of the federal government, the UN expert visited California, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia and Washington, D.C., as well as Puerto Rico.

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