



The US came under sharp criticism at the UN human rights committee in Geneva on Thursday for a long list of human rights abuses that included everything from detention without charge at Guantánamo, drone strikes and NSA surveillance, to the death penalty, rampant gun violence and endemic racial inequality.

At the start of a two-day grilling of the US delegation, the committee's 18 experts made clear their deep concerns about the US record across a raft of human rights issues. Many related to faultlines as old as America itself, such as guns and race.

Other issues were relative newcomers. The experts raised questions about the National Security Agency's surveillance of digital communications in the wake of Edward Snowden's revelations. It also intervened in this week's dispute between the CIA and US senators by calling for declassification and release of the 6,300-page report into the Bush administration's use of torture techniques and rendition that lay behind the current CIA-Senate dispute.

The committee is charged with upholding the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a UN treaty that the US ratified in 1992. The current exercise, repeated every five years, is a purely voluntarily review, and the US will face no penalties should it choose to ignore the committee's recommendations, which will appear in a final report in a few weeks' time.

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