



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

April 25, 2015

The Honorable
Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 316
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser:

I am writing to you as part of the U.S. Department of State's ongoing efforts to keep officials at all levels of government informed about U.S. human rights obligations and commitments. As you know, the United States has a long and proud tradition of advancing the protection of human rights around the globe. Our country also upholds these values by protecting human rights here at home, which we achieve not only through actions taken at the federal level, but also through the dedicated efforts of state, local, insular, and tribal governments in areas such as protecting civil and political rights, combating racial discrimination, and protecting children from harms like trafficking and prostitution. We thus believe it is important to distribute broadly information regarding the U.S. government's human rights obligations and commitments and our efforts to present and defend our country's human rights record to the international community.

2014 Treaty Presentations

The United States is a party to five core human rights treaties: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); and two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). As part of our obligations under these treaties, the U.S. government must submit reports periodically to a committee of independent experts created by the terms of each of these treaties and then appear before that committee to present the report and answer questions. Over the last 12 months, the U.S. government made three such presentations in Geneva, Switzerland with respect to the following treaties: the ICCPR on March 13 and 14, 2014; the CERD on August 13 and 14, 2014; and the CAT on November 12 and 13, 2014.

These presentations were valuable opportunities to demonstrate to the world our country's commitment to protecting human rights domestically through our comprehensive system of laws, policies, and programs at all levels of government – federal, state, local, insular, and tribal. Reflecting our federal system of government, each of the U.S. delegations to these presentations featured not only senior officials from a range of federal agencies, but also elected or other high-level officials from state and local governments.

Shortly after each presentation, the respective committee issued a set of Concluding Observations & Recommendations (CORs), which presented the committee's views and recommendations on how the United States can further our implementation of the relevant treaty. Although these CORs are not legally binding, the United States carefully considers the views expressed by each committee, regardless of whether we agree with the factual or legal assertions on which they are based or whether they bear directly on obligations arising under the relevant treaty. These CORs provide constructive input from respected human rights actors in the international community and, as such, they merit consideration by officials at every level of government within the United States when taking actions or formulating and implementing policies that impact human rights.

In addition, CORs can serve as helpful reference points for consultations with civil society organizations and advocates on issues related to human rights in the United States. The federal government conducts civil society consultations in connection with the human rights treaty reporting process, which are important opportunities to receive input and feedback on ways that we can improve our implementation of human rights obligations and commitments. Similar human rights consultations could be useful at other levels of government.

The three sets of CORs from our 2014 presentations are available on the State Department website at:

ICCPR: www.state.gov/documents/organization/235641.pdf

CERD: www.state.gov/documents/organization/235644.pdf

CAT: www.state.gov/documents/organization/234772.pdf

These documents can also be found, along with a wealth of other materials regarding U.S. human rights treaties and U.S. reports and presentations related to our human rights treaty obligations, at: www.state.gov/j/drl/reports/treaties/index.htm.

Upcoming Universal Periodic Review Presentation

The U.S. government will make its next human rights related presentation as part of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, on May 11, 2015, after filing our second UPR report on February 2, 2015. Unlike the treaty reporting process, the UPR is a process applicable to every UN Member State and UPR reports are filed approximately every five years. At the May presentation, other UN member states will have the opportunity to pose questions and make recommendations to the U.S. delegation related to implementation of our human rights obligations and commitments across a broad range of issues. The UPR provides the United States with the opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made in the promotion of human rights domestically, and to continue to consider ways to improve protection of human rights in our country. The content of our presentation, and the recommendations that we receive and ultimately support, will be available online at www.humanrights.gov.

Upcoming Reports on Children and Human Rights

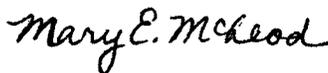
We will also soon begin drafting our next human rights treaty reports, which will provide information on U.S. implementation of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that were ratified by the United States in 2003: (1) the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and (2) the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. If you would like more information about these treaties, or if you have information relevant to your own jurisdiction's efforts to combat child trafficking, child prostitution and/or child pornography, we invite you to contact us at the email address below. We would prefer to receive any such input – which could include descriptions of programs, significant prosecutions, or relevant data – by June 1, 2015.

Many of the topics covered in this letter were addressed in my recent speech to the National Association of Attorneys General, which I invite you to read:
www.state.gov/s/l/releases/remarks/239960.htm.

As with previous letters, we encourage you to share this letter broadly with other appropriate officials within your jurisdiction, such as the Office of the Attorney General, law enforcement agencies, and the Office of Human Rights.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact us through the State Department's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs at IGA_humanrights@state.gov.

Best regards,



Mary E. McLeod
Acting Legal Adviser
U.S. Department of State

Attachment:
U.S. Human Rights Presentations in 2014-15

Cc:
U.S. Conference of Mayors
National Association of Attorneys General
International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies