

Dear IAOHRA Members,

In recent months, issues of immigration policy and border security have permeated the media, with a focus on issues of racial discrimination, citizenship status, and law enforcement. Today, we take a moment to discuss how an international human rights framework addresses discrimination based on national origin, including treatment of non-citizens and migrants (persons outside the territory of the State of which they are nationals or citizens and are often in the U.S. for work purposes).

International human rights law protects both citizens and non-citizens alike. The [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) and the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) (CERD) guarantee fundamental human rights to all persons, without distinction and expressly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of national origin, including in the right to education, housing, employment, and health. According to these treaties to which the U.S. is a party, fundamental human rights are to be enjoyed equally between citizens and non-citizens within a given territory, and governments are obligated to ensure equal treatment with respect to fundamental rights, though they have some discretion in crafting migratory policy and linking certain privileges to citizenship status (such as the right to vote or stand for elections).

State and local civil and human rights commissions can and do promote and protect the rights of communities vulnerable to discrimination on the basis of race and national origin, and a number of commissions use a human rights framework in their approach to the issue:

- ***Documenting Abuses.*** Both the [Washington State Human Rights Commission](#) and the [Michigan Civil Rights Commission](#) have written reports documenting the conditions faced by Farmworkers after holding community forums and completing in depth investigations. Both commissions uncovered discrimination based on race and national origin as well as a the lack of adequate housing, poor working conditions, insufficient wages and the lack of equal access to social services based on language. The reports highlight the indivisibility of rights and demonstrate how a lack of housing and access to services implicate the right to health and education, drawing on international human rights principles. Each report also recommends steps that commissions and other state and local agencies can take to address these issues, including meeting with stakeholders, public education campaigns, improved enforcement of existing laws and inter-agency collaboration.
- ***Public Education and Training.*** The New York City Commission on Human Rights received an education and outreach grant from Department of Justice Civil Rights Division Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices to support prevention of immigration-related discrimination in the workplace. The Commission worked with local advocacy organizations to create material (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/cchr/html/immigrants.html>) raise public awareness of workplace rights, including among employers and employees. Classes were offered in multiple languages, laying out New York and federal law, as well as ways to respond to violations by employers.

There are a number of additional ways in which your agency can work to promote and protect the rights of communities vulnerable to discrimination on the basis of national origin, including:

- Conducting public hearings in communities with large immigrant populations to develop an understanding of any problems regarding access to services or discrimination and documenting your findings.

- Producing educational materials on existing rights and obligations under local, state, federal and international law. Ensure information and resources are available in multiple languages.
- Conducting trainings among service providers, such as landlords, local officials and agency staff to ensure equal access to service and equal treatment for all members of your community, in accordance with international human rights norms.

Please let us know if you have any questions by emailing [IAOHRAoutreach@law.columbia.edu](mailto:IAOHRAoutreach@law.columbia.edu). We look forward to hearing about your work and to continue to support you in your efforts.

Sincerely yours,

Risa E. Kaufman  
Executive Director  
Columbia Law School  
Human Rights Institute

Leon Russell  
President  
International Association of  
Official Human Rights Agencies

Robin S.Toma  
Executive Director  
Los Angeles County  
Human Relations Commission