

Subject: Using the Human Rights Framework in 2010

Dear members of IAOHRA,

Happy New Year.

Building upon our December communications, we write to provide additional suggestions for ways that you can continue to raise awareness of human rights in your community throughout the year, fulfilling your commitment to take one action to use international human rights in your work.

First, we want to take a moment to thank you for your work commemorating Human Rights Day. In response to our December outreach materials, we heard from eleven IAOHRA members who took action to promote human rights on December 10th. Each celebration of Human Rights Day represents an important step toward increasing awareness of how a human rights framework can help address a wide range of problems facing many of our communities. In 2009 IAOHRA members and commissions around the country recognized the day in some of the following ways:

- **The Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission** worked with the County Board of Supervisors, who declared December 10 Human Rights Day in the County and adopted a resolution pledging support for the UDHR.
- The **Illinois Department of Human Rights** presented a forum on race & public policy, addressing racial disparities in housing, employment, healthcare, and education.
- The **Seattle Human Rights Commission** and the **Seattle Office for Civil Rights** co-sponsored an event that featured a prominent speaker and included awards to local human rights heroes.
- The **Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination** secured a Human Rights Day proclamation and publicized the event through an Op-Ed and on its website
- The Mayor and City Council of Tacoma presented a Human Rights Day proclamation to the **Tacoma Human Rights Commission** and attended the Seattle Human Rights Day event.
- The **New York State Division of Human Rights** hosted an event featuring a civil rights activist and placed an Op-Ed by its director in two newspapers in the state (in both English and Spanish).
- The **King's County Office of Civil Rights** emailed its employees about Human Rights Day, noting the connection of the UDHR to its Equity and Social Justice Initiative.
- The **Anchorage Equal Rights Commission** posted its mayoral Human Rights Day proclamation and sent a message to city employees and partners, among other outreach.
- The **City of Evansville-Vanderburgh County Human Relations Commission** celebrated at the inaugural event of the University of Southern Indiana's Center for Social Justice, where the Mayor's Human Rights Day Proclamation was read.
- The **Tennessee Human Rights Commission** placed an Op-Ed by its executive director and celebrated Human Rights Day at a ceremony including awards for advocates and human rights speakers.
- At the direction of the Topeka City Manager, the **Topeka City Departments of Human Relations and Human Resources** started the Topeka Employees Diversity Network, which celebrates differences in the workplace and will sponsor ongoing discussions to promote cultural understanding and diversity.

- **The Eugene Oregon Human Rights Commission** co-hosted a community event with the Community Coalition for Advancement of Human Rights, which included a speech by the Mayor and a human rights video by local youth.

The human rights framework can help advance your work by recognizing the interdependence of civil, political, economic and social rights, and underscoring that in order to achieve dignity, equality and freedom, every person must be able to meet his or her basic needs. This framework obligates the government to progressively create conditions under which individuals' basic needs can be met, guaranteeing certain rights—including the right to health, the right to housing and the right to education—whether or not these rights are guaranteed under federal or state laws.

The Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda will continue to advocate for reforms that will improve monitoring and implementation of human rights at the national, state, and local level, including the creation of a U.S. Commission on Civil *and Human* Rights. However, your efforts to build support and awareness for human rights at the state and local level are necessary to bring about meaningful change.

The following are examples of actions, both big and small, that you can take to raise awareness of human rights in your community:

- Write a piece for a local newspaper applying human rights to a local current event. For example, if hate crimes have become a problem in your community, discuss the right to freedom from discrimination and other relevant rights, such as the right to bodily integrity.
- Partner with local libraries to promote books on local human rights issues.
 - Develop an “Essential Human Rights Readings” list for the library to post and distribute.
 - Print human rights themed bookmarks for your library to hand out. These bookmarks could include a quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or a photograph of a local human rights advocate with a few sentences describing his or her work.
- Work with local sports teams to encourage them to speak out publicly on behalf of a local human rights issue.
- Launch a campaign to raise awareness of a human rights issue in your community, such as rights of people who are homeless, immigrants, or issues of access for people with disabilities.
- Have communities involved in creating community murals on public or private walls with human rights themes.
- Partner with local schools to encourage human rights education for youth. For example, sponsor school art and writing competitions on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Display the winning entries in a local mall or other public space, or print them in a calendar of the winning entries.
- Pass a resolution committing your commission to adhere to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in your work.
- Recognize a local human rights hero or defender through an award for his or her work.
 - *We would also like to hear about local human rights heroes from your community. Both Black History Month (February) and Women’s History Month (March) are approaching, and we ask that you send the names of individuals in your community that have used human rights to address injustices or issues of discrimination based on race or gender to IAOHRAoutreach@law.columbia.edu.*

In your email, please include the individuals' names and a brief description of the work they have done in your community.

For more information on how state and local human rights and human relations commissions can incorporate international human rights to advance equality and opportunity, please see “State and Local Human Rights Agencies: Recommendations for Advancing Opportunity and Equality Through an International Human Rights Framework,” which can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

Additionally, we want to inform you about an exciting opportunity for you to provide input on how the United States is performing against its human rights obligations, through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. In November, members of the United Nations Human Rights Council will conduct their first review of the United States, assessing its adherence to human rights obligations under international law.

The State Department has recently indicated that, as part of its participation in the UPR, it will conduct consultations in selected cities across the U.S. and that some of these consultations may be with state and local government agencies, including human rights and human relations commissions. We do not have any additional information on these consultations with state and local governments yet, but we believe that the consultations will be a chance to discuss your work as well as provide feedback and recommendations on how state and local agencies coordinate with the federal government in relation to human rights monitoring and implementation. We will keep you informed as we learn more. For general information on the UPR process, please see this [toolkit](#), prepared by the Urban Justice Center in New York.

Throughout the year we will continue to serve as a resource for using human rights in your work and to assist in developing awareness raising materials. If you have any questions or additional ideas on ways that human rights can assist your commission, you can send an email to IAOHRAoutreach@law.columbia.edu.

We look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely yours,

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