

The Human Rights at Home Campaign

What is the Human Rights at Home Campaign?

The Human Rights at Home Campaign is a coalition of approximately 50 national U.S.-based organizations that came together to support human rights at home and abroad soon after the election last year. Among them are major human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, and social justice groups.

What is the mission of the Campaign?

The Human Rights at Home Campaign is urging the Obama administration to reaffirm the United States' longstanding bipartisan commitment to human rights at home and abroad by building human rights principles into the way government operates throughout federal agencies.

What does the Campaign want?

The Campaign wants to translate our country's human rights commitments from rhetoric to reality. This will require the Administration and Congress to take concrete steps to put in place mechanisms that will enhance both coordination and accountability.

To this end, the Human Rights at Home Campaign is calling on President Obama and Congress to take a number of actions including instituting reforms at the national level to create a better system of accountability around the United States' domestic and international human rights obligations and to coordinate and support state and local efforts.

Specifically, those reforms include:

- Reconstituting and revitalizing an Interagency Working Group on Human Rights which will serve as a coordinating body among federal agencies and departments, as well as states and localities, for the promotion and respect of human rights and the implementation of human rights obligations in U.S. domestic policy; and
- Restructuring and transforming the U.S. Civil Rights Commission into a U.S. Civil *and Human Rights* Commission, thus establishing an independent and non-partisan entity that would include as part of its mandate the monitoring and promotion of the United States' domestic and international human rights obligations, including at the state and local level.

Compliance with human rights obligations requires coordination between the federal government and state and local government, agencies and institutions

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States and localities play a critical role in bring the United States into compliance with its international human rights commitments. Realization of human rights requires local decision-making, as well as strong cooperation and collaboration between local, state and federal government, and between government and civil society.

A reconstituted Interagency Working Group on Human Rights and a transformed U.S. Civil and Human Rights Commission can provide critical support for human rights compliance at the state and local level. Indeed, to be effective, they must work in close coordination with, and indeed support the work of, state and local efforts to ensure broad civil and human rights compliance, through dedicated staff, education and training, and funding.

State and local efforts to advance human rights

Many state and local governments and agencies around the country are *already* using international human rights standards to promote equality, dignity, fairness and opportunity in their communities.

There are over 150 state and local government commissions or agencies mandated by state, county or city governments to enforce human and civil rights, and/or to conduct research, training and public education and issue policy recommendations. These commissions and agencies are well positioned to advance human rights through vibrant community partnerships and a keen understanding of local communities' needs and resources. Local commissions have used human rights in many ways, for example:

- The Portland Oregon Human Rights Commission has created a complaint mechanism that engages in documenting and reporting a wide-range of potential human rights violations, including abuse to the integrity of the person, denial of an education, incidents of bias, trafficking in persons and abuse of workers' rights;
- The Washington State Human Rights Commission has begun a project to document, analyze and address the severe lack of housing for farm workers in the state;
- The Los Angeles Human Relations Commission is embarking on a campaign to address rising violence against people who are homeless, drawing on international human rights standards regarding shelter and housing;
- The San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women played an instrumental role in implementing a local ordinance that directly incorporates human rights principles and requires the city to eradicate all policies that discriminate on the basis of gender and to proactively identify barriers to the exercise of human rights.

State and local agencies and institutions can use international human rights standards and strategies to advance their work by engaging in practices that include monitoring and documenting human rights abuses, assessing local policies in light of international standards, engaging in human rights education, incorporating human rights principles into advocacy efforts and local policy, and investigating human rights complaints.

By supporting state and local efforts, through dedicated staff, education and training and funding, federal human rights mechanisms can strengthen institutional support for human rights and help ensure that the human rights

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ideals the United States was founded upon are reflected and realized at every level of government and accessible for all individuals.

For more information about the Human Rights at Home Campaign or the work it is doing to coordinate and support state and local efforts to create a better system of accountability around the United States' domestic and international human rights obligations, please contact Risa Kaufman at risa.kaufman@law.columbia.edu or 212-854-0706.

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