



May 18, 2010

INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
OF OFFICIAL
HUMAN RIGHTS
AGENCIES

Harold Hongju Koh
Office of the Legal Adviser
Room 6421
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

REPLY TO:

IAOHRA
C/O Pinellas County OHR
400 S. Ft. Harrison Ave. 5th Floor
Clearwater, Florida 33756

Dear Legal Adviser Koh,

Thank you for your recent correspondence inviting state and local human rights commissions to contribute to the US government's human rights treaty reporting efforts. We applaud your recognition of the critical role that states and localities play in implementing the United States' international human rights commitments. And we appreciate your acknowledgment of the important function that state and local human rights and human relations commissions, in particular, can play in ensuring broad human rights compliance within the United States.

Leon W. Russell
President
Clearwater, FL 33756
(727) -464-4880

Gerald Foday
First Vice President
Fort Wayne, IN 46802
(260) -427-1146

Galen Kirkland
Second Vice President
Bronx, NY 10458
(718) -741-8400

Paula M. Haley
Secretary
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 276-7474

Homer C. Floyd
Treasurer
Harrisburg, PA 17101
(717) 787-4410

James L. Stowe
Past President
Rockville, MD 20850
(240)777-8490

We are pleased that you have followed up with us after the December 1, 2009 civil society consultation at the White House Conference Center where Robin Toma, an International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA) board member, proposed this relationship to strengthen the U.S. domestic human rights infrastructure. We welcome your invitation to partner with the State Department in this effort.

As you know, given their history, mission and expertise, state and local human rights and human relations agencies are well-situated to engage in local human rights implementation. This includes helping to facilitate the United States' compliance with human rights obligations through the human rights treaty reporting process, and sharing promising and effective practices that have achieved needed institutional change in state and local education and criminal justice systems, as well as other documentation efforts.

Washington D.C. Office
444 North Capitol, N.W.
Suite 536
Washington, D.C. 20001
(202) 624-5410

Given serious resource constraints, including significant budget cuts, however, we are concerned about the ability of state and local commissions to fulfill this role without support. Federal assistance, specifically in the form of **dedicated staff, education and training, and funding**, is essential to enable commission staff to engage in reporting efforts, both for the present reports and going forward. These resources should be an essential component of a renewed Interagency Working Group on Human Rights and an enhanced U.S. Civil and Human Rights Commission, both of which should include as part of their mandate coordination and support of the efforts of states and localities to implement human rights close to home.

A District of Columbia
Nonprofit Corporation

Koh, Page 2
Cont'

Staff dedicated to liaising and coordinating with states and municipalities should be charged with soliciting input from and consulting with state and local human rights and human relations commissions and other relevant state and local agencies on reports to international and regional human rights bodies, as well as assisting in the collection of this data. Such staff should also be charged with receiving reports, suggestions, and recommendations from state and local human rights and human relations commissions, and other relevant state and local officials. Likewise, they should initiate and forward advice and recommendations to state and local commissions and other relevant state and local officials on reports received from international and regional human rights bodies.

State and local human rights agencies and commissions and their staff would also benefit from human rights training to foster awareness of governments' obligations under human rights treaties ratified by the United States, and relevant international, regional and national human rights mechanisms. Education and training for state and local commissions is essential to help to develop the commissions' understanding of the obligations that state and municipal governments are expected to undertake, to assist with data collection and analysis, and to facilitate dialogue with international and regional human rights bodies.

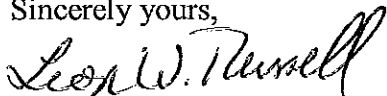
Finally, the federal government should provide financial support for state and local governments to engage in civil and human rights implementation and compliance. A federal grants program should be established to support state and local human rights agencies, as well as community based non-governmental agencies in their efforts to undertake civil and human rights education, monitoring, reporting, compliance, and enforcement efforts.

These recommendations are detailed in a 2009 report drafted by IAOHRA in collaboration with the Human Rights at Home Campaign. The report, "State and Local Human Rights Agencies: Recommendations for Advancing Opportunity and Equality Through an International Human Rights Framework," can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

As your correspondence to state and local commissions recognizes, in order to effectively strengthen institutional support for human rights, the federal government must partner with state and local agencies and institutions. Yet, state and local commissions cannot act unassisted. Through dedicated staff, education and training, and funding, the federal government can support and coordinate state and local actors, helping the US to meet its obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights for all.

We look forward to working with you in this effort.

Sincerely yours,



Leon Russell

President

International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies

cc: Lisa Crooms, *Steering Committee Chair, the Human Rights at Home Campaign*
Risa Kaufman, *Chair, State and Local Government Coordination Subcommittee,*
Human Rights at Home Campaign
Christopher Camponovo, *Senior Advisor, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of*
Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Sabeena Rajpal, *Attorney-Adviser, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Legal*
Adviser, Human Rights & Refugees
Mary Beth West, *Coordinator, U.S. ICCPR Report*