

March 21, 2013

US Human Rights Network  
250 Georgia Ave Suite 330  
Atlanta, GA 30312  
info@ushrnetwork.org

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

Today, as we join the global community in commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the undersigned organizations call on the Obama Administration to develop a National Plan of Action for Racial Justice to fully comply with its human rights obligations to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination in the United States. We call on the Obama Administration to develop this Plan of Action in consultation with communities directly affected by structural racism across the country.

Despite a strong civil rights legacy, race disparities linked to institutionalized and structural forms of racism continue to exist in almost every sphere of life in the United States. For example:

- National unemployment rates for Latinos are higher than the national average, and for African-Americans and Indigenous Peoples the rates are twice as high. These disparities are linked to employer discrimination and higher rates of incarceration, which often leads to being barred from employment.
- In the 2009-2010 school year, 74 percent of African-American students and 80 percent of Latino students attended majority minority schools, where most of their classmates are nonwhite. An outcome of the deeply segregated and racially and economically isolated American education system is severe achievement gaps between students of color and white students.
- Indigenous Peoples, African Americans, and Latinos are disproportionately incarcerated in the United States. Two-thirds of the two million prisoners in the United States are African-American or Latino. The disparities can be linked to improper policing practices like racial profiling. Drug policy and drug sentencing also contribute by disproportionately targeting African Americans and Latinos.

- African Americans, Latinos, Indigenous Peoples, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders experience adverse health outcomes at higher rates than white Americans. Health disparities and poor health outcomes are driven by the lack of access to quality health insurance.

- People of color and Indigenous Peoples are also more likely to live near hazardous waste facilities with nearly half of all people of color in the United States living within less than two miles of a hazardous waste facility.

- Since 2011, a new wave of threats to voting rights has emerged. Restrictive voting laws like those requiring voters to present identification to vote have a disproportionate impact on people of color, who are less likely to have government-issued identification often due to cost.

Civil rights laws and agencies have not effectively addressed structural racism and the large disparities it produces in how groups experience institutions such as the justice system, schools, hospitals, and social services. In addition, recent court decisions have undermined some important aspects of civil rights legislation. A comprehensive plan is needed to address the historical legacy of racism in the U.S. and persistent contemporary forms of racial discrimination and race disparities.

Under the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the United States has a human rights obligation to address structural racism comprehensively. Despite having ratified this important treaty almost 20 years ago, human rights continues to be an underutilized tool for eliminating racial discrimination in the United States. We urge this Administration to meet its obligations and comply with the recommendations from several entities of the United Nations over the past five years to create a national strategy for advancing racial justice. Specifically, the 2008 ICERD recommendation that called for “implementation of national strategies or plans of actions aimed at the elimination of structural racism,”<sup>i</sup> and the recommendation from the 2010 Universal Periodic Review to adopt “a comprehensive national work-plan to combat racial discrimination.”<sup>ii</sup>

This year, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and the many achievements of the Civil Rights Movement, we encourage this Administration to take bold leadership on this issue by adopting a National Plan of Action for Racial Justice. The time to act is now.

Sincerely,

Ejim Dike  
Executive Director  
US Human Rights Network

National and Local Organizations Signed On to This Letter

2025 Network for Black Men and Boys

9to5

9to5 Atlanta

American-Arab Anti Discrimination Committee: Michigan

Advocates for Environmental Human Rights

Advocates for Human Rights  
Advocates for Youth  
African American Human Rights Foundation  
Alaska Community Action on Toxics  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)  
American Friends Service Committee  
Amigos Multicultural Services Center  
AntiRacist Alliance  
Asian Law Caucus  
Benroe Housing Initiatives  
Big Apple Playback Theatre  
Black Alliance for Just Immigration  
Black Left Unity Network  
Black Women's Blueprint  
Black Workers for justice  
Boston Public Health Commission  
buxtun.hellerproject  
Center for Community Alternatives  
Center for Participatory Change  
Center for Reproductive Rights  
Center for the Human Rights of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry  
Center For Third World Organizing  
Center for Urban Transformation  
Center for Women's Global Leadership  
Champaign Urbana Area Project  
ChangeLab  
Chicago Anti Eviction Campaign  
Chicago Grassroots Curriculum Taskforce  
Chicago independent Human Rights Council  
Child Welfare Organizing Project  
Cidadao Global  
Coastal Women for Change  
Colorado Criminal Defense Bar  
Color of Change  
Consortium of Hispanic Agencies  
Crossing Borders  
Denver Justice & Peace Committee  
Desiree Alliance  
Direct Action Welfare Group (DAWG)  
East Bay Saturday Dialogues  
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights  
Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)  
FDA GLOBE

Freedom Archives  
Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty  
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance  
Gray Panthers Association of California Networks  
Housing is a Human Right  
Human Rights Institute, Columbia Law School  
humansynergyworks.org  
Indigenous Environmental Network  
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti  
International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA)  
International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD)  
International Human Rights Clinic at Santa Clara University School  
International Indian Treaty Council (IITC)  
Iowa City Jericho Movement  
It Takes a Village  
Junta for Progressive Action  
Kwame Nkrumah Academy  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
League of United Latin American Citizens Council 4994  
The Libra Foundation  
Local to Global Advocates for Justice  
Los Angeles Community Action Network  
Los Angeles Human Right to Housing Collective  
Maine People's Alliance  
Malcolm X Center for Self Determination  
Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance (MIRA)  
Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights  
MonaArt  
Montana Human Rights Network  
Mount Hermon Missionary Baptist Church  
Mt. Sinai Medical Center  
National Conference of Black Lawyers  
National Domestic Workers Alliance, Atlanta Chapter  
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)  
National Jericho Movement  
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty  
National Lawyers Guild  
Northeast Iowa Peace & Justice Center, Inc.  
New Jim Crow  
New Mexico Environmental Law Center  
New Hampshire Lesbians for Racial Justice

Northern Alaska Environmental Center  
NYC Jericho Movement  
Ohio Justice and Policy Center  
Organization for Black Struggle  
People's Institute for Survival and Beyond  
Police Reform Organizing Project  
Poverty and Race Research Action Council (PRRAC)  
Queer B.O.I.S.  
Rights Working Group  
Rockland Council on Alcoholism and Other Drug Dependence  
San Francisco Living Wage Coalition  
Seattle Office for Civil Rights  
The Sentencing Project  
SisterNet  
Southern Anti-Racism Network  
Southern Human Rights Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, Inc.  
Survivors Village New Orleans  
TBA Magazine  
Tonatierra  
Topenga Peace Alliance  
Trinity UCC-Gary  
The Umoja Committee  
Union de Vecinos  
United Confederation of Taino People  
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America  
University Sin Fronteras  
Urban Justice Center  
Vermont Workers Center  
VOCAL-NY  
Volunteering Counseling Service  
West End Revitalization Association  
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance  
Wyoming Criminal Justice Association

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<sup>i</sup> Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: United States of America, CERD/C/USA/CO/6, February 2008.

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<sup>ii</sup> Recommendation #92.111 made by the government of Qatar: “Adopt a comprehensive national work-plan to combat racial discrimination.” Canada, Australia, Brazil, and other countries have adopted national action plans to address racial discrimination.