

PRRAC

Poverty & Race Research Action Council

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March 21, 2010: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Policy Statement

On this occasion, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, it is time to recognize the United States government's work to mend a broken promise; a promise to govern with a human rights lens. Under the Obama Administration, the U.S. has taken its place among nations in Human Rights Council and is increasingly participating in United Nations governance structures. The US is increasingly engaging in more efforts to respect the principles of human rights, a shift in US foreign policy that is just in time for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The ultimate goal of the UPR is the improvement of compliance in every country with respect to human rights treaty obligations and international law. In 2008, the United States underwent review by the United Nations to examine its human rights record on racial discrimination and implementation of the treaty on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which it ratified in 1984. The Committee found that wide racial disparities continue to plague the United States despite strong civil rights protections and suggested concrete ways the United States could improve its record. Specifically, the Committee made recommendations with regards to housing, education and health, among other areas.

Progress on the CERD committee's recommendations will be reviewed once again in December of 2010 under the UPR process. It is our hope that the UPR committee will seize upon the previous recommendations and strongly recommend that the US government act upon its failures to comply with current international human rights treaties.

The United States has undoubtedly made great strides in the decades since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, markedly the election of President Obama is a sign of progress but contemporary forms of racial discrimination continue to create a society highly segregated, unequal and with few protections under the law for these new forms of discrimination.

The decline of human rights is obvious—more poverty, persistent disparities in education, housing, and health— creating a state of low human development within a highly developed nation. The economic crisis is felt by all Americans but has had a particularly crippling impact on Black families. The last four years has resulted in the largest loss of land ownership among African-Americans since the end of the reconstruction period. Capital loss is curtailing the ability of Black families for economic stability and furthering the wealth gap that already exists. The National Council of Negro

Women's recent report identified the striking disparities that African American women faced in high-cost lending practices. The unemployment rate in the African American community rivals the great depression's average but for black men it's the top of the scale.

These disparities are not isolated to African American communities. The poverty rate of Native Americans in these certain counties is 41 percent, a level greater than that of the dominant minority in other types of high-poverty counties. Native American counties not only have higher incidence of poverty, they also had the highest proportion in deep poverty. Migrant workers and certain immigrant groups are also prone to marginalization and discrimination.

However, there are several policy measures which must and should be taken under the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. PRRAC is asking the government to act specifically in the following ways:

1. In response to the CERD Committee's 2008 Concluding Observations, ¶16, the federal government should reorient its assisted housing programs to dismantle housing segregation – by incorporating strong civil rights requirements in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, targeting Section 8 housing vouchers to low poverty, high opportunity communities, and reestablishing strong site selection requirements in all HUD housing development programs, including the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative. A detailed agenda for reform is set out in the December 2008 Final Report of the bipartisan National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, www.civilrights.org/publications/reports/fairhousing/.
2. In response to CERD Committee's 2008 Concluding Observations, ¶17, the federal government should incorporate a goal of racial and economic integration into all of its school funding programs, including both incentives and requirements for states and local districts to reduce racial isolation and poverty concentration in K-12 education. The National Coalition on School Diversity has set out a ten-point agenda for implementing this goal; see www.prrac.org/pdf/schooldiversitystatement.pdf.
3. The federal government should acknowledge the substantial role of concentrated poverty and neighborhood distress in contributing to minority health disparities in the U.S., and develop targeted public health interventions to reduce these impacts, including both neighborhood improvement strategies and voluntary relocation options for children with physical or mental health problems that could be ameliorated by moving to a healthier neighborhood environment.

Reduction of racial disparities in poverty, education, health, and housing are essential to a healthy democracy and vibrant economy. In addition, the USHRN is calling on the Obama administration to put forth a concrete National Plan of Action on Racial Discrimination. A Plan of Action will allow for concrete and measurable progress in

reducing disparities and promote a more proactive and systemic approach to policy. Trillions of dollars have been spent to activate the economy and those dollars should have an impact in creating a more equitable society. In line with developed nations around the globe, a National Plan of Action on Racial Discrimination is not only an obligation under ICERD, it is long overdue.