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,” and the recommendation from the 2010 Universal Periodic Review to adopt “a comprehensive national work-plan to combat racial discrimination.”

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

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.