

SUBJECT: CELEBRATING YOUR EFFORTS TO BRING HUMAN RIGHTS HOME ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Dear IAOHRA Members,

Happy Human Rights Day!

This anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights offers a welcome opportunity to celebrate the fundamental idea that all people are born equal in dignity and rights. It is also a time to take stock of how these rights are respected in our own backyard.

Many IAOHRA members are honoring this day through local commemorations. Today, we want to take a moment to celebrate each of you as human rights heroes. Just this week, President Obama underscored [that income inequality is the defining challenge of our time](#). Your daily work is essential to addressing this challenge by combatting discrimination and fostering equality in your communities

This August, 50 years after the March on Washington many of gathered at the annual IAOHRA conference to reflect on where we are now and where we are going. The conference focused on critical human rights issues, including housing, equitable development and employment. We also had the opportunity to explore concrete strategies to incorporate international human rights standards into local policy and hear examples from Eugene, Oregon and Salt Lake City, Utah, among others. At the conference we shared [a joint IAOHRA and HRI report, recently submitted to the United Nations](#), which highlights promising human rights strategies from many of your agencies.

We are also excited to report that IAOHRA adopted five resolutions, all reaffirming the core values found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including ensuring equal voting rights for all, eliminating racial profiling, proactively addressing the root causes of discrimination and advancing racial justice.

Two resolutions explicitly connected your daily work to international human rights principles, and can serve as a guide for your actions in the upcoming year. As in recent years, the IAOHRA membership adopted a resolution to promote and encourage a broader understanding of international human rights. This resolution signaled a commitment to take at least one action to incorporate international human rights standards locally, in collaboration with other state and local government actors.

IAOHRA also adopted a resolution to promote the civil and human rights of homeless persons, including through homeless bills of rights. Through this resolution, IAOHRA recognized that efforts to criminalize homelessness, such as penalizing basic life-sustaining activities and disparate enforcement of laws against homeless people, violate our international human rights obligations. Further, the membership resolved to affirm the human rights of homeless

individuals through homeless bills of rights, and to promote the human right to adequate housing, and other constructive solutions to homelessness.

Notably, both of these resolutions align with commitments of the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM), and offer opportunities to partner with mayors. In 2013, the USCM similarly adopted resolutions committing to promote international human rights and to enhance efforts to address homelessness, including through recommendations laid out in the 2012 report by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and Department of Justice, [Searching Out Solutions](#).

HRI looks forward to continuing a strong partnership with IAOHRA and working with member agencies to advance international human rights principles in these and other ways. We have detailed a number of promising human rights strategies that agencies already using in several reports, available [here](#) and [here](#). We are thrilled to work with you in your efforts to bring human rights home in your community.

You can contact JoAnn Kamuf Ward at jward@law.columbia.edu with any questions.

Happy Human Rights Day.

Sincerely yours,

JoAnn Kamuf Ward
Associate Director
Human Rights in the US Project
Columbia Law School, Human Rights Institute

Jean Kelleher
President
International Association of
Official Human Rights Agencies