



Expanding Opportunity for All

Promoting US Compliance with the International Convention Against Racial Discrimination

This memo provides advice on talking with journalists and other general audiences about US compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Opinion research shows that Americans embrace the concept of human rights at home as an important set of societal values. They also believe strongly that equal opportunity based on race and freedom from racial discrimination are fundamental human rights. At the same time, however, most Americans have no knowledge of the international system, have little faith in the United Nations, and are wary of international treaties as a potential threat to US sovereignty. Many also question whether racial discrimination is a serious problem today, and may be uncomfortable talking about race. These concerns can sometimes prevent audiences from hearing messages about race and human rights with which they might otherwise agree.

To overcome these barriers, we recommend that communications about race and human rights:

- Lead with shared *values* of Opportunity and Equality;
- Provide ample evidence of discrimination and inequality in practical terms;
- Always include *solutions*, and explain that addressing racial discrimination creates a better country for all of us;
- Focus on *systemic* problems and examples of racial bias, rather than individual bigotry;
- Avoid jargon, discussing the treaty in simple terms and emphasizing US participation and agreement.

The Values: Opportunity and Equality.

Opportunity is the deeply held American value that everyone deserves a fair chance to reach his or her full potential. Rooted in this value is *Equality*, the notion that access to the benefits, responsibilities, and burdens of our society should not depend on what we look like or where we come from. Equal Opportunity does not mean treating people identically, but treating them as equals—with fairness and dignity. Opinion research shows broad agreement with those principles.

The Message: We can and must do better.

One way to stay “on message” is to communicate in terms of **Value, Problem, Solution, and Action**:

- The color of your skin shouldn’t affect the opportunity that you have in our society. That’s a basic American belief, and it’s recognized at home and abroad as a fundamental human right.
- But, despite the progress we’ve made as a nation, racial bias and discrimination continue to deny opportunity to millions of Americans.
 - For example, a study by Princeton University showed that Black and Latino job applicants in New York City are much less likely to be called back for a job than are white applicants *with the same qualifications*—in fact white applicants with a criminal record had a better chance of a call-back than black applicants with no criminal record.
- The Convention Against Racial Discrimination is part of America’s promise to protect equal opportunity for everyone, and experts around the country have found that’s just not happening today. But we can and must do better.

www.opportunityagenda.org

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America.*

New York
568 Broadway
Suite 302
New York, NY 10012
Tel: 212.334.4202
Fax: 212.334.2656

Washington, DC
2000 Florida Avenue NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: 202.387.2829 ext. 101
Fax: 301.576.5780



- We're calling, for example, on New York's Human Rights Commission to step up investigation of employment discrimination, to take enforcement action where laws are broken, and to assist employers who want to do the right thing. That will help create a more just and prosperous city for *all* New Yorkers, and can become a model for the nation.

We recommend using terms like the “Convention Against Racial Discrimination” rather than “CERD,” which most audiences will not understand, and explaining the convention process in terms of America’s promise to our nation and the world:

- Americans overwhelmingly believe in equal opportunity; in a recent survey 85% percent of Americans said that equal treatment regardless of race is a *human right*. The US signed and ratified the Convention Against Discrimination along with almost every other country in the world to protect that human right.
- This year, it's the United States' turn to report to Americans and the world what it's doing to protect against racial discrimination here at home. But the Bush Administration's report is misleading and incomplete—the picture it paints for the world doesn't mention the significant discrimination and inequality that the US has failed to address.
 - For example, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development found that African-American, Latino, and Asian-American homeseekers continue to face significant housing discrimination around the country—and that's bad for all of us. HUD found white renters were consistently favored over blacks 21% of the time. And non-Hispanic whites were favored over Hispanics 25% of the time. In sales, whites were favored over blacks 17% of the time; and non-Hispanic whites were favored over Hispanics 19% of the time.
 - Research also shows that communities of color are more likely to face predatory sub-prime loans, even when their income level is the same as white communities.
 - Yet the current Administration has *reduced* its efforts to enforce racial anti-discrimination laws.
- One way to keep tabs on our government's efforts is to track its progress under the treaty. So independent US experts prepare a report to the U.N. that examines that progress, and describes where the government's falling short. It's called a “shadow report” because it provides a reality check on the official government story from independent experts.
- This year's shadow report also recommends *concrete solutions*, like updating our nation's human rights laws to prevent subtle racial bias from seeping into our health care system and criminal justice system—which research shows is happening now. Cities, states, and our federal government have to step up their investigation and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in employment, housing, education, voting, and other pathways to opportunity.

The Opportunity Agenda is a communications, research, and advocacy organization dedicated to building the national will to expand opportunity in America. The Opportunity Agenda is a project of the Tides Center. Visit us at www.opportunityagenda.org.

www.opportunityagenda.org

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America.*

New York
568 Broadway
Suite 302
New York, NY 10012
Tel: 212.334.4202
Fax: 212.334.2656

Washington, DC
2000 Florida Avenue NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: 202.387.2829 ext. 101
Fax: 301.576.5780