



United States Mission to the OSCE

Working Session 3

The international covenants on human rights and their importance for the OSCE human dimension (continued)

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Kozak, Head of Delegation
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Seventy-five years ago, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his famous Four Freedoms speech. He said that liberty rested on “freedom of speech and expression, freedom to worship, freedom from fear, and freedom from want.” He identified freedom of speech and freedom to worship as core civil and political rights. He defined “freedom from fear” as a worldwide reduction in armaments to such a point that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression. With the phrase “freedom from want,” Roosevelt linked the liberty of people with their basic economic and social wellbeing.

The phrase “freedom from want” is not explicitly mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. But concern about the economic wellbeing of the American populace is deeply embedded in our nation’s history and culture. In the Preamble to the Constitution, the Framers aimed to “promote the general welfare.” At the same time, they sought to avoid giving the national government plenary powers over the economic and social issues. That is why, from our earliest days, state laws and constitutions sought to promote our people’s economic security. The American Dream is predicated on the belief that allowing individuals to flourish is the best way for our nation to flourish.

The United States is not a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in part because of concerns that the Federal government not undertake obligations that involve powers reserved to the states. But in accordance with our Federal system, we ask to be judged by results. We have taken steps to provide for the economic, social, and cultural rights, and we work to progressively realize them through a political system based on representative democracy. The United States believes that where governments respect peaceful assembly and the freedoms of expression, association, and religion or belief, they do the most for their people. Our domestic agencies carry out their policy mandates every day to improve the wellbeing of the American people.

The Environmental Protection Agency is currently seeking to strengthen implementation of the Safe Drinking Water Act regulations. It is working to strengthen protections against lead in drinking water, and address the challenges posed by emerging and unregulated contaminants. In developing this plan, the EPA has made civil society engagement a priority. It has hosted several engagements with states, tribes and local governments, drinking water utilities, and public health, environment, and community organizations.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development enforces the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits all forms of housing-related discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, or because you have children.

In 2010, the United States set an ambitious agenda to reduce all forms of homelessness within the decade, and to reduce homelessness among veterans by the end of 2015. Since then, the United States has achieved an 11% reduction in homelessness nationwide. This includes a 22% decrease in chronic homelessness; a 19% decline in homelessness among families; and a 47% drop in homelessness among veterans.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development is also helping communities address homelessness without criminalizing it affording technical assistance and financial resources. The Department's "housing first" approach has an effective federal response to homelessness in our cities.

The U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces several federal laws prohibiting discrimination in compensation, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes unlawful a wide range of discriminatory employment practices, including pay discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibits sex-based wage discrimination between men and women if they work in the same establishment and perform jobs that require substantially equal skill, effort, and responsibility under similar working conditions.

With the assistance of the U.S. Department of Education, the United States currently has the highest high school graduation rate we've ever had. The United States is closing gaps between our African-American students, our Latino students, our Native American students, and their white and Asian peers. Many, many more students with disabilities are earning high school diplomas. There are one million more African-American and Latino students in college today than in the beginning of 2009.

The United States strongly encourages all States to work to meet the economic, social and cultural needs of their people as we are working to do in our country.