



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will  
to Expand Opportunity in America*

# *Talking Human Rights in the United States* A Communications Toolkit

Tips, tools, and techniques for building public support  
to uphold human rights at home.

# About The Opportunity Agenda

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2004 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds, and policy over time, the organization works with social justice groups, leaders, and movements to advance solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and corresponding solutions, uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion, and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives. To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda, go to our website at [www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org).

# Acknowledgments

This guide was made possible in part by grants from the Oak Foundation and the U.S. Human Rights Fund at Public Interest Projects (PIP). General operating grants from the Ford Foundation and the Starry Night Fund at Tides Foundation, and project grants from The Overbrook Foundation and The Libra Foundation, also helped support this effort. Earlier support from Tides Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), *The Nation*, and the Mertz Gilmore Foundation helped lay the foundation for the public opinion research on which the guide was based. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

We would also like to thank the following individuals who served on the Advisory Committee for the research upon which this publication is based and generally guided our thinking about human rights messaging.

CATHERINE ALBISA, National Economic and Social Rights Initiative

ISABEL ALEGRIA, California Immigrant Policy Center

SONAL AMBEGAOKAR, National Immigration Law Center

KATRINA ANDERSON, Center for Reproductive Rights

JUDY APPELBAUM, American Constitution Society

AJAMU BARAKA, US Human Rights Network

CAROLINE BETTINGER-LOPEZ, Columbia Law School

CARROLL BOGERT, Human Rights Watch

HEIDI BOISVERT, Breakthrough

MATISSE BUSTOS HAWKES, Witness

LISA CROOMS, Howard University

JAMIL DAKWAR, ACLU

EJIM DIKE, Human Rights Project, Urban Justice Center

JASON DISTERHOFT, Amnesty International USA

FRANK DONAGHUE, Physicians for Human Rights

MALLIKA DUTT, Breakthrough

DAVID FATHI, Human Rights Watch, United States Program

GWEN FITZGERALD, Amnesty International USA

FERNANDO GARCIA, Border Network for Human Rights

LUCAS GUTTENTAG, ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project

DALIA HASHAD, Amnesty International USA

ANA HERNANDEZ, Causes in Common at the LGBT Community Center in New York

STEVE HITOV, National Health Law Program

MARGARET HUANG, Rights Working Group

AZIZ HUQ, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law

JONATHAN HUTSON, Physicians for Human Rights

JODY KENT, The National Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth

RISA KAUFMAN, Human Rights Institute at Columbia Law

KAMI KRUCKENBERG, Poverty & Race Research Action Council

MITCH MARR, North Dakota Human Rights Coalition

JEN NESSEL, Center for Constitutional Rights

ALISON PARKER, Human Rights Watch

CATHERINE POWELL, Fordham Law School Human Rights Project

LORETTA ROSS, SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective

ANJA RUDIGER, National Economic and Social Rights Institute Initiative

LEONARD RUBENSTEIN, Physicians for Human Rights

DOUG SCHENKLEBERG, Heartland Alliance For Human Needs & Human Rights

BILL SCHULZ, Center for American Progress

RESHMA SHAMASUNDER, California Immigrant Policy Center

MICHAEL SHELLENBERGER, The Breakthrough Institute

LARRY SIEMS, Pen American Center

CYNTHIA SOOHOO, Center for Reproductive Rights

PHILIP TEGELER, Poverty & Race Research Action Council

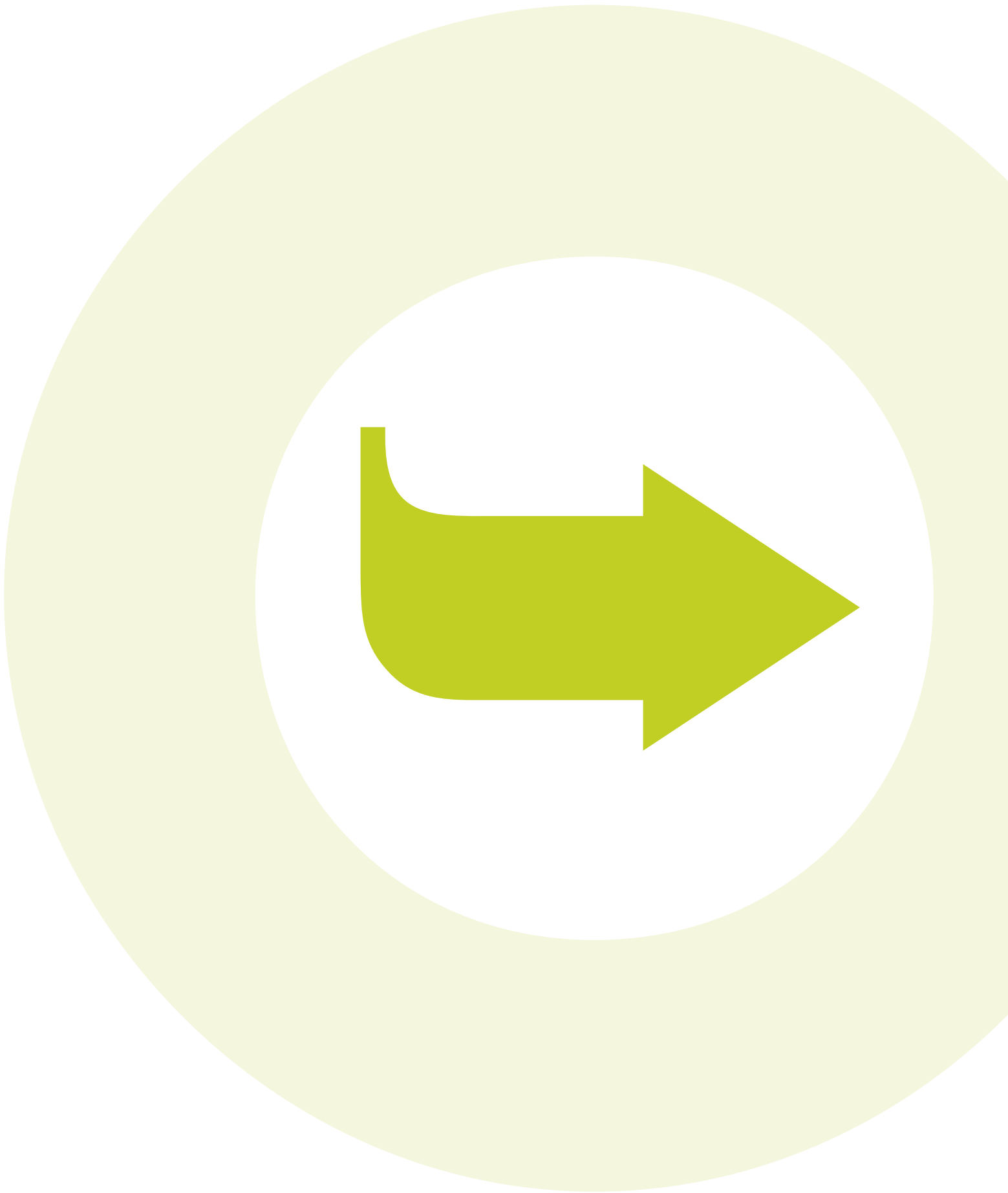
MAKANI THEMBA-NIXON, The Praxis Project

JOANN KAMUF WARD, Human Rights Institute

VINCENT WARREN, Center for Constitutional Rights

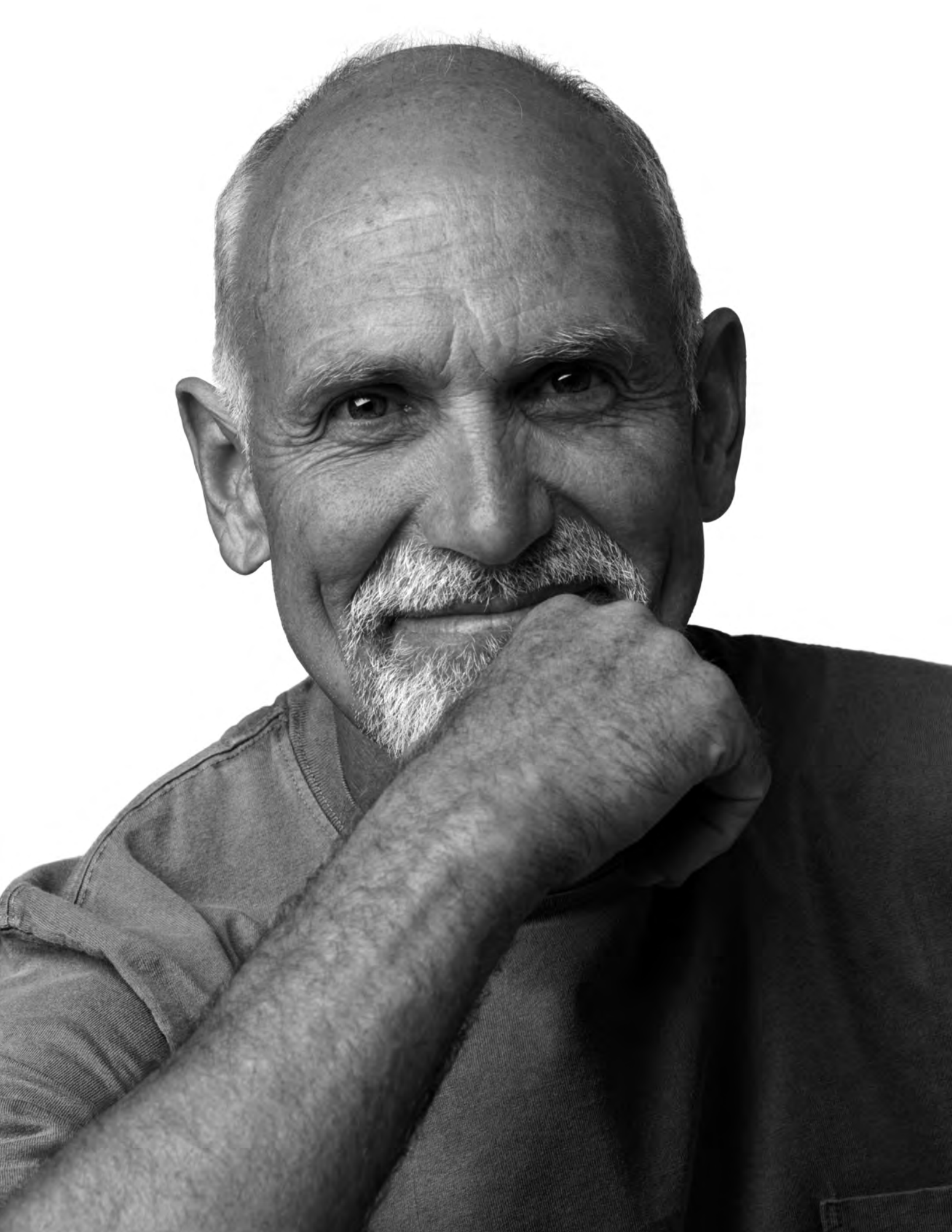
PHIL WIDER, National Economic and Social Rights Institute Initiative

Thanks also to Kate Stewart of Belden Russonello & Stewart, who oversaw the poll and focus groups, and to Loren Siegel for her work in building the foundation for the ongoing human rights work that supports this publication.



# Table of Contents

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>  | <b>5</b> |
| Human Rights and Social Justice  | 6        |
| How to Use This Toolkit  | 7        |
| About the Research   | 7        |
| <br><b>SECTION I - Strategy, Framing, and Talking Points</b>                 |          |
| General Messaging and Framing Guidance                                       | 9        |
| Target Audiences   | 11       |
| Human Rights Messaging   | 14       |
| Social Justice Issues and Human Rights at a Glance                           | 16       |
| International Human Rights Treaties  | 16       |
| Health Care  | 20       |
| Life Without the Opportunity for Parole for Young People                     | 25       |
| Racial Profiling   | 30       |
| Due Process  | 35       |
| Immigration  | 40       |
| <br><b>SECTION II - Media Tools, Guidance, and Samples</b>                   |          |
| Working With Reporters   | 47       |
| Choosing Spokespeople  | 48       |
| Press Releases   | 50       |
| Letters to the Editor  | 52       |
| Op-Eds   | 54       |
| Online Strategies  | 57       |
| News Hook Calendar   | 60       |
| <br><b>SECTION III - Public Opinion on Human Rights in the United States</b> |          |
| 2007 Focus Groups and Survey   | 64       |
| Social Justice Advocates Interviews and Survey                               | 66       |
| Policymaker Interviews   | 66       |
| 2009 Message Testing Focus Groups  | 66       |
| <br>Select Resources   | 67       |
| Conclusion   | 72       |



# Introduction

Human rights are among society's most powerful ideals.

The notion that all people have rights, simply by virtue of their humanity, has spawned new nations, inspired countless freedom movements, and transformed the relationship between people and their governments in places big and small around the globe.

Human rights represent, at once, a set of values; a system of laws and enforcement mechanisms; and a dynamic, growing movement. They embody the values of dignity, fairness, equality, and opportunity necessary to a just society and an empowered populace. Beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they represent the world's explicit agreement as to those protections that are crucial to our humanity. They are concretized through domestic laws and international treaties, monitoring, and enforcement bodies. And as an organizing principle and policy approach, they inspire social justice movements to achieve transformative change.

After years of dormancy, human rights are coming home to the United States today, in each of those respects. Americans strongly support the ideals of human rights across a range of issues and policies, from health care to due process to freedom from discrimination. Federal and state policymakers and courts are increasingly recognizing the relevance of international human rights principles to domestic law and policy. And a rising tide of U.S. social justice advocates and organizations are using human rights as both rallying cry and policy goal. Over the last decade, the human rights approach has contributed to impressive victories, from the nationwide abolition of the death penalty for young people, to equitable public health protections in Connecticut, to anti-poverty efforts in Illinois, to women's rights guarantees in California.

At the same time, however, there is public misinformation, resistance, and even backlash in some quarters against certain human rights issues. Despite the resonance of human rights values among the public, Americans are unfamiliar with the international human rights system, skeptical about international bodies, and hesitant about the implications of enforcing some rights aggressively. And different groups of Americans have different concerns, different perceptions, and different levels of openness to a human rights message.

At this crucial moment, it's important that we get it right when it comes to human rights communications. Leading with the most resonant values, language, facts, and arguments, and targeting the appropriate audiences, will be crucial to motivating our base of human rights supporters while convincing "persuadables"—people who could be reliably with us but are not yet in our camp. This toolkit is intended to provide concrete advice and examples for achieving that goal.



## HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

At The Opportunity Agenda, our mission is building the national will to expand opportunity in America. We believe that respect for the full range of human rights—economic, social, cultural, civil, and political—is crucial to fulfilling that mission.

In other resources and publications, we have offered recommendations for communicating other, related social justice themes, including an inclusive *Opportunity Frame*, subthemes such as the value of *Community*, and specific narratives on issues such as immigration or racial equity. Although these resources can stand alone, they also fit together with this toolkit to help advocates and spokespeople promote a comprehensive social justice vision.

For us, human rights are a crucial part of opportunity for all. For other readers, human rights may represent the defining principle from which other themes and goals flow. Still others may seek the best way to persuade the public on a particular rights issue, whether or not human rights play a visible role in their communications. In order to support as broad an array of advocates and spokespeople as possible, this toolkit provides recommendations for advancing support for human rights principles and for promoting specific policies and outcomes that are crucial to upholding our human rights.





## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit offers ideas, recommendations, and best practices for promoting human rights in the United States through media and other communications. The suggestions included here are rooted in a large body of opinion and media research; in established communications techniques; and in the shared experience of hundreds of advocates, policymakers, and communications strategists. We hope readers will use this collective knowledge to build greater understanding and support for human rights at home and abroad, creating a more just society and world for us all.

The opinion and communications research that underlies our recommendations explored a variety of topics:

- Are target audiences open to understanding the issue as a human rights issue?
- What's the most effective *human rights* argument for persuading audiences on the issue?
- If human rights messaging is not effective (or is counterproductive), what other messaging approaches might better persuade audiences to embrace a policy solution that would, in practice, uphold the right in question?

The toolkit includes advice along each of those parallel tracks. In many cases, readers will find that leading with alternate themes, such as the opportunity for rehabilitation or workable solutions, can open the door to more detailed discussions that introduce human rights explicitly to skeptical audiences.

This toolkit is also designed for readers to use in modules. For those looking for quick tips or language, the At a Glance section within each issue area provides short and easy-to-find advice and sample language. For those wishing more context, we have also included longer explanations; summaries of the research; framing and messaging overviews; and longer examples of messaging.

Although this version of the toolkit is printed, we consider the development of strategies around human rights messaging to be an ongoing process. To that end, we will continue to produce tools and resources, most of which will be available at our website. In this ongoing work, we hope to continue to learn from you, our readers, and ask you to share your experience and advice with us. You can submit your experiences communicating about human rights at our website ([www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org)), or by e-mailing us at [partners@opportunityagenda.org](mailto:partners@opportunityagenda.org).

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The public opinion research on which much of the guidance presented here was based comprised a series of focus groups with persuadable audiences, interviews with and a survey of social justice advocates, interviews with state policymakers, and a national poll. It was conducted over a three-year period from 2007 to 2009, culminating with focus groups that tested messages around the issues covered in this toolkit: health care, racial profiling, the sentencing of young people to life without parole, due process, and immigration. See Section 3 for a full description of this work. Unless otherwise cited, the research referenced here can be found at [www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org) or, as in the case of the 2009 Message Testing Focus Groups, by emailing [partners@opportunityagenda.org](mailto:partners@opportunityagenda.org).



# SECTION I:

# Strategy, Framing, and Talking Points

## GENERAL MESSAGING AND FRAMING GUIDANCE

We often talk about “framing” or “reframing” the debate on social issues. But what exactly does that mean? And how can it promote support for human rights? Framing is the idea that communications—whether in a news story, a speech, an op-ed, or a water cooler conversation—carry implicit values, stories, and world views that shape the terms of debate and determine whether problems and solutions are part of the conversation. Framing taps into stories that we carry in our heads, with heroes, villains, morals, causes, and solutions.

Framing or reframing a debate takes time, repetition, and “message discipline.” It does not mean that we should all mindlessly mouth the exact same words or avoid answering tough questions honestly. But it does mean that all of our communications should carry common values and themes.

Human rights are just such a theme. By consistently calling up the values represented by a human rights approach, we can start to reframe a number of debates in favor of upholding human rights for all. Identifying those values and developing messages and stories that showcase them are key strategies to shaping the national dialogue.

As we work to start a conversation about human rights, it’s important to understand the barriers and opportunities identified through public opinion research and on-the-ground experience. It’s unlikely that we can immediately or dramatically change the frame of a particular argument in favor of a human rights frame if our audiences currently do not connect the issue to human rights. That’s why it’s encouraging that audiences *are* receptive to talking about due process, health care, racial profiling, and some other issues in specific human rights terms. It’s also why we need to open conversations about other issues, such as immigration and sentencing youth to life without parole, with care and build more slowly toward an understanding of how they intersect with human rights.

Promoting values, concerns, and solutions in the public discourse is a long-term effort. Successful narratives about civil rights and environmentalism, for example, took decades to establish. We now know enough about how key audiences receive human rights messages to start strategically shaping a HUMAN RIGHTS NARRATIVE.

## Messaging Questions

Some useful questions to consider when building a message include the following:

### What values are central to the issue and motivate audiences?

Communications research shows that audiences are more receptive to unfamiliar arguments when they are framed within the context of shared values. If a litany of facts and arguments are presented that somehow conflict, or appear to conflict, with an audiences' core values, the audience will often disregard the facts. It is therefore essential to tie arguments to universal values that matter to members of persuadable audiences. It is also important to talk about how upholding those values is important to all of us and to creating the society we want.

### Who does the narrative suggest is responsible for implementing solutions?

Many stories focus on the plight of individuals. It's an easy and often compelling way to make a point about a certain issues. But research shows that an exclusive focus on such stories inadvertently suggests to audiences that people should solve the bulk of their problems themselves, without outside intervention or support. Instead of an inclusive health care system, for instance, an individual approach suggests we should have individual health savings accounts or simply diet and exercise more. By contrast, placing human stories in a broader context—patients who challenged their insurance company, a doctor who sees her patients having to forego treatment—connects our audience to systemic problems and solutions.

### Does the story inadvertently invoke unhelpful cultural narratives?

For instance, in talking about health care, we sometimes use a consumer frame. But this frame is actually unhelpful if the solution we want to promote is universal care. Consumerism implies that we are economic players competing for limited resources. Instead, we want to promote the idea that health care is a human right and public good, and the system is stronger when we're all in it.

## Building a Message

To start building a drumbeat of shared communications, it's important to "stay on message." We recommend using the following model to help build easy-to-use and understandable messages: emphasize the values at stake, state the problem, explain the solution, and call for action.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>VALUE at Stake</b><br>Why should your audience care?                               | Health care is a public good as essential as food or water, and no one should have to go without this basic human right. It enables us to live healthy, productive lives and to contribute to our society.  |
| <b>PROBLEM</b><br>Documentation and statistics bolster arguments.                     | But, right now, our country is failing to protect that right. When people lose their jobs, their health care goes too, adding to the 46 million Americans who have no health insurance at all. Millions more have insurance that's too expensive and doesn't cover their basic health needs. People shouldn't have to declare bankruptcy or lose their savings or even their homes because of crushing hospital and doctor bills. That hurts all of us. |
| <b>SOLUTION</b><br>Avoid issue fatigue—offer a positive solution.                     | We can protect the human right to health care through reforming our insurance system to give everyone quality care and by investing in community clinics and other quality, affordable services in communities around the country.  |
| <b>ACTION</b><br>What can your audience concretely do? The more specific, the better. | Urge your elected officials to protect the human right to health care for all Americans by supporting these important reforms.  |

## TARGET AUDIENCES

In the benchmark human rights survey that The Opportunity Agenda commissioned in 2007, public opinion researchers Belden Russonello & Stewart used a technique called cluster analysis to describe different U.S. audiences based on their attitudes toward three main themes: views on human rights, the application of certain human rights in the United States, and attitudes toward the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> The message testing focus groups then consisted of members of the three clusters of American viewpoints that are supportive or persuadable on human rights. Together, they represent 69% of the U.S. population.

This segmentation is important because it helps advocates to think strategically about their audiences and not to become preoccupied with the remaining 31% of the population who are much more difficult to persuade. (For a description of these groups, see the cluster analysis on the next page.) Engaging these first three groups will start moving the national dialogue, as and policy, down the road we need. It may eventually be the case that the unconvinced 31% move in a more favorable direction as the result of a changed culture. But right now resources are best spent on targeting the following groups.

- ▶ The first group, **Human Rights Champions**, comprises 29% of the population and is the most likely to believe that every person has basic rights that are common to all human beings. They are also most likely to say the United States needs to move “aggressively” to put human rights at the top of its agenda. Although this group is the most amenable to hearing about social issues within a human rights framework, they are by no means immediately familiar with this framework or even aware of its existence. They are likely the most open to learning about it, though, and thus are a good starting point for many communications strategies. Members of this cluster are disproportionately professional, educated women who live in cities. Politically, this group is progressive and Democratic. They are best reached through media outlets such as NPR, national newspapers and blogs, or through the communications of allied social justice organizations in which they are likely to be involved.
- ▶ The next group is also a target for outreach, but members of this cluster are more hesitant to move forward on a domestic human rights agenda. Members of the **Young Cautious Human Rights Supporters** are 19% of the population. They are most likely to believe we need to move “cautiously” when it comes to human rights in the United States. This cluster is the youngest group, tends to be lower income, and has a relatively high proportion of moderate single women who listen to public radio and perform volunteer work. This group also includes a high number of NPR listeners.
- ▶ A third cluster, **U.S. Human Rights Supporters**, includes a relatively high percentage of African Americans and Hispanics. This cluster makes up 21% of the population. Although this group accepts a range of social justice issues as human rights concerns, the other distinguishing characteristic of this group is that its members are among the least likely to believe the United States should sign international human rights treaties and the most likely to believe that, because of different cultures and values, it is impossible to have rights that apply to everyone in the world. This group is best reached through traditional media and through faith-based organizations.

To uphold human rights in the United States it is often necessary to expand government assistance programs to help people obtain things like housing, food, health care, and jobs.

PERCENTAGE THAT  
STRONGLY AGREE

|                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| General population:     | <b>37%</b> |
| Human Rights Champions: | <b>48%</b> |
| Young Cautious:         | <b>56%</b> |
| U.S. HR Supporters:     | <b>51%</b> |

Here you can see how these audiences differ from the general public in their views of government programs and human rights.

1. See Section III for a fuller explanation of the research.

It should also be noted that these audiences represent the general public, most of whom have very limited knowledge about the human rights framework. A 1997 poll by Peter D. Hart Research, for example, found that only 8% of Americans could name the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The human rights base—those who have attended trainings, who show up for rallies, or are active in the movement in other concrete ways—is a relatively small group, even within the first cluster of Human Rights Champions. Messaging that works with this base likely differs from some of the recommendations here. This toolkit is focused on creating new audiences for human rights issues and is premised on a strategy that identifies the most likely future allies for our cause.

Other Audience Breakdowns

While the entire U.S. population is included in the cluster analysis, Americans also differ somewhat by demographic group in their reasons for supporting human rights communicators.

| Percentage saying reasons are extremely important | African Americans | Asian Americans | Incomes Less Than \$25,000 | Latinos | Progressives | Women |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------|--------------|-------|
| Treat people fairly and with dignity              | 83                | 58              | 73                         | 70      | 77           | 75    |
| Community: better for society                     | 72                | 35              | 61                         | 56      | 69           | 64    |
| Heritage: America founded on human rights         | 67                | 41              | 67                         | 66      | 61           | 59    |
| Follows will of God                               | 73                | 23              | 62                         | 64      | 46           | 60    |
| Opportunity to succeed                            | 70                | 33              | 57                         | 55      | 50           | 50    |



## Audience “Cluster Analysis”

|   | <b>Human Rights Champions (29%)</b>   | <b>Young Cautious HR Supporters (19%)</b>  | <b>U.S. Human Rights Supporters (21%)</b>  | <b>Anti-U.N.ites (17%)</b>  | <b>Anti-Gov't Bedrock Conservatives (14%)</b>  |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Description</b>                                    | More women<br>Younger<br>High income<br>Highest ed<br>High prof<br>Most liberal<br>Most Dem<br>More city  | More women<br>Youngest<br>Most single<br>Low inc<br>Most moderate<br>High Dem  | More women<br>Younger<br>Most parents<br>Highest Hisp and African Amer<br>Lowest ed and inc<br>High cons<br>High Dem<br>More city<br>More south  | More men<br>Oldest<br>High married<br>Most retired<br>High cons<br>High Rep<br>Most rural<br>More South                                       | More men<br>Older<br>Most married<br>Highest inc<br>High educ<br>High prof<br>Most cons<br>Most Rep<br>Most suburb<br>High Midwest             |
| <b>Engagement</b>                                     | Among most likely national newspapers readers, blogs, NPR<br><br>Donate and vol for charitable organ  | High NPR listeners<br><br>Volunteers<br><br>Least likely attend rel. services  | High rel attenders<br><br>High news consumers<br><br>Least likely voters   | Highest rel attenders<br><br>Most political<br><br>Most talk radio listeners  | High voters and most pol and charitable donors<br><br>High newspaper readers   |
| <b>Applications of Human Rights and Role of Gov't</b> | Among most likely to agree w/applications of HR.<br><br>100% agree hr of illegal imm violated when denied med care<br><br>86% agree to expand gov't programs to uphold hr | Agree with HR but not all the applications.<br><br>100% disagree hr of illegal imm violated when denied med care<br><br>100% agree expand gov't programs to uphold hr                  | Agree w/HR; highest on eco-related rights<br><br>95% agree hr of illegal imm violated when denied med care<br><br>84% agree to expand gov't programs to uphold hr                      | Narrow view of hr.<br><br>96% disagree hr of illegal imm violated when denied med care<br><br>59% disagree expand gov't programs to uphold hr | Narrow view of hr.<br><br>90% disagree hr of illegal imm violated when denied med care<br><br>100% disagree expand gov't programs to uphold hr |
| <b>Potential Barriers</b>                             | 95% disagree that the U.S. should NOT sign international treaties.  | 67% disagree that the U.S. should NOT sign international treaties.<br><br>But: 57% agree b/c of diff cultures and values it is imp to have rights that apply to everyone in the world. | 97% agree that the U.S. should NOT sign international treaties.<br><br>Most to say b/c of diff cultures and values it is imp to have rights that apply to everyone in the world. (64%) | 100% agree that the U.S. should NOT sign international treaties.<br><br>Most negative opinions on U.N.  | 63% disagree that the U.S. should NOT sign international treaties.   |
| <b>Urgency</b>  | 92% agree should strive to uphold hr in US<br><br>36% “aggressively”  | 86% agree should strive to uphold hr in US<br><br>28% “aggressively”; 57% “cautiously”   | 89% agree should strive to uphold hr in US<br><br>34% “aggressively”   | 70% agree should strive to uphold hr in US<br><br>41% “slowly” or “evolve”  | 60% agree should strive to uphold hr in US<br><br>36% “slowly” or “evolve”   |
| <b>Overall Framework</b>                              | Imp to treat people fairly and w/dignity<br><br>Better for everyone to live in a society that pays attention to hr, rather than one that ignore human rights              | Imp to treat people fairly and w/dignity   | Imp to treat people fairly and w/dignity<br><br>Am founded on Jefferson's belief that we all have rights that no gov't should take away<br><br>Respecting hr follows the will of God   | Am founded on Jefferson's belief that we all have rights that no gov't should take away<br><br>Imp to treat people fairly and w/dignity       | Imp to treat people fairly and w/dignity   |



# HUMAN RIGHTS MESSAGING

**CORE MESSAGE:** It is better for everyone to live in a society that pays attention to human rights, rather than one that ignores human rights.

Our research shows that the American public is ready to hear more about upholding and promoting human rights at home. Americans hold a clear and positive concept of human rights and place social justice issues in a human rights framework—including economic and social rights. However, this understanding of and support for human rights is not rooted in treaties and does not translate to urgency in moving forward with an explicit human rights agenda. To build a case for doing so, we recommend that advocates both connect human rights to familiar and core values and make the case for a human rights approach with concrete examples of how using such a framework can have a positive and concrete effect on people's lives.

## Themes to Guide Message Development

- ▶ **Lead with values.** Fairness, dignity and opportunity, and pride in America's heritage and founding principles, were ranked highly by all audiences as a reason why human rights are important. Connect human rights issues to these values, drawing particularly on American experiences and history and our continuing struggle to make our founding ideals a reality.
- ▶ **Begin with supportive audiences and work outward.** See the "Identifying Target Audiences" section of this toolkit for more ideas on this strategy.
- ▶ **Emphasize consensus issues to introduce the idea of human rights generally.** Equal opportunity, freedom from torture, education, and health care are each widely accepted as human rights.
- ▶ **Start conversations with the goal—upholding human rights—rather than the process.** Audiences have almost no knowledge of treaties and mechanisms and care less about their existence than they do about the conditions such vehicles are meant to address.
- ▶ **Then move to specific examples.** This will illustrate the effectiveness of thinking about social justice issues through a human rights lens. Audiences do not immediately see the implication of viewing an issue as a human right and are likely to view human rights merely as inspiring ideals without concrete examples of their impact.

## Specific Challenges and Opportunities

- ▶ **Concern about the role of government.** Many audiences are concerned about the ability and propriety of government providing for certain rights, such as health care and education, and view it as a protector. It's important to point out cases in which the government has successfully upheld social and economic rights, such as in the instances of Social Security and Medicare.
- ▶ **Concern about "personal responsibility."** People are often preoccupied by the idea that too much government assistance removes personal ambition and responsibility. To balance this concern, focus on instances in which we all need to work together for solutions and where policy is a better answer than telling people to figure things out on their own. For the audiences receptive to human rights arguments, health care is a good place to start.

## Human Rights Messaging in Action

The following letter was submitted to the *Seattle Post*.

March 11, 2009

To the Editor:

Re: “Advocates worry human rights get lost during economic crisis” (Judy Vue, March 8):

Rather than taking the view that human rights and economic issues need to compete for our national attention, advocates should be reminding President Obama, the Administration and Congress that they are integral.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke of freedom from want as a fundamental right in his famous “Four Freedoms” speech, connecting human rights with the economic challenges facing the nation. In establishing the New Deal, FDR recognized that the protection of essential freedoms was part and parcel to rebuilding America. President Obama should embrace such fundamental rights while advancing a new “New Deal” along with implementation of the economic recovery package and passage of the budget.

One way to do that is to support the creation of an Interagency Working Group on Human Rights. This Working Group, established by President Bill Clinton and essentially dismantled by President George W. Bush, would serve as a coordinating body among federal agencies and departments for the promotion and respect of human rights and the implementation of human rights obligations in U.S. domestic policy.

The moment is ripe to build human rights into the foundation of our government and restore America’s standing in the world.

Ajamu Baraka

Executive Director of the United States Human Rights Network and Co-Coordinator,  
Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda



## SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS AT A GLANCE

Belden Russonello & Stewart developed the following chart to provide guidance around how to promote different social justice issues effectively through a human rights lens.

| ISSUES  | HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK   |
|---|--|
| <b>TREATIES</b>   | It is better for everyone to live in a society that pays attention to human rights, rather than one that ignores human rights. Human rights treaties provide tools to help ensure the basic rights of all people are upheld. |
| <b>HEALTH CARE</b>  | Health care, as a public good, is as essential as food and water and no one should have to go without this basic human right.  |
| <b>JUVENILE LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE</b>   | The opportunity for rehabilitation is a human right that should be upheld for young people who commit crimes.  |
| <b>RACIAL PROFILING</b>   | Racial profiling violates the human rights to fair treatment and freedom from discrimination and violates American values of fairness and justice.   |
| <b>DUE PROCESS</b>  | American values of justice and fairness stand strong only when we uphold the human right to due process.   |
| <b>IMMIGRANT ISSUES GENERAL</b><br>(framework should be used cautiously with selected issues) | We need workable solutions to immigration that uphold our nation's values and allow people who contribute and participate to live in the country legally with their human rights protected.                                  |

## INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES

**CORE MESSAGE:** It is better for everyone to live in a society that pays attention to human rights, rather than one that ignores human rights. Human rights treaties provide tools to help ensure that the basic rights of all people are upheld.

Although our research found that key audiences are not immediately moved by the introduction of human rights treaties to an argument, it did uncover some openings to educating these audiences in a way that could spur further discussion.

Audiences—including policymakers and social justice advocates—are largely unaware of the existence or intention of such treaties. In addition, they tend to view international treaties as ineffective and unenforceable. Even those who are willing to view social justice issues through a human rights lens

worry that treaties are not an effective way to uphold human rights here because the United States has not always lived up to international agreements in the past.

For instance, although audiences in focus groups reacted positively to a short description of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they also exhibited some disillusionment with the document because the Declaration has not in their view resulted in more concrete changes within the United States. However, most recognized the value in having a document that lays out human rights because it provides goals to which we can aspire and because it is a starting place for countries to come together and agree on how people around the world should be treated.

**“We’re still fighting for all of this; equal pay for equal work? My goodness, the women have been fighting for that for how long? It’s sad to say, but this is almost a joke—that the government is the one that signed this and the government is the one that’s still saying, let’s see what we can do before we can give it to you.”** —*Hispanic woman, South San Francisco*

**“This makes me angry, because it’s not right that this was written down so long ago and no one is upholding it; no one goes back to it. We wrote this down, we need to try to fix this.”** —*Hispanic woman, South San Francisco*

**“To me, I don’t [think we should sign treaties] if we just want to sign something to have in writing so the world thinks that we’re getting along with everybody. I would much rather be more honest and fix what’s going on here with the citizens of this country rather than signing stuff that we’re not going to abide by.”** —*African-American woman, Atlanta*

Because of these initial barriers, we recommend that advocates examine the goals of their communications strategies when deciding how to communicate about international treaties and laws with key audience members. For situations in which the goal is education about the role and importance of treaties, we have provided the guidance below for drawing audiences into the conversation and opening discussions of how treaties can bring about positive change. When the immediate goal is to build support for specific social justice issues, we have provided guidelines about how to enter into conversations in ways that connect with people’s current understanding of human rights issues and their core values.

## Themes to Guide Message Development

**Values:** Equality, community, opportunity, founding U.S. principles.

**What’s important: The purpose and desired outcomes of the treaty.** Connect first with why audiences care about the specific human rights issue and then introduce the treaty as a solution and a means for upholding human rights.

**Diverse cultures agree on human rights.** To address concern about “forcing” human rights on those with different cultural values, advocates can inform audiences that many countries have agreed on common human rights shared by different cultures.

**How treaties uphold human rights.** This is crucial to combat the belief that treaties are unenforceable and irrelevant. Successful examples show how state governments are adopting treaty language in their own laws and how advocates use treaties to pressure governments to change policy. For example, in focus groups, audiences reacted well to the example of Connecticut, where the

state passed a law using principles from the Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, declaring that equal access to the highest attainable standard of health is a human right and a priority of the state, and created a commission to promote the health of all of the state’s communities.

**Pitfalls of arguing that international treaties restore our standing in the world.**

Our poll showed this argument as not persuasive to most audiences, with the exception of African Americans, those with incomes of less than \$25,000, and those with a high school degree or less education. That said, in focus groups, audiences generally rejected this argument and in some cases exhibited hostility toward it. For instance, in the case of due process, audiences tended to say that living up to our national values should be our motivation behind ensuring due process for everyone here, not concerns about our reputation.

**Policymaker lack of awareness of international laws and treaties.** Research with state policy leaders found very little awareness of international treaties or their implications. When educating receptive policymakers, advocates should provide examples of how international treaties have been applied in states or local jurisdiction and offer technical assistance. Many policymakers interviewed were intrigued by the example set by the City and County of San Francisco, which evaluated and changed local policies in light of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women’s (CEDAW) principles. Building on this model would require both demonstrating to sympathetic state and/or local officials how this has been accomplished and providing them with the technical support they would need to figure out how to write policies based on international treaties.

**Building a Message**

We recommend using a consistent structure in building messages. Including the following elements can help advocates stay on message while also helping to edit out excess information that is not always necessary. Below is an example of how to lead into treaty discussions.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>VALUE at Stake</b><br>Why should your audience care?                       | Our nation was founded on the idea that we all have basic rights. We have continuously worked to broaden, promote, and fulfill these rights, and sometimes we have failed. In striving to make them a reality for all, however, we have made some of the most important leaps forward in our history. American leadership in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, through which diverse countries and cultures came together to agree on a basic set of human rights, is a reminder of how central this notion of rights is to our national values. |
| <b>PROBLEM</b><br>Documentation and statistics bolster arguments.             | But it also reminds us that we have a long way to go to uphold these rights for everyone here. The Universal Declaration talks about health care, housing, freedom from torture, and our right to privacy, among other things. Many of these basic rights are in growing jeopardy, with Wall Street’s mismanagement and greed forcing millions out of their homes, with 46 million Americans lacking health insurance, and with policies that condone torture and invade our privacy.   |
| <b>SOLUTION</b><br>Avoid issue fatigue—offer a positive solution.             | In this time of great change, let’s return to a nation that respects and protects the rights all humans share, by working together to pass legislation that further protects our life, liberty, and chance at fulfilling the American Dream. In turning the tide, we can return to important documents like the Universal Declaration that remind us of what kind of country we really want to be.  |
| <b>ACTION</b><br>What can your audience do?<br>The more specific, the better. | Learn about the Universal Declaration at <a href="http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr">www.un.org/en/documents/udhr</a> and write your member of Congress to encourage a return to human rights values in our policymaking.   |

## Talking Point Suggestions

- ▶ *Over the past 60 years, countries around the world have come together to agree on and document the human rights that we need to uphold and aspire to. Human rights treaties provide us with the common understanding and tools by which the basic rights of all people can be upheld because it is better for everyone to live in a society that pays attention to human rights, rather than one that ignores human rights.*
- ▶ *These treaties provide an opportunity for countries with very different cultures and governments to come together and declare the common rights for all human beings around the world.*
- ▶ *By signing these treaties, countries promise to uphold the human rights of their people and the treaties provide individuals with the tools to help stand up for their human rights in the face of violations.*

## INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **Core Message:** It is better for everyone to live in a society that pays attention to human rights, rather than one that ignores human rights. Human rights treaties provide tools to help ensure the basic rights of all people are upheld.
- ▶ **Lead with values:** Equality, community, opportunity.
- ▶ Start by **emphasizing the purpose and desired outcomes** of a specific treaty.
- ▶ Highlight the **coming together of diverse cultures** and countries.
- ▶ Illustrate how the treaties can be **used to uphold human rights**.
- ▶ Use carefully the argument that the United States should follow international treaties to set an example or **restore its standing in the world**. Not all audiences react well to it.
- ▶ Remember that **policymakers** are by and large also **unaware of international laws and treaties**. Provide examples of how international treaties have been applied in states or local jurisdictions.
- ▶ Build messages with **Value, Problem, Solution, Action**.

## Human Rights Messaging in Action

Excerpted from: The Huffington Post. March 17, 2009.<sup>2</sup>

### Women's Rights Are Human Rights

By JoAnn Kamuf

President Obama continues to recognize the vital contributions that women make to the U.S. economy. ... There is no better time, on the heels...of the celebration of International Women's Day, to express this commitment to women's rights to the international community. The President should take this opportunity to submit the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ("CEDAW") to the Senate for ratification. Ratification of CEDAW would confirm the President's commitment to improving the status of women both in domestic and international policy arenas.

CEDAW ratification would powerfully demonstrate President Obama's commitment to stand up for women's human rights by example at home and by encouraging others abroad. The treaty would strengthen U.S. laws that promote women's equality. It would lead to further economic empowerment of women, improve equality in the workplace, and bolster laws that prohibit discriminatory impact. U.S. law currently prohibits unequal pay for unequal work, however, existing laws do not go far enough to ensure equal treatment and equal pay. While the recent Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act provides women some protection, the law principally deals with women's ability to seek redress for discriminatory pay and expands the time frame for women to challenge such discrimination. CEDAW would build on this by enhancing the underlying standards concerning equal pay and paid parental leave (for men and women), in ways that would help support American families. Ratification of this major human right treaty would recognize the significant role that women play in strengthening the United States, economically, socially and politically.

....

— The author starts broadly and with a familiar value and figure: economic contributions and President Obama. She then moves to introducing the treaty and what it would accomplish.

— These kinds of concrete examples of how a treaty would affect policy are what amenable audiences need to think constructively about treaties.

## HEALTH CARE

**CORE MESSAGE:** Health care, as a public good, is as essential as food and water, and no one should have to go without this basic human right.

Approaching health and health care as a human right is powerful because it connects the values of the human rights movement to those of the broader American public. It is also preferable to using a consumer approach. Building an audience for equal access to health care requires portraying care as a public resource that's stronger when we're all in it together and as a system that is our right to expect and demand.

---

2. [www.huffingtonpost.com/joann-kamuf/womens-rights-are-human-r\\_b\\_176038.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joann-kamuf/womens-rights-are-human-r_b_176038.html)



## Themes to Guide Message Development

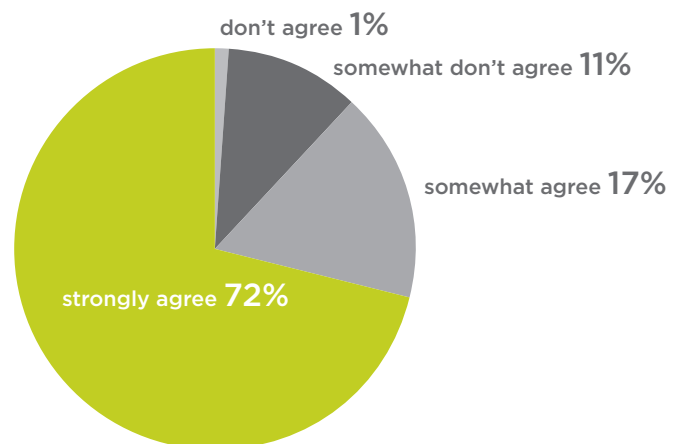
**Values:** Equality, security, and community.

**Cooperation and community over consumerism.** Talking about health care as a right is an opportunity to move away from a consumerist view. Framing health care only as a good that each of us must purchase at market rates reinforces a competitive, individualistic mindset, suggesting that people who lack quality health care are simply poor economic competitors. Moreover, key audiences are ready to start hearing a message about health care as a “public good.”

**Human rights.** Our poll showed that 89% of the public believes health care to be a human right. Among key persuadable audiences, health care is seen as a “basic necessity” for survival and central to fulfilling the human right to “the pursuit of happiness.” Whereas most audience members view emergency medical care as a human right, many also include a range of services as part of the right to health care, including preventative care and the availability of contraceptives and abortion.

**Emphasizing solutions that address disparities in health.** Audiences recognize racial, income, and gender disparities in care as human rights violations. Although they readily acknowledge the existence of health care gaps caused by income, they are less aware of racial and ethnic and, to a lesser extent, gender inequalities. Most are more likely to accept a mix of income, race, and ethnicity as explanations for disparities. Arguments, then, must contain sufficient evidence of inequality to surmount a lack of knowledge and in some cases skepticism.

### Access to health care should be a human right:



## Specific Opportunities and Challenges

### The Idea of a Right to Health

- ▶ Confusing at first—audiences assume health *care*.
- ▶ Some warm to the idea, but most don't go beyond clean air and water and don't place things like safe housing under a right to health because they don't easily see a connection.

*“I think more of health care [when you say a right to health].” —Hispanic woman, South San Francisco*

*“You have a right to clean air and clean water, but as far as being born healthy you can't dictate that. You can't say, well, you have to be born healthy.” —Caucasian man, Chicago*

*“Everyone has the same opportunity to be healthy...to good equal health opportunities—safe water, food and shelter and clothing and just your basic human needs to be healthy.” —Caucasian woman, Santa Monica*

- ▶ There's good potential for education about the right to health in longer discussions and an opportunity to expand ideas about health care. It pushes people to think more broadly about what affects health and what kinds of policies are important beyond health insurance.
- ▶ Save discussions about the broader right to health for particularly sympathetic audiences and longer form media.
- ▶ Start with connecting environmental dots like clean air and water before moving to other issues.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *Helping people have good health means more than just good health insurance. We need clean air and water, park spaces, and access to healthy foods, among other things. Our human rights include more than just a right to health care, but also a fundamental right to the opportunity for health itself. Our policies need to reflect this broader view if we are to uphold human rights in this country.*

### Reproductive Rights and the Right to Abortion

- ▶ Human rights messages opened up discussions about reproductive rights and abortion in particular.
- ▶ In some cases, people shifted from agreeing abortion should not be banned to agreement that such a ban would deny them the right to control their bodies. This shift could move some audiences to conversations about public funding.
- ▶ Use the human rights frame to push people to think about the difference between protecting and providing rights.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *There is no more fundamental human right than the right to have control over one's own life. And being able to make one's own decisions about childbearing is a part of this right. When we defend the freedom to access and use birth control, to get a safe abortion, or to learn the facts about reproduction, what we are really defending is this basic human right.*

### Talking to Policymakers

- ▶ Many of the policymakers in our research, particularly Democrats and nonpartisan public health officials, agreed that basic health care was a human right and that the state government thus had a responsibility to ensure basic care for everyone. Many, however, were pessimistic that this could happen in the foreseeable future because of the state budget crises and specific policy proposals that had failed in their states.
- ▶ In seeing health care as a right, these policy leaders see health care as part of the basic right to take care of one's bodily survival, just like food or shelter.
- ▶ In messages, include the perspective of the common good: It is better for us all to live in a society that respects human rights and where people are healthy.
- ▶ Also important are examples of how lawmakers can fulfill human rights in manageable chunks.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *Health care is a human right because it is as essential to the ability to lead a healthy productive life as are food and shelter. Access to health care is part of the American belief that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This human right is important for the success of individuals and communities.*

## Building a Message

We recommend using a consistent structure in building messages. Including the following elements can help advocates stay on message while also helping to edit out excess information that is not always necessary.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>VALUE at Stake</b><br>Why should your audience care?                       | Health care is a public good as essential as food or water, and no one should have to go without this basic human right. It enables us to live healthy, productive lives and to contribute to our society.  |
| <b>PROBLEM</b><br>Documentation and statistics bolster arguments.             | But, right now, our country is failing to protect that right. When people lose their jobs, their health care goes too, adding to the 46 million Americans who have no health insurance at all. And millions more have insurance that's too expensive and doesn't cover their basic health needs. People shouldn't have to declare bankruptcy or to lose their savings or even their homes because of crushing hospital and doctor bills. That hurts us all. |
| <b>SOLUTION</b><br>Avoid issue fatigue—offer a positive solution.             | We can protect the human right to health care through reforming our insurance system to give everyone quality care and by investing in community clinics and other quality, affordable services in communities around the country.  |
| <b>ACTION</b><br>What can your audience do?<br>The more specific, the better. | Urge your elected officials to protect the human right to health care for all Americans by supporting these important reforms.  |

## Talking Point Suggestions

- ▶ *Health care is as essential to leading a productive life as food and housing. No one should have to go without this basic human right in this country. But today we have a system where millions of people live in fear that one accident or illness will leave them unable to care for themselves or their families because they lack quality health care. This violates our basic values. Health care policy should recognize our basic right to health.*
- ▶ *It's time we acknowledged that health care is a basic human right for all. This means we need a health care system that ensures quality health care services are available to everyone. Americans need preventive care, reproductive services, mental health care, geriatric care, and substance abuse treatment. And this system must rest on the understanding that health care is not a commodity to be bought and sold but a human right shared by all. It is time to uphold the human right to health care because no one should have to go without their basic human rights.*
- ▶ *Human rights are held by every person as inherent to their humanity. Upholding the human right to health care means creating a system that ensures access to adequate health care for every person. This is the only legitimate goal of a health care system because health care is a public good that belongs to everyone. Treating health care as a commodity and protecting the private market at the expense of anyone's health is inconsistent with human rights principles.*
- ▶ *When it comes to health care, it doesn't make sense to expect people to "go it alone." We're all in it together, and threats to individual health quickly become national challenges. By coming together to support the development of healthy communities—with access to healthy food, clean drinking water, parks, and open space—we'll create a healthier nation.*
- ▶ *We have to address and remove obstacles and biases based on income, race, gender, and other aspects of who we are. There is ample evidence that people of color and those in low-income areas don't have the same access to quality health care as others, and that is a violation of basic human rights. It's only sensible, fair, and right that we fix this.*

## HEALTH CARE AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **Core Message:** Health care, as a public good, is as essential as food and water, and no one should have to go without this basic human right.
- ▶ Lead with **values:** Equality, security, and community.
- ▶ Stress **cooperation** and **community** over **consumerism**. Audiences are ready to hear about health care as a public good and not a commodity.
- ▶ Remember that **89% of the general public** consider health care a right.
- ▶ Connect the notion of a human right to health care to policy implications, such as guaranteeing **a range of quality services**.
- ▶ Emphasize **solutions** that address **disparities** in health. Back up disparities arguments with documentation.
- ▶ Use **caution** in introducing **treaties** and mechanisms. Include **concrete** examples of positive impact.
- ▶ Build messages with **Value, Problem, Solution, Action**.

## Human Rights Messaging in Action

From Amnesty International USA's Health Care Petition.<sup>3</sup>

We, the undersigned human rights supporters, recognize that health care is a right, not a privilege or a commodity. We urge our elected officials to deliver a U.S. health care system that fulfills the human right to health care—a system that's universal, equitable, and accountable.

— *Immediately, the language draws a distinction between rights and privileges.*

We believe that health care is a human right, not a privilege or a commodity. To fulfill the human right to health care, the U.S. health care system must meet these principles:

1. **Universality:** This means that everyone in the United States has the human right to health care.
2. **Equity:** This means that benefits and contributions should be shared fairly to create a system that works for everyone.
3. **Accountability:** This means that the U.S. government has a responsibility to ensure that care comes first.

— *These principles further outline what viewing health care as a right means.*

3. <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/index.aspx?c=jhKPIXPCIoE&b=2590179&template=x.ascx&action=12025>

From “Campaign in Montana Seeks to Establish Healthcare as a Human Right.” Democracy Now radio program. April 23, 2009.<sup>4</sup>

HOST: It’s good to have you with us. So, you just heard Senator Baucus. Your response?

SEN. CHRISTINE KAUFMANN: Well, Senator Baucus’s plan, like so many that are gaining traction across the nation, is based on a market-based solution. And I think, you know, this public-private partnership, we need to kind of get past that, and we need to have a—conversations that’s rooted in values and in a human right to health care. I think part of the reason that single payer doesn’t gain any traction is because it’s not valued, it’s not placed in the right kind of context, which is that human—that health care really is a human right.

— *Kaufman immediately emphasizes values and how they transcend ideas of market and competition.*

HOST: What does it mean to say health care is a human right?

SEN. CHRISTINE KAUFMANN: Well, I think we have to first start by saying this needs to be a part of our founding documents, in our constitutions, and to be able to say that we, as citizens, can count on our government to be able to enforce that right. We need to count on them as, you know, an enforcer of a human right, and that it’s something that’s just part of what we get as citizens in this country.

— *It’s effective to remind people to think about health care as a public, rather than a consumer good. Describing government as an “enforcer” of rights is also effective.*

## LIFE WITHOUT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PAROLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**CORE MESSAGE:** The opportunity for rehabilitation is a human right that should be upheld for young people who commit crimes.

We suggest that advocates organize messages about ending life without parole sentences for youth around three core areas: values, science, and the broken criminal justice system. Effective messages should begin with strong, easy-to-digest statements that argue within one or more of these frames and are then supported by facts, statistics, and compelling stories. However, all supporting evidence should be in the service of underscoring one of these central points. Doing so will result in a powerful narrative, soon recognizable to the persuadable audiences advocates hope to reach. If there are compelling reasons to avoid using one of these particular frames, messengers can focus on the others. There may also be occasions when straying from this framework is necessary. However, these departures should be limited and strategically based.

---

4. [http://i4.democracynow.org/2009/4/23/campaign\\_in\\_montana\\_seeks\\_to\\_establish](http://i4.democracynow.org/2009/4/23/campaign_in_montana_seeks_to_establish)

## Themes to Guide Message Development

**Values.** Values include rehabilitation, opportunity, balanced with accountability. Audiences don't want to "give up" on someone who is younger than 18 years old. But messages also need a clear acknowledgment of the need for accountability.

**Science.** Most audiences understand that youth, particularly teenagers, process decisions differently than adults and accept that youth have greater potential for change. This understanding does not lead to a desire to release young people from responsibility by any means, but it does lead audiences to think differently about punishment and rehabilitation for this particular group. Bringing the science of brain development into an argument can be an effective way to open up discussion about appropriate sentences.

**Commonsense solutions for a broken system.** Among the general public, knowledge about the criminal justice system is limited. Understanding of the differences between the adult and juvenile systems, and the mechanisms around how they relate, is even more limited. Thus, it should not be assumed that even sympathetic audiences immediately agree that reform is needed. However, by using ample supporting evidence, arguments about fixing the system can be an effective way to place the unfair sentencing of youth into a broader spectrum of issues, increasing potential allies. When using this frame, it is extremely important to offer solutions and alternatives. Those arguing for reform need to show that they have positive solutions that uphold the values of fairness and justice, are commonsense and workable, and provide opportunities for rehabilitation and public safety.

## Specific Opportunities and Challenges

### Life Without Parole for Youth and Human Rights

- ▶ Consider that most members of the key audience do not view the sentence of life without parole for youth as an inherent human rights violation at all. Beginning with blanket statements of rights violations can therefore move persuadable audiences in the wrong direction.

"I don't think human right is the right word. I think there should be an opportunity for rehabilitation, but I don't know if I'd put it under a human right." —*Caucasian woman, Columbus*
- ▶ Start by addressing the idea of an opportunity for rehabilitation. Audiences are more likely to see the denial of the opportunity for rehabilitation as a human rights violation rather than the mere existence of life without parole sentencing.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *It benefits all of us to rehabilitate young people who commit serious crimes. Providing the opportunity to change and grow is a human right we should strive to uphold because it is better for everyone to live in a society that upholds human rights, rather than one that ignores human rights.*

### “Manipulative” Language

- ▶ Consider that focus group participants had a strong negative reaction to messages that referred to life without the possibility of parole as “sentencing young people to eventually die in prison.” They felt that this message was extreme and manipulative and it did not put them in the mood to hear further arguments.

“It’s sensational sounding...putting it down there to make you feel bad, that’s what it feels like they’re trying to do.” —*Caucasian Man, Columbus*

- ▶ Avoid referring to teenagers as “children” for the purposes of arguing against life without parole. “Youth” and “young people” are less likely to provoke negative backlash from key audiences.
- ▶ Focus on the need for an opportunity for rehabilitation.
- ▶ **Alternative language:** *Right now our system of justice does not give many young people who commit serious crimes the opportunity for a second chance. Instead, young people who commit serious crimes are being sentenced to life without parole, which means that they will spend the next 40, 50, or 60 years in prison with no chance of release. Life without parole for young people is life without the opportunity for rehabilitation, and that is wrong.*

### Balancing the Needs of Youth and Society

- ▶ Avoid talking only about how the sentence damages youth. Most audiences want to be assured that society is protected from potential repeat offenders.

“I think it starts out as it’s about what’s good for the youth, the individual youth that gets in trouble, but if they come back for the second time they get in trouble, then it’s a little more balanced between what’s good for society and what’s good for the kid, and then if they come back for a third time and a fourth time and a fifth time, then it becomes more weighted towards what’s good for society as opposed to what’s best for the child.”

—*Caucasian man, Columbus*

- ▶ Address how society can be made better when youth who have made serious mistakes have the opportunity to change and grow/rehabilitate.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *When young people commit serious crimes, they should be held accountable but in a way that reflects their capacity for rehabilitation. Young people are still developing mentally and emotionally. Their punishment needs to be focused on rehabilitation and reintegration into society, giving young people the opportunity to change and grow. We can do better by providing sentencing alternatives that are in the best interest of the young person and society.*





## Building a Message

We recommend using a consistent structure in building messages. Including the following elements can help advocates stay on message while also helping to edit out excess information that is not always necessary.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>VALUE at Stake</b><br>Why should your audience care?                       | When young people commit serious crimes, they should be held accountable but in a way that reflects their capacity to change and grow and provides an opportunity for rehabilitation and reintegration.  |
| <b>PROBLEM</b><br>Documentation and statistics bolster arguments.             | Right now our system of justice does not give many young people who commit serious crimes the opportunity for a second chance. Instead, young people who commit serious crimes are being sentenced to life without parole, which means that they will spend the next 40,50, or 60 years in prison with no chance of release. Life without parole for young people is life without the opportunity for rehabilitation, and that is wrong.   |
| <b>SOLUTION</b><br>Avoid issue fatigue—offer a positive solution.             | Eliminating life without the possibility of parole sentences will protect a young person's right to the opportunity for rehabilitation and allow for careful review to determine whether, years later, young offenders continue to pose a threat to the community. Ending this practice would be no guarantee of release—only the opportunity to prove remorse and rehabilitation. This alternative to life without parole sentencing appropriately recognizes the particular capacity of youth to change and grow over time and focuses on rehabilitation and reintegration into society. |
| <b>ACTION</b><br>What can your audience do?<br>The more specific, the better. | Educate your elected officials about alternatives to denying youth the opportunity for rehabilitation and the need to eliminate this sentence.   |

## Talking Point Suggestions

- ▶ *Youth are still developing both physically and emotionally and their brains, not just their bodies, are not yet fully grown. Therefore, youth have greater potential to change and grow. When young people commit serious crimes, they should be held accountable but in a way that reflects their capacity for rehabilitation.*
- ▶ *When young people commit serious crimes, they should be held accountable in a way that reflects their greater capacity to change and grow. Research confirms that youth do not have adult levels of judgment, impulse control, or ability to assess risks. Moreover, as the American Psychological Association has noted, juveniles, because of their immaturity and status as minors, are less able to control their own environment, resist peer pressure, or remove themselves from dangerous surroundings and negative influences.*
- ▶ *Because of their relatively unformed characters, they have a better chance than adults at reforming their behavior and for rehabilitation. They deserve meaningful and periodic reviews of their sentences to ensure that those who can prove they have reformed are given an opportunity to re-enter society as contributing citizens.*
- ▶ *Dozens of long-term studies show that most juvenile offenders mature out of crime. Adolescents are more capable of rehabilitation than adults, either as a result of maturing naturally or through the intervention of a conviction and sentence. Experts in neuroscience, social science, and psychology agree that the same immaturity and flexibility that make teenagers more susceptible to outside influences also make them strong candidates for rehabilitation.*

- ▶ *Many of those sentenced to life without parole as youth received the sentence for crimes not considered to be the most serious offenses. In some places, courts are mandated to try youth as adults for certain crimes and are then mandated to sentence those convicted to life without parole. The result is that neither judge nor jury had discretion to consider the individual circumstance of the case and to impose a less extreme sentence.*
- ▶ *Eliminating the sentence of life without parole for youth does not mean that young people will be released without careful, thorough consideration of their fitness to resume life in society. But youth should be given the opportunity to have their sentences reviewed later in their lives by the same authorities who are entrusted with making parole decisions in the case of thousands of adult offenders. It is those authorities who will ultimately decide whether adolescents who have served significant portions of their sentences have rehabilitated themselves, pose no threat to others, and are deserving of release.*

## LIFE WITHOUT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PAROLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **Core Message:** The opportunity for rehabilitation is a human right that should be upheld for young people who commit crimes.
- ▶ **Lead with values:** Rehabilitation, opportunity, balanced with accountability.
- ▶ Include science-based **arguments** about **brain development** and young people's capacity for change and rehabilitation.
- ▶ Promote **commonsense solutions** to a broken system, including specifics on how the system needs reform, and **concrete alternatives** to life without parole sentences for young people.
- ▶ If using a human rights frame, talk about **the right to the opportunity for rehabilitation** instead of stating that life without parole sentences for youth are human rights violations in themselves.
- ▶ Refer to teenagers accused of serious crimes as "youth," "young people," or "teenagers," instead of "children," which audiences find manipulative.
- ▶ Talk about youth being sentenced to spend the next 40, 50, OR 60 years in prison instead of "dying in prison," a term to which audiences react badly.
- ▶ **Balance the needs of youth and society** by addressing how society can be made better when youth who have made serious mistakes have the **opportunity to change and grow**.
- ▶ Build messages with **Value, Problem, Solution, Action**.

## Human Rights Messaging in Action

From “Editorial: A Shameful Record.” *The New York Times*. February 6, 2008.<sup>5</sup>

Some juvenile criminals commit horrible crimes, and the justice system should punish them accordingly. Juveniles, though, are not adults. Even their brain development is different, making them less able than older people to resist impulses. Consideration should also be given to the nature of the crime. In some cases, juveniles have been imprisoned for life for acting as accessories or lookouts for adults. Putting a 16-year-old who played such a role in jail for perhaps 65 years is an extraordinarily harsh, and expensive, societal response.

— Balances the accountability and the needs of the young person.

From “Editorial: Parole Reform.” *The Gainesville Sun*. September 3, 2009.<sup>6</sup>

The prevailing idea that juveniles who commit serious crimes should “do the time” is difficult to overcome. Even Weinstein agrees that juveniles facing life imprisonment made a “major mistake,” and some were convicted of heinous crimes (such as rape).

Yet, a state and society should also recognize that juveniles so young that they aren’t permitted—for their own good—to drive a car, buy cigarettes or alcohol or enter into contracts, ought to be given some considerations in sentencing and have an opportunity for rehabilitation and redemption. Weinstein’s bill would provide, but not mandate, those opportunities and a chance at parole under strict conditions. A bill in Congress—HR 2289—would do the same.

— The author relies on the values of rehabilitation and redemption, once making a point about the nature of youth.

# RACIAL PROFILING

**CORE MESSAGE:** Racial profiling violates the human rights to fair treatment and freedom from discrimination and violates American values of fairness and justice.

We suggest that messages around racial profiling center on two main themes: values and positive solutions. Our recent focus groups built on the findings of The Opportunity Agenda’s 2007 poll, conducted by Belden Russonello & Stewart, which found that 84% of Americans believed racial profiling to be a human rights violation. In addition, the same poll found that Americans feel strongly that people should be free from discrimination, have equal opportunities, and be treated fairly in the

---

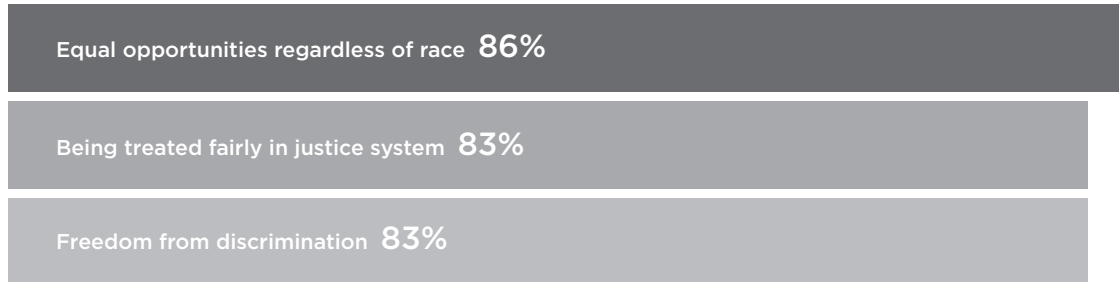
5. [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/06/opinion/06wed5.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/06/opinion/06wed5.html?_r=2)

6. <http://www.gainesville.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090903/OPINION01/909031043/1017&Title=Editorial-Parole-reform&template=printpicart>

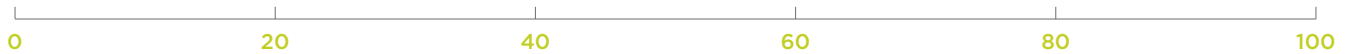
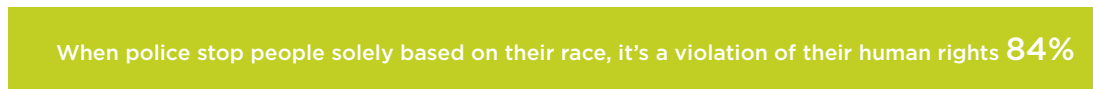
criminal justice system and that all of these things are human rights. Policymakers, too, felt that issues relating to protecting equal treatment based on race were human rights issues and that people had a right to be protected against unfair practices.

## National Poll Findings on Equal Treatment and Race

### Percentage saying “strongly should be a human right”:



### Percentage saying “agree”



## Themes to Guide Message Development

**Values:** Equality, freedom from discrimination, and fair treatment.

**Racial profiling as a human rights violation.** Audiences believe that racial profiling is a violation of both human rights and the values on which the country was founded. Messages should remind audiences of these ideals but acknowledge that, as a country, we’ve never fully achieved them. The existence of racial profiling is one example of our falling short, and policies must be in place to eradicate the practice.

**Positive solutions.** It is important in communications to begin by stating what the messengers are in favor of, and not just what they oppose. By beginning with an affirmation of core American values and human rights, messages can lead audiences through an argument about racial profiling in a more solution-oriented manner, ending with positive alternatives to the practice that effectively protect communities and individuals.

## Specific Opportunities and Challenges

### Defining the Term

- ▶ Some people focus on the term “profile” as something that police construct based on the physical profile of a suspect reported to be involved in a specific event or crime, indicating that police are acting based on evidence rather than based on stereotypes and appearances.
- ▶ Messages should underscore that racial profiling is not evidence-based—it is stereotyping.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *Racial profiling is the ineffective practice of relying specifically on stereotypes in law enforcement practices. It means singling people out because of their race and is not only ineffective and a waste of time, but also a human rights violation. We need to make sure law enforcement personnel are using evidence-based practices to make us all safer.*

### Racial Profiling As an Entry to Discussions of Broader Criminal Justice Disparities

- ▶ Most in the key audiences agree that there are systemic racial disparities in the justice system.
- ▶ Following a thorough discussion of racial profiling as a human rights violation, members of the key audiences are also willing to accept broader racial disparities in the criminal justice system as human rights violations.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *Racial profiling is not the only systemic problem within our criminal justice system when it comes to race. People of color face violations as suspects, defendants, and prisoners and racial profiling is only one piece of the puzzle. We must root out unequal treatment and ensure that everyone is treated fairly by the police and our entire justice system. Ignoring this reality is a violation of values and human rights.*

### Countering Racial Profiling As an Effective Police Tool

- ▶ Some are likely to say racial profiling may be acceptable, even if it may be unfair and unequal treatment, if it somehow keeps communities safe. They are hesitant to limit police authority to act, often describing such situations as mere inconveniences.  
  
“I think there are benefits. Sometimes the police will pull someone over just because and it can lead to a big bust, finding a bunch of kilos in the trunk. So when you racial profile people, sometimes you do get that good bust. It depends that on how far they take the profiling. Do they pull them over just to search them or do they pull them over to physically degrade them?”  
—African American man, Houston
- ▶ Messages stress both the inefficiencies that can be caused by racial profiling and inherent rights violations.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *When police are relying only on race to make decisions about who to pull over, or who to investigate, it is not only inefficient law enforcement, but also a human rights violation, which puts us all at risk. We need to make sure police have effective tools and do not rely on outdated and inherently harmful practices.*

## Building a Message

We recommend using a consistent structure in building messages. Including the following elements can help advocates stay on message while also helping to edit out excess information that is not always necessary.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>VALUE at Stake</b><br>Why should your audience care?                       | The color of your skin shouldn't affect the way you're treated in our system of justice. That's a basic American belief, and it's recognized at home and abroad as a fundamental human right.   |
| <b>PROBLEM</b><br>Documentation and statistics bolster arguments.             | However, when African Americans, Latinos, and other people of color are targeted by practices like racial profiling, which relies on stereotypes over evidence to determine who to focus investigations on, these core values are violated. |
| <b>SOLUTION</b><br>Avoid issue fatigue—offer a positive solution.             | The policies of our local, state or federal law enforcement must be rooted in our national values, focused on our communities' safety, and protective of our basic human rights.  |
| <b>ACTION</b><br>What can your audience do?<br>The more specific, the better. | Call on our local officials to review police statistics and procedures to ensure that this outdated and ineffective practice is not in use.   |

## Talking Point Suggestions

- ▶ *Law enforcement's job is to keep people safe while protecting human rights. Many agencies recognize that this means using effective practices that focus on the facts of a crime or specific information about individuals suspected to be involved. Practices like racial profiling that focus on stereotypes are a violation of human rights and have no place in any law enforcement policies or procedures. We need to ensure that no one is a victim of racial profiling and that law enforcement agencies are focused on research-based and effective practices to uphold the law.*
- ▶ *As Americans, we want our government's policies to uphold human rights and be free of racial bias. Racial profiling—that is, targeting individuals just because of their skin color, religion, or country of origin—violates our American values of fairness and justice. Unfortunately, too many law enforcement departments across the country are tolerating racial profiling. This practice divides our society and makes our justice system unfair. And, racial profiling violates an individual's human rights to fair treatment and freedom from discrimination.*
- ▶ *We need to make it clear that it is unacceptable for those who enforce our laws to stereotype people based on the color of their skin, religion, or nation of origin. We must outlaw racial profiling to make it clear that law enforcement should act on facts and evidence and not racial bias. If one group can be singled out based on race or ethnicity or religion, none of us will be safe to enjoy the rights that the United States stands for.*

## RACIAL PROFILING AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **Core Message:** Racial profiling violates the human rights to fair treatment and freedom from discrimination and violates American values of fairness and justice.
- ▶ **Lead with values:** Equality, freedom from discrimination, and fair treatment.
- ▶ Remember that **84% of the American public views racial profiling as a human rights violation.**
- ▶ Move beyond only denouncing racial profiling and **promote positive solutions** and alternatives.
- ▶ Use **racial profiling as an entry to discussions of broader criminal justice disparities.**
- ▶ **Explain why racial profiling is not an effective police tool and a human rights violation.** Be ready to counter those who believe racial profiling may be acceptable, even if it may be unfair and unequal treatment, if it somehow keeps communities safe.
- ▶ **Define the term** and fully explain that racial profiling is based on **stereotypes** and not evidence in an individual case. Criminal profiles may use characteristics such as race to describe a specific suspect. But racial profiling means singling people out only because of race.
- ▶ Build messages with **Value, Problem, Solution, Action.**

## Human Rights Messaging in Action

From “Racial Profiling Background.” Amnesty International website.<sup>7</sup>

According to the U.S. Constitution and international treaties and law, every person has the fundamental right to equal protection under the law regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. Racial profiling is an insidious violation of human rights that can affect people in both public and private places—in their homes or at work, or while driving, flying or walking. Racial profiling by law enforcement instills fear and distrust among members of targeted communities, making them less likely to cooperate with criminal investigations or to seek police protection when victimized. Multiple studies have shown that when police focus on race, even as one of several predictive factors, they tend to pay less attention to actual criminal behavior. This is a dangerous trend that can inhibit effective law enforcement and ultimately can endanger the lives of all persons who depend on law enforcement for protection.

— Drawing on U.S. founding documents along with international law is a good strategy for tapping into values.

— Makes points about why and how racial profiling is not an effective law enforcement strategy.

7. <http://www.amnestyusa.org/us-human-rights/other/rp-racial-profiling-background/page.do?id=1106647>



From: “Sanctioned Bias—The Problem of Racial Profiling in the United States of America.”  
The American Civil Liberties Union statement.<sup>8</sup>

There is incontrovertible proof that racial profiling does not give law enforcement officials an advantage in fighting crime. Furthermore, the premise on which it is based—that certain ethnic minorities are more likely than whites to be in violation of the law—is simply wrong. Racial profiling is a distraction because law enforcement officers begin focusing on the wrong suspect. When a U.S. government building was bombed in 1995, law enforcement officials immediately began to focus its investigation on Middle Eastern suspects, but the actual perpetrator was a white war veteran. Studies consistently show that “hit rates”—the discovery of contraband or evidence of other illegal conduct—among minorities stopped and searched by the police are lower than “hit rates” for whites who are stopped and searched.

— Gives concrete examples of how racial profiling hinders law enforcement.

## DUE PROCESS

**CORE MESSAGE:** Due process is a human right central to the American justice system. American values of justice and fairness only stand strong when we uphold the human right to due process.

Key audiences strongly agree that due process in the legal system is a human right and believe denying due process violates the human rights to security, fair treatment, and freedom from government persecution. Most commonly, these audiences recognize due process as giving someone a fair trial, but many also believe due process refers to following a set of standardized rules and procedures to protect individuals from being unfairly treated or imprisoned. Timeliness in granting due process is central to audience concerns.

Our research focused on two specific groups whose due process rights have been in jeopardy in recent years—immigrants and terror suspects—to further illuminate due process themes. The following guidelines are based on those discussions. Nearly all participants agreed that everyone, including undocumented immigrants and terror suspects, is entitled to fair treatment in the justice system and freedom from mistreatment by law enforcement officials.

### Themes to Guide Message Development

**Values:** Fairness, equality, America’s founding principles. Assert that the United States should uphold the human right of due process in order to stand up for American values. Focus on the goal of ensuring that the United States upholds human rights and due process, over the goal of protecting the specific rights of terrorism suspects or undocumented immigrants.

---

8. <http://www.aclu.org/FilesPDFs/racial%20profiling%20statement%20for%20un.pdf>

**Due process as central to the credibility of our justice system** and the general health of due process protections for all Americans. Highlight the idea that once we start denying rights for one individual or type of people, it puts all individuals' rights at risk.

**Avoid getting bogged down in the details of the process for trying detainees.**

When arguing for or against a specific process or type of court, a message framed in terms of values is always more effective. You are on higher ground if you can keep the debate centered on whether the specific process under debate upholds the government's commitment to due process and human rights.

**Deportation and raids not seen as violations in and of themselves.** Audiences do see the unfair deportation of legal immigrants as human rights violations, but this is not the case for undocumented immigrants. Raids are seen as part of law enforcement's natural job, but detention without a trial or access to a lawyer is seen as a rights violation.

**Avoid messages focusing on boosting the international reputation of the United States.** These are a turn-off for some participants who believe that the United States should uphold human rights because it is the right thing to do, not to improve our image in the eyes of the world.

**Include key information about how the current system denies due process rights to immigrants.** Participants are not aware of how our laws violate due process, and several have a hard time believing that this could be happening. Therefore, it is important to keep the language simple and straightforward. If the rhetoric strays from a simple description, the message's credibility could be put into question.

"Personally, I think everyone in the world is really entitled to [due process], that's my personal feeling...I think that it doesn't matter if you're an illegal alien or if you're an American citizen, there is a due process... those individuals who are not U.S. citizens, but they're in America, they see this country as the great country that it is because we do things the right way."  
—*Caucasian man, New York*

"This is what we're all about. That's the United States of America." —*Caucasian man, New York*

"Due process is quintessential to our society." —*Caucasian woman, Columbus*

## Specific Opportunities and Challenges

### Guantanamo Bay

- ▶ Audiences want to ensure due process for detainees as the country moves forward with closing Guantanamo.
- ▶ This support is not based on a desire to give the individual terrorism suspects due process rights, but rather is motivated by national interest—standing up for what they believe the United States should be about and bringing closure to the U.S. violation of its own values at Guantanamo.
- ▶ While the participants believe giving the Guantanamo detainees a fair trial should be the end result, on their own many do not have a clear idea of the best way to go about doing this, and some are concerned about public safety if there is a chance potentially dangerous detainees would be released.
- ▶ Sample language: Upholding the human right of due process is central to who we are as a country. This means ensuring due process for everyone, including those currently held at Guantanamo Bay, should be a priority.

## Building a Message

We recommend using a consistent structure in building messages. Including the following elements can help advocates stay on message while also helping to edit out excess information that is not always necessary. Below is an example of how to lead into due process discussions.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>VALUE at Stake</b><br>Why should your audience care?                       | Since the Declaration of Independence, America has strived to uphold fairness and due process.  |
| <b>PROBLEM</b><br>Documentation and statistics bolster arguments.             | But today, a broken immigration system denies basic human rights and due process to people who live here. In the aftermath of 9-11, immigrants have borne the brunt of harsh policies, with the U.S. government allowing raids and arrests without warrants, holding thousands in inhumane detention conditions, and deporting people without a fair trial. |
| <b>SOLUTION</b><br>Avoid issue fatigue—offer a positive solution.             | We need to change these laws and ensure that our government upholds the human rights and civil liberties of all people in the United States.  |
| <b>ACTION</b><br>What can your audience do?<br>The more specific, the better. | Email your Congressional member now and urge him or her to overhaul the broken immigration system and restore fairness and due process so that we can uphold our American ideals. <sup>9</sup>  |

## Talking Point Suggestions

- ▶ *Due process is a human right central to the U.S. justice system. We should not operate dual systems of justice or deny due process, for undocumented immigrants or anyone else. Our American values of justice and fairness only stand strong when we have one system of justice for everyone. If one group can be denied due process, none of us will be safe to enjoy the rights that America stands for.*
- ▶ *The United States was founded on the belief that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and on basic notions of fairness and justice. Denying due process to any group violates the values of fairness and justice our country was founded upon.*
- ▶ *In the aftermath of 9-11, our country has seen a steady erosion of basic human rights. Some of our laws have been denying basic due process to thousands of people in the United States, and many policies discriminate against people on the basis of national origin, race, religion, or citizenship. Even now, the Department of Homeland Security continues to arrest people without warrants, denies them phone calls to their lawyers, holds them in inhumane detention conditions, and deportes them without a fair trial. We shouldn't let the government treat anyone like this because denying human rights and due process to some puts all of our freedoms at risk.*

9. From the Restore Fairness Campaign. [http://action.restorefairness.org/o/6023/t/7236/p/dia/action/public?action\\_KEY=1088](http://action.restorefairness.org/o/6023/t/7236/p/dia/action/public?action_KEY=1088)

## DUE PROCESS AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **Core Message:** Due process is a human right central to the American justice system. American values of justice and fairness only stand strong when we uphold the human right to due process.
- ▶ **Lead** with values: Fairness, equality, America's founding principles.
- ▶ Emphasize **due process as central to the credibility of our justice system.**
- ▶ Avoid getting **bogged down in the details** of the process for trying detainees.
- ▶ Understand that **deportation and raids are not seen as violations in and of themselves.**
- ▶ Avoid messages focused on **restoring the international reputation** of the United States. Audiences find this an unconvincing, and even weak, argument for protecting due process, which they see as a core American value that we should protect as such.
- ▶ Include key **information about how the current system denies due process rights** to immigrants.
- ▶ Build messages with **Value, Problem, Solution, Action.**



## Human Rights Messaging in Action

From the ACLU website.<sup>10</sup>

### Attorney General Withdraws Bush Administration Ruling Denying Immigrants Protection From Lawyers' Mistakes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE CONTACT: (212) 549-2666; media@aclu.org

WASHINGTON—In a major step towards restoring key legal protections for immigrants facing deportation, Attorney General Eric Holder today withdrew a last-minute Bush administration order that severely restricted the right of immigrants to reopen immigration cases lost because of their lawyers' mistakes. ...

"Attorney General Holder correctly recognized that fairness and due process apply to everyone including immigrants," said Lee Gelernt, Deputy Director of the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project. "By restoring the longstanding right of individuals to challenge immigration proceedings lost because of lawyers' mistakes, innocent immigrants at risk of being deported through no fault of their own are once again protected by the rule of law. Holder's decision will profoundly affect the lives of many immigrants and their families." ...

"The winners today are fairness and due process. Attorney General Holder has taken a huge step in the right direction, and we applaud his decision. The Obama administration recognizes that immigrants facing deportation, including longtime permanent residents with U.S. citizen children and family, should not be denied fair hearings because of incompetent or unscrupulous lawyers who fail in their duty to provide proper representation to vulnerable immigrants, many of whom lack fluency in English and an understanding of the complex procedures that govern their hearings. It is now essential that the Justice Department take the same position in pending court cases," said Lucas Guttentag, Director of the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project.

— *Gelernt stresses that this issue is about everyone, not just immigrants.*

— *Guttentag stresses values over legal jargon, while connecting the problem to specific issues that audiences are likely to understand, such as inadequate legal representation.*

---

10. <http://www.aclu.org/immigrants/gen/39753prs20090603.html>

# IMMIGRATION

**CORE MESSAGE:** We need workable solutions to immigration problems that uphold our nation’s values and allow people who contribute and participate to live in the country legally with their human rights protected.

We suggest that advocates organize immigration messages around the core narrative and message above. A “Core Narrative” is a set of broad themes and values that help to connect with persuadable audiences and build support for change. Anti-immigrant spokespeople have a clear narrative with two main elements: law and order and the overwhelming of scarce resources. Over the past two years, pro-immigration advocates and communications experts have developed a pro-immigrant narrative designed to move hearts, minds, and policy. These broad themes help advocates tell a more united story about immigration and policies that affect immigrants. Although upholding human rights should clearly be a central goal of these policies, research reveals that human rights arguments can be effective in a limited number of circumstances on immigration but can be counterproductive on others.

## Themes to Guide Message Development

**Workable Solutions.** Americans are hungry for solutions when it comes to immigration, and they understand that punitive, anti-immigrant approaches are not realistic or workable. We can win by showing ourselves to be voices of solutions and can-do pragmatism. Messages without solutions are easily dismissed.

**Upholding Our Nation’s Values.** The most prominent positive values behind the core narrative are fairness and accountability. Many progressive audiences also see freedom from exploitation as important. And many native-born Latinos and African Americans bring up the value of equality when talking about how immigrants from different countries are treated.

**Moving Forward Together.** These messages tap most Americans’ views that immigrants work hard and are already contributing to the economy in some ways.

## Specific Opportunities and Challenges

### Human Rights Messages

- For issues like medical care for undocumented immigrants or legalization for the undocumented, human rights arguments can actively dissuade audiences from supporting positive reforms. Only 49% of Americans agree that “the human rights of illegal immigrants in the United States are violated when they are denied access to medical care.”

- ▶ Try to stay within the core narrative when messaging on immigration issues. Human rights as a theme can be most effective within this framework with messages on due process, freedom from discrimination, and protection from hate crimes.
- ▶ **Sample language:** *The United States was founded on the belief that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Denying due process to any group violates the values of fairness and justice our country was founded upon. We must uphold the human rights of all people to keep our justice system fair and effective.*

## Talking About Status

- ▶ Most key audiences see little difference between the rights of documented immigrants and U.S. citizens.
- ▶ But, they do begin to hesitate when the conversation turns to undocumented immigrants and the idea of conditional rights begins to emerge—the notion that if someone breaks societal rules, they give up some rights. Because this is not useful or helpful to immigration messaging or human rights messaging, we recommend against beginning most conversations about undocumented immigrants with a human rights frame.
 

“When you choose to do something like [come into the country illegally] you should lose some of your rights.” —*Caucasian woman, Chicago*

“If they are here working and not paying taxes, they have to go. We are working and paying taxes and that means we are supporting the rights of everyone. They can’t come here and not pay taxes and expect support.” — *Hispanic woman, Atlanta*
- ▶ Instead, focus on the government’s actions by asking to fix the immigration system in a way that upholds our nation’s values.
- ▶ **Alternative language:** *Harsh policies that force people into the shadows are not consistent with what our nation stands for. Some anti-immigrant forces want to ban undocumented immigrant families from renting apartments or sending their kids to school. These kinds of policies are unworkable and are not consistent with our values. We need Congress to pass just and humane immigration reform.*

## Health Care and Immigration

- ▶ Most key audiences agree that health care should be provided in emergency situations and that the government should provide health care for anyone in custody.
- ▶ But most don’t see the denial of medical care to undocumented immigrants as a human rights violation.
- ▶ It can help conversations to talk about undocumented immigrants contributing to health care. (Although we recommend moving away from “contributing” and commodity language in general health care messages, it is still necessary to allay key audiences’ concerns about the cost and address the values of fairness and responsibility when talking about undocumented immigrants.)

**The human rights of illegal immigrants in the U.S. are violated when they are denied access to medical care. Strongly agree:**

|                               |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| General population:           | <b>24%</b> |
| Human Rights Champions:       | <b>48%</b> |
| Young Cautious HR Supporters: | <b>00%</b> |
| U.S. HR Supporters:           | <b>52%</b> |

This breakdown shows the importance of knowing your audience when talking about immigration and human rights. U.S. Human Rights Supporters are the only cluster who reliably consider denying undocumented immigrants medical attention to be a human rights violation and thus are a good place to start with arguments about health care. However, there is much work to do with Young Cautious Human Rights Supporters on the issue, who actually fall below the general population in their support for this statement.



- ▶ **Sample language:** *Affordable health care for everyone in the United States is a necessity. We need a health care system where everyone contributes to the cost of medical care and no one has to fear that one accident or illness will leave them unable to care for themselves or their families. In this system, everyone contributes and everyone is secure in knowing that they can get health care; this needs to include all immigrants, legal or not. If we leave out millions of people living in our communities, the system will not work and will affect all of us.*

### Talking to Policymakers

- ▶ Every policymaker in our study agreed that legal immigrants have just as much right to government protection of their human rights as citizens. However, views on their role in protecting and providing human rights for *undocumented* immigrants are divided, usually down ideological and partisan lines.
- ▶ When speaking about due process for immigrants, almost all of the leaders agree that state government should protect the rights of all immigrants—regardless of their immigration status—to a fair judicial process. But, providing access to health care for undocumented immigrants gains agreement from some progressive leaders but also strong opposition from conservatives.
- ▶ Using a human rights frame in talking about immigration is likely to resonate with only the most progressive leaders.

### Building a Message

We recommend using a consistent structure in building messages. Including the following elements can help advocates stay on message while also helping to edit out excess information that is not always necessary.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>VALUE at Stake</b><br>Why should your audience care?                       | When it comes to immigration, we need real solutions that uphold our nation's values and move us forward together. We need a system that's fair and effective for everyone.   |
| <b>PROBLEM</b><br>Documentation and statistics bolster arguments.             | But our current immigration system is badly broken. There is no way for undocumented immigrants to get legal, including people who were here as young children. And unscrupulous employers can prey on workers and pay low wages. |
| <b>SOLUTION</b><br>Avoid issue fatigue—offer a positive solution.             | We need practical solutions to fix our broken immigration system, so people can get legal, pay taxes, and participate fully in American society.  |
| <b>ACTION</b><br>What can your audience do?<br>The more specific, the better. | The time is now for the President and Congress to pass commonsense immigration reform. It will help our economy and help all workers, and it's the right thing to do.   |

## Talking Point Suggestions

- ▶ *We need workable solutions that uphold our values and move us forward together.*
- ▶ *Due process and fair treatment in the justice system are basic human rights, and respecting them is a crucial part of who we are as a nation. There is a lot of evidence that immigrants—both documented and undocumented—are being denied due process in this country. If anyone is denied that basic human right, we are all at risk.*
- ▶ *We need to fix our broken immigration system, so people can get legal, contribute, and participate fully in the American economy and society. We're not going to round up and deport 12 million undocumented men, women, and children, so let's focus on realistic solutions like creating a way for people to get legal and cracking down on employers that exploit or underpay their workers.*
- ▶ *Building border walls and raiding people's homes and workplaces are just not realistic solutions, and they violate basic values and human rights. We need real solutions that will work to fix our broken system.*
- ▶ *We need policies that allow everyone who lives here to work and participate in our society. Our system must protect all workers from exploitation and depressed wages and allow us to all rise together.*
- ▶ *Harsh policies that force people into the shadows are not consistent with our values. Some anti-immigrant forces want to ban undocumented immigrant families from renting apartments or sending their kids to school. These kinds of policies are unworkable and are not consistent with our values. We need to fix our system so that immigrants who came here to work, pay taxes, and learn English can become legal and contribute fully.*
- ▶ *We need everyone's contribution to get us out of the mess we're in. To really fix the economy, we need to fix our immigration system to eliminate the underground economy it perpetuates. By legalizing the undocumented workforce, we will bring these workers out of the shadows and put more workers and employers on our tax rolls.*
- ▶ *Due process is a human right central to the U.S. justice system. We should not operate dual systems of justice or deny due process, for undocumented immigrants or anyone else. Our American values of justice and fairness only stand strong when we have one system of justice for everyone. If one group can be denied due process, none of us will be safe to enjoy the rights that America stands for.*



## IMMIGRATION AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **Core Message:** We need workable solutions to immigration problems that uphold our nation's values and allow people who contribute and participate to live in the country legally with their human rights protected.
- ▶ **Structure Messages Around the Core Narrative.**
  - **Workable Solutions.** Americans are hungry for solutions when it comes to immigration, and they understand that punitive, anti-immigrant approaches are not realistic or workable. Messages without solutions are easily dismissed.
  - **Upholding Our Nation's Values.** The most prominent positive values behind the core narrative are fairness and accountability. Many progressive audiences also see freedom from exploitation as important.
  - **Moving Forward Together.** These messages tap most Americans' views that immigrants work hard and are already contributing to the economy in some ways.
- ▶ People see little difference between the rights that documented immigrants and U.S. citizens should enjoy.
- ▶ Proceed with caution on explicit **human rights messages when it comes to talking about undocumented immigrants. Due process, freedom from discrimination, and protection from hate crimes are the most promising places to use human rights messaging.**
- ▶ Focus on the government's actions by asking to fix the immigration system in a way that upholds our nation's values.
- ▶ Build messages with **Value, Problem, Solution, Action.**



## Human Rights Messaging in Action

From *The Des Moines Register*, June 23, 2009.

### Guest column: “Toll too high: Push forward now to reform immigration”

*Thomas Rendon of Des Moines is a member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement.*

We need comprehensive immigration reform now. The current policies don’t work, and the realities of those policies are exacting a toll we can no longer tolerate.

That was the message we received when a delegation from Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement and the Iowa Immigration Reform Network attended the Reform Immigration for America Summit earlier this month. Nearly 800 people from more than 40 states gathered in Washington, D.C., to learn about how to fix our failed immigration policy.

The system abuses working families, perpetuates a vulnerable underclass in the United States, deprives hope for family reunification, denies an orderly process for immigrants to legalize their status and prevents communities from tapping into the talents and potential of valuable contributors to our society and economy. The summit mobilized around an urgent call to members of Congress to take action on immigration reform, an effort that generated 125,000 faxes and 7,500 calls from individuals around the country, including Iowa.

A growing consensus is emerging among a variety of interest groups—business, labor, immigrants’ rights groups, and communities of faith—that immigration reform is needed now. By reform, we mean workable policy solutions that reflect the common interests of the American people: establishing order at the border; focusing law-enforcement resources on criminals, not workers and parents; meeting American work-force demands; providing a reasonable path to citizenship; lifting wages for all workers; and generating billions in tax revenues that now go uncollected because some employers are operating in the shadows.

President Barack Obama pledged during the election to address immigration reform in 2009. Meanwhile, in 2006 and 2008, Iowa witnessed two devastating raids that brought upheaval and economic disaster to their communities. A popular restaurant owner was jailed and sent back to a nation he left as a teenager. Others defer their pursuit of the American dream for as long as three decades while awaiting a visa.

....

America wants a system that reflects its values, one that combines fairness, accountability, justice and a heavy dose of pragmatism. We want a nation that lives its motto of *e pluribus unum*, out of many, one.

— In listing the problems with the current system, Rendon makes sure to describe explicitly rights violations that the public are not aware of.

— Here he uses the “moving forward together” and “workable solutions” themes to underscore why our solutions are good for the entire community.

— Rendon closes with a strong affirmation of American values.



# SECTION II:

# Media Tools, Guidance, and Samples

**Getting Your Story Told:** Once audiences are identified and researched, and messages are developed and tested, advocates are ready to start shaping public discourse. Although there are many ways to do this, one of the most effective is through the media and the megaphones they represent. In this section, we provide some ideas and tools for effectively broadcasting your ideas and using the various media available to do so.

## WORKING WITH REPORTERS

Reporters need sources to effectively do their jobs. Becoming a source for the reporters who reach your target audience should become a goal of your communications plan. However, equally important is devising and implementing a strategy for sharing the messages you want included in the public dialogue. A few things to remember:

- ▶ **Reporters need information and often do not have much time to find it.** Making yourself and any reports, statistics, and spokespeople you have available on a regular basis increases the chances that a reporter will turn to you for a story. However, it's also important not to bombard reporters with a series of non-newsworthy press releases. Save specific press materials for newsworthy events, but do familiarize reporters with the specific types of resources you are able to offer them.
- ▶ **Be a consumer of the media.** To have a good idea of what might interest the media generally, or reporters you are targeting specifically, you need to be familiar not only with how your issue is covered, but also with how various media outlets approach stories and specific reporters' angles and preferences. *USA Today* covers stories differently than *The Nation*, for example, and

will often require a different angle, spokesperson, or news hook for a successful pitch. In addition, reporters like to know that those pitching them are familiar with their work and interests and will appreciate a tailored approach.

- ▶ **The goal is persuasion, not just publicity.** Although earning publicity is an obvious and crucial goal in any communications plan, it should not be at the expense of communicating the right message. Reporters may be eager to cover aspects of your issue that preclude the broader point you are trying to make, so it is important to evaluate requests carefully to ensure that you have at least an opportunity to frame the story in a way that highlights the solutions you are seeking.
- ▶ **Preparation is key.** Before anyone in your organization talks to the media, make sure they have undergone at least basic media training. Staying on message is not easy and requires practice. Anyone talking to the media also needs to have a basic set of points they want to make laid out in front of them. For short interviews and for those who do not have ample experience with the media, it's a good idea to stick to three points that can be reiterated. Check the At a Glance sections within each issue area of this toolkit for ideas about central points. Only those with ample media experience should be sent to interviews that could turn hostile.

## CHOOSING SPOKESPEOPLE

When you choose spokespersons to communicate a pro-human rights agenda, consider that they don't just speak a message—they also visually symbolize your frame and values. The messenger's identity is often just as important as the message—in some cases, a spokesperson personifies an issue. As a result, a campaign's cast of spokespersons should be diverse in terms of race, gender, class, and other respects. The best spokesperson candidates are those with potential to attract and command media attention; present a poised, confident, and persuasive image; and stay on message no matter what is happening around them or what questions come at them. Once you've picked diverse and talented spokesperson candidates, devote time and other resources to refining their skills—you'll find them to be among your campaign's top assets.

Spokespeople are very effective when they have a direct tie to a relevant issue. Audience members often see legal advocates, social science scholars, and even those personally affected by human rights violations as credible sources. An ideal situation is when a pool of spokespersons includes voices from many such vantages. This assures reporters access to as many compelling spokespersons as possible, allowing for effective reporting.

### A Few Words of Caution

Spokespersons who tell personal stories about problems in their lives are often blamed by audiences for causing their own problems. Communications consultant Doug Gould, after analyzing peoples' reactions to various messages about poverty, concluded, "When people hear personal, emotional stories about the working poor, they see the personal flaws of the individual that may have contributed to the problem. 'If he didn't take drugs, or quit school, have a teenage mom, etc., he wouldn't be poor.'"

According to extensive opinion research carried out by Gould, advocates can't rely on audiences' sympathy. Instead, frames based on "responsible planning and economic values," reinforced with ideas about "teamwork and respect," were found to be most successful in the poverty context. This means choosing spokespersons based not only on their potential to make audiences feel sympathy, but also on their ability to speak in terms of these larger frames. If you do choose to have spokespersons



tell their “hard times” stories, be sure that they bring them around to a discussion of the broader institutional accountability for their problems so that audiences do not focus on their personal imperfections.

In many organizations, the executive director and key staff are responsible for being spokespersons. This is not always the best choice. Choose your spokespersons based on how appealing to and effective with media they are, not based on their seniority.

Make your spokespeople easy to contact. Reporters, rushing against deadlines, often do not have time to call a dozen different people looking for quotes. They tend to go with the designated spokesperson pitched to them. It is important to identify key spokespersons and make those individuals as available as possible to reporters. We suggest giving key reporters cell phone numbers and email addresses of your top spokespersons.

There are three kinds of spokespersons you might designate, based on the goals of your efforts:

### **1. Organizational Spokespersons**

These spokespersons officially represent your group—they typically include your executive director, key program staff, or board members. These spokespersons should be comfortable speaking to the media and have a command of your organization’s messages and the issues you work on. They need to be able to provide reliable, accurate, and timely information to reporters—or know where to get it. Reporters may call these people at any time for a quote or background information. Make sure members of the media know how and where to find these folks, including personal contact information, if possible.

### **2. Community Spokespersons**

It is important to diversify your list of spokespersons so the same one or two people are not always being quoted. This helps to ensure that the voice of people directly affected by the issue are included in the media. Moreover, be mindful of all the kinds of diversity—racial, age, sexual orientation, class, nationality, gender, and otherwise—that make up the rich texture of your communities and whether those people are being groomed for the media. We encourage community spokespersons to speak at press conferences, rallies, and other public events; write opinion-editorials; or appear on talk shows. Community spokespersons represent “real people.” Their dramatic personal stories can be tremendously persuasive. Remember, do not always present community spokespersons with the intention of provoking sympathy. Choose members of the affected community who can speak with authority, who audiences will easily respect, and who can powerfully present the issue in terms of institutions and broad themes, not just in terms of isolated negative personal impacts.

### **3. Other Voices**

People not typically associated with your campaign can often validate your position with new audiences. They can also broaden the frame. For example, having law enforcement officers speak on behalf of convicted juveniles seeking fair sentencing conveys a message of those regarded as “tough on crime,” calling for reform that opponents might otherwise frame as being “soft on crime.” Another example would be to have local leaders, such as fire fighters or schoolteachers, speak out on abuses against immigrants. Understanding that scarcity of resources is a major anti-immigrant theme, such spokespeople are seen as those personally affected by such scarcity, and allow audience members to trust more fully the moral argument that the spokesperson is trying to convey. They also serve as insurance against audiences’ tendency to blame victims when they hear sad stories from a community.

Once you have identified your spokespersons, it is important to make sure they are able to speak on message. It might be helpful to conduct practice interviews with each of your spokespersons, finding where common themes intersect, and if your narrative can be heard in what they say. This could help you strengthen your own talking points and begin to collect sound bites for press releases and pitch letters that you will send to editors and reporters.

Remember, powerful journalism is rooted in powerful storytelling. People interviewed are like characters in a story. Therefore, the more spokespersons you have from diverse backgrounds, the more characters the journalist has readily available when putting together the building blocks of the story.

## PRESS RELEASES

Press releases are more than an opportunity to publicize an event or report. They are also messaging vehicles. Although the main text of the release should be primarily factual, you have a lot of room in the quotes you provide for elevating human rights.

Typically, press releases are written in the style of a basic news story. These feature the “who, what, when, and where” of the story early in the copy. The “why” can be supplied in the form of a quote from the spokesperson of your organization. This is also an important messaging opportunity. Releases should be reasonably short and make the case for the newsworthiness of the story. Be sure to include contact information on every page.



## Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
CONTACT: [Name (email and phone)]

### BREAKTHROUGH RELEASES *RESTORE FAIRNESS* VIDEO TO BRING BACK DUE PROCESS TO BROKEN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

#### Powerful New Video Urges U.S. Government to Uphold Human Rights in Immigration Policies

New York, NY (September 14, 2009)—Breakthrough ([www.breakthrough.tv](http://www.breakthrough.tv)), an international human rights organization, today released a powerful new video, *Restore Fairness*, to call for effective immigration reform that ensures American values like fairness and due process for all people in the United States. To view the video, visit [www.restorefairness.org](http://www.restorefairness.org).

Restore Fairness gives a human face to the harsh impact of current immigration laws on ordinary families. One featured story is that of Ana Galindo and her husband Walter Chavez, legal permanent residents with a 10-year-old U.S. citizen son who were raided (without a warrant) in their home by armed immigration officers. Their young son now suffers from nightmares and lives in fear of the police. These personal testimonies highlight the growing injustice that has emerged in post 9-11 policies which allow the government to arrest people without warrants, hold them in inhumane detention conditions, and deport them without a fair trial.

The video also includes interviews with leading Congresswomen, such as Zoe Lofgren, Chair of Subcommittee on Immigration and Lucille Roybal-Allard, Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security. “Everybody in America under our Constitution is entitled to due process of law and we’ve fallen short in the due process arena when it comes to the whole immigration system. If we’re not going to adhere to the basic standards that are in the Constitution, everybody is at risk,” said Congresswoman Lofgren.

The *Restore Fairness* video was produced by Breakthrough in partnership with twenty- two leading organizations and four advisors and is being distributed across the country as an education and mobilization tool. The campaign website features additional videos, action steps, a blog, and resources on due process and immigration policy.

#### About Breakthrough

Breakthrough is an innovative, international human rights organization using the power of popular culture, media, and community education to transform public attitudes and advance equality, justice, and dignity. Through initiatives in India and the United States, Breakthrough addresses critical global issues including violence against women, sexuality and HIV/AIDS, racial justice, and immigrant rights. For more information, visit [www.breakthrough.tv](http://www.breakthrough.tv)

###

— In this case, an important value is embedded in the campaign name, ensuring a value focus in any coverage.

— The release gets straight to the point and makes it easy for reporters to find the resources they’ll need to cover the story.

— Providing a quick glimpse of what kind of information and stories reporters can expect to find increases the chances of follow-up.

— A main spokesperson echoes the values theme and highlights core recommended messaging.

— Make sure to include a boilerplate outlining key information about your organization and where reporters can go for more information.

— This symbol indicates the end of the press release.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor are a quick and effective way to weigh in on issues that the media frequently cover. Often, more people read the letters page than the pages where the original article appeared, so there is great potential for readership here. A few tips for writing successful letters:

- ▶ **Referencing the original piece.** Letters are typically a reaction to a specific article and should reference it, including the author and title. However, sometimes headlines contain harmful frames and vocabulary that we would rather not repeat. In these cases, you can refer to the story's author and the date it ran.
- ▶ **Thinking about length and focus.** Letters need to be short and straight to the point and shouldn't exceed 150 words, which can be a challenge. Because of these limitations, and the goal of getting your message across, it's best to focus on one point you want to make about an article, not try to refute or praise every piece of it.
- ▶ **Setting the right tone.** It's important to be strategic about the tone of your letter. There are certainly times when an angry letter is effective and called for. However, there are other situations in which a letter that sounds reasonable and measured is more likely to have an impact with persuadable audiences. Picture average readers and gauge their likely knowledge of the issue and write the letter with them in mind.
- ▶ **Looking for opportunities.** Almost any story can generate a letter to the editor. Finding the angle can be a good exercise for staff and encourages both daily media consumption and the generation of new messaging language. Most importantly, finding opportunities and submitting letters obviously increases your chance of getting your messages into the paper.

The Value, Problem, Solution, Action formulation discussed in Section 1 and featured throughout this toolkit can be an effective structure for creating an effective and succinct letter to the editor.



## Sample Letter to the Editor

The following letter was submitted to *The Washington Post* and illustrates how writers can use available news hooks to transition to important points they seek to make. In this case, Catherine Powell of the Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda uses an international hook to draw attention to the need for a human rights focus in domestic policy.

February 10, 2009  
To the Editor:

Re: “Obama’s NSC Will Get New Power” (Karen DeYoung, Feb. 8)

We applaud National Security Advisor, James Jones, for his plans to expand the authority of the National Security Council. We believe that part of the new mandate should include helping President Obama restore U.S. moral leadership in the world by building human rights principles into the way the government operates.

One way to do that is to support the creation of an Interagency Working Group on Human Rights. This Working Group, established by President Bill Clinton and essentially dismantled by President George W. Bush, would serve as a coordinating body among federal agencies and departments for the promotion and respect of human rights and the implementation of human rights obligations in U.S. domestic policy.

The moment is ripe to build human rights into the foundation of our government and restore America’s standing in the world.

Catherine Powell  
Associate Professor of Law, Fordham Law School  
Co-coordinator, Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda

*Referencing the original piece, as done here, can also be a part of the body of the letter.*

*The author uses a topical news hook as an entry to the point she wants to make about broader human rights issues. An alternative to talking about restoring U.S. leadership would be to link human rights to our nation’s founding principles.*

*The author offers concrete solutions and ideas to underscore her point.*

*At 135 words, the short length of this letter increases its chances for publication.*



## OP-EDS

Op-eds are your chance to speak through the news media directly to policymakers, your constituents, and other target audiences. Papers will run op-eds from a range of sources, including experts, community voices, advocates, and those directly affected by issues. It is important for you to make the case as to why your voice should be included, providing biographical information and credentials and a persuasive argument about why your point of view is timely. A few tips for writing your piece follow:

**Check the paper's guidelines.** Outlets usually include op-ed guidelines on their website, including information about desired length and how to submit. It is important to follow these closely to avoid the risk of rejection over technicalities or unwarranted editing due to length.

**Structuring your piece.** Op-eds need not be formulaic, but a certain familiar structure does apply to most successful pieces.

- ▶ **A punchy intro.** Draw your reader in with a quick anecdote or metaphor that helps set the stage for the point you want to make.
- ▶ **A hook.** Tie your piece to a current event, an emerging trend, or a historical milestone such as an anniversary. The Value, Problem, Solution, Action formulation discussed in Section 1 and featured throughout this toolkit can also be helpful in drafting a persuasive op-ed. Invoking shared values and calling for concrete action are particularly important.
- ▶ **A central thesis.** State your central point clearly and focus all supporting evidence on further illuminating it.
- ▶ **Supporting evidence.** The rule of threes applies here, with three compelling examples, statistics, or anecdotes best supporting the thesis.
- ▶ **Acknowledging the opposition.** A good tactic in outlining your argument is to acknowledge the main opposing argument to your point, thus addressing questions that may be running through the reader's mind. Sometimes called the "to be sure" paragraph, providing this makes you appear to be reasonable and aware of the "other side," while also giving you an opportunity in the following paragraph to refute that particular line of reasoning.
- ▶ **A snappy closing.** Leave the reader with something to ponder while reiterating your point one final time. It should be noted that the inclusion of forceful and creative introductions and closings should not preclude your main point. If a metaphor is too difficult to follow, or an anecdote focuses readers' attention on its details, your point is likely to be lost.



## Sample Op-Ed

In the following op-ed Sid Mohn of the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights uses Human Rights Day to make the case for a domestic human rights focus. He draws on familiar American values to remind audiences that the human rights approach is central to our history and founding documents.

From: *The State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), December 10, 2007

### Address Human Rights Issues in Our Own Back Yard

For many of us, the mention of human rights evokes powerful images, like the tragic loss of life in Sudan, or the brutal crackdown on Burmese monks. For others, it draws out deep cynicism about governments—our own and others.

— *An evocative introduction draws readers in.*

But what exactly does it mean for us here in the United States to celebrate an International Human Rights Day? In an era marked by U.S. exceptionalism, it is certainly simpler for us to believe that human rights are about issues we hear about from far across the globe: torture, unfair elections, genocide or repressive regimes.

— *The news hook here is the celebration of Human Rights Day. See the news book section of this toolkit for more ideas.*

But this is only a part of the human rights story. As we watched the city of New Orleans disrobbed by Katrina two years ago, revealing scars of deeply entrenched poverty and the fresh bruises of a blatantly ineffective government response, we knew that something had gone terribly wrong. In those moments, we collectively understood that human rights were not just about other countries, but very much about the issues in our own back yard.

Human rights are the very bedrock of our U.S. democracy. When our founders recognized that we all have rights that no government should take away, including “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” they built a strong foundation for the United States. This was based in the belief that all persons should be treated with dignity and fairness, creating a better society for all.

— *We know audiences are drawn to links between U.S. founding principles and human rights. The author emphasizes these and the core values of dignity and fairness.*

But these human rights are not just about freedom from the impact of war, conflict or violence. They are as much about economic and social rights—the right to a livelihood, freedom from poverty, access to health care and having a roof over your head. Human rights indeed connect to the hardships of people on the west side of Chicago, in Galesburg or Rockford, working hard but struggling to make ends meet.

— *It's important to make explicit links to domestic issues. Key audiences agree that these are human rights issues, but this connection is not top of mind for them.*

Today, we have a critical opportunity in the U.S. to rediscover and realize human rights in our own communities. But what exactly does adopting a more universal human rights perspective get us?

A refocus on human rights at home moves us away from the narrow agendas of special interest groups and lets us begin to believe again in a larger vision for the United States.

— *This argument is particularly effective for social justice advocates and activists looking for intersectional issues.*

It helps us transcend the “either this or that” mentality of a fragmented political system, one that pits African-American issues against Latino concerns, job security against the environment, or something we hear a lot about today in Illinois—transit against health, education or human services.

Continued



Adopting this outlook about human rights would also challenge the longstanding, futile debate between conservatives and liberals about who is ultimately responsible for tackling society's challenges and ills, the individual or government?

Bringing a human rights perspective to the U.S. bridges this false divide, recognizing we face a huge price of inaction as a nation and as individuals. It declares a basic standard of a responsible society, propelling us out of political silos and demanding that we work collectively and more proactively toward common goals. Ultimately, we must all be committed to achieving mutual rights through mutual responsibility.

Today, we live in a globalized world where conventional boundaries no longer stand. The business community has learned this, but the social and political sectors have not caught up. Conflict across the world results in real need at home; last year alone, nearly 1,500 refugees, often carrying with them traumas of war or disaster and serious needs, sought safety in Illinois communities. They need more than a coat to face the Midwestern winters or a chance at a job that does not come close to paying local rents. In this changed world, a new vision of human rights would recognize that we are deeply interconnected and we can no longer afford to address the world's problems separately.

It also allows us to combat claims of U.S. exceptionalism, now abundant in an information saturation age where U.S. action and inaction—such as the mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib—can be seen instantly and repeatedly across the world. Adopting a human rights view in our own country could push us from exceptionalism to exceptional, boosting our profile abroad and allowing us to be a credible mentor to other regions of the world.

— *The exceptionalism argument is likely to work best with more progressive audiences, who are part of the key groups the movement will need to expand.*

The environmental movement has made dramatic progress by thinking globally and acting locally, turning the tables on old U.S. patterns of acting globally while overlooking our own back yard. We must rethink human rights as well. Improving the well-being of all means bringing human rights back home to the U.S. today.



## ONLINE STRATEGIES

Americans are increasingly getting their news and information online rather than from traditional news outlets. According to a December 2008 Pew Research survey, the Internet is second only to television as a source for national and international news. It is the top source for news on political campaigns. Getting your voice into blogs and online outlets that reach your target audience is an important and often overlooked strategy for human rights advocates.

### Online Articles

The comments section in online articles is another great place for messaging. If you are able to post on the first page of comments, you will reach a good proportion of those who have read the article itself. It is important for these types of posts to be strategic, however, because it can be tempting only to argue with other posters or refute specific facts within the article. One or two sentences that are on message will begin to add up if you are able to implement this strategy regularly.

The following comments on a PBS site that featured a story on ending juvenile life without parole sentences illustrate this strategy.<sup>11</sup> The following first five comments are short and to the point and could have been made by advocates or concerned citizens alike. However, the fifth comment, too long to reproduce here, is from an advocate working on the other side of the issue. Its length decreases the chances of anyone outside of the fight reading and internalizing it. It's therefore important to keep in mind your audience and the kind of information they can handle and to prioritize that in your comments.

1/30/2009 : 08:00:22 PM **alwayer Says:**

This case is so hard to believe. Florida needs to end the practice of automatic certification for children under 16—especially where it does not involve murder. Armed robbers have been reformed by juvenile systems for over a hundred years. There is no reason at all to put a 15 year old in the adult system when there is a chance at reform.

01/31/2009 : 03:24:01 PM **Mel Beckman Says:**

An excellent story! It illustrates well why we are working for an end to juvenile life without parole in Nebraska.

01/31/2009 : 06:48:32 PM **concerned Says:**

Please keep fighting for these kids. For “ALL” of the children who are forced to go through the adult court and prison system. I strongly beleive what we do to these kids is truly barbaric, inhumane and morally wrong this type of treatment desparately needs to stop. There is no excuse for us to force children to be something they are clearly and factually not, they couldn't be, act or even look like an adult even if they wanted to. Shame on us “adults” who point fingers at children and want nothing but vengeance!

02/01/2009 : 12:00:27 AM **Theresa Yuricic Says:**

This is such a huge issue that hurts our children. Children and not adults and are still capable of change and growth. When Kenneth was 15 years old he made a childish mistake. I have met Kenneth, and he is now a 23 year old man who understands this mistake. If the mothers of murdered children in MAMA can find it in their hearts to forgive, why can't the rest of us wake up and realize the mistake that is made when we lock away a child for life and throw away the key?

---

11. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/january-30-2009/juvenile-life-without-parole/2081/>

## Social Networking

Learn the ins and outs of using a social networking account for your cause. Both MySpace and Facebook, for instance, have opportunities for organizations to organize members or fans and to communicate with them. You can start a Facebook cause to publicize a campaign. Advertise it to members and allies and then provide frequent updates, which will appear on their walls when they log in. Advocates for youth sentencing reform in California have used Facebook in this manner and make sure to infuse their online advocacy with the same consistent messaging as the rest of their campaign.

To see their campaign, go to the following link:

<http://apps.facebook.com/causes/282881/26414806>

## Blogs

**Bloggers as reporters.** Many bloggers view themselves as journalists and wish to be treated as such. Thus, the strategy of creating and maintaining relationships applies here as well. It is particularly important in this case to do enough research to be familiar with a blogger's interests and angle so that you can provide the kind of information and arguments she or he is most likely to feature.

**Becoming a blogger.** Many organizations are launching their own blogs as a strategy for reaching their base audiences more immediately. For such a blog to be successful, it is important to have predictably frequent posts, ideally each day, so that readers are drawn in consistently. Another effective strategy is to cross-post your organization's posts onto more widely read sympathetic blogs. In the progressive blogosphere, for instance, outlets such as Daily Kos and MyDD allow for cross-posts, which both increase your readership and link back to your original blog.

## Tips When Blogging

- ▶ **Keep it short.** It's simply the nature of the Internet that everything comes in shorter and shorter bursts. This is to your benefit, too, because you only need to produce a couple of paragraphs. That's not just sufficient but often preferable.
- ▶ **Use hyperlinks.** Link whenever possible. This doesn't drive traffic away from your website but instead makes it more likely that people will read your blog. Sharing useful information makes your blog useful.
- ▶ **Brainstorm ideas and write posts in advance.** Even if you decide to post on a specific schedule, you can still write the blog whenever you like. Save it and post it later. Blog traffic is the highest Monday through Wednesday and Saturday between 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. EST, so it's a good idea to have posts ready and available to go up before or during these times.
- ▶ **Use pictures when possible, but be cognizant of copyright.** Major media outlets are picky about using their pictures elsewhere. Try Creative Commons ([www.creativecommons.com](http://www.creativecommons.com)) for photos you can use without specific permissions.

## Sample Blog Post

The following excerpt is from a blog post that appeared in the online section of *The Washington Post*.<sup>11</sup> The author makes the case for health as a right as opposed to a commodity and connects health care to healthy democracy.

Guest Blogger: **Dani Filc**

The current discussion about health care reform in the United States sounds strange for anyone living in a country with a public, universal, health care service. Indeed, it is difficult to consider a country that does not guarantee its citizens universal access to health care as a true democracy.

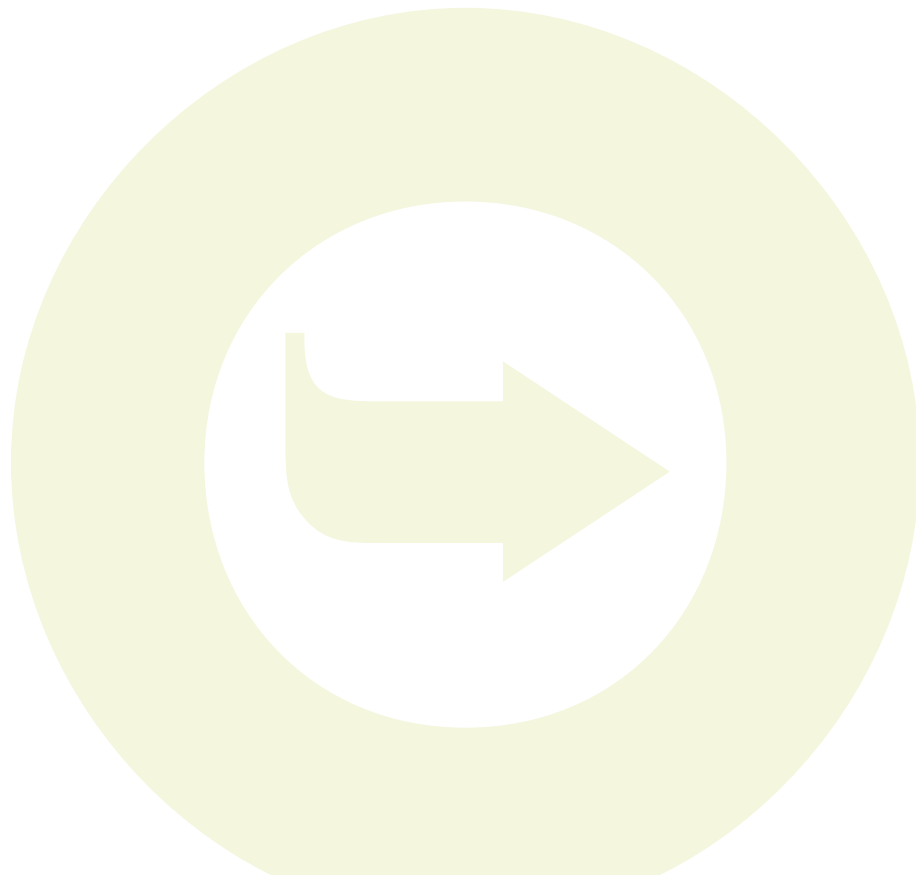
For those who have no access to health care, basic principles like equality of opportunity are empty slogans. You cannot be an active member of the political community if you are not healthy enough, and although access to health care services is not the main contributor to health, still its importance is undeniable.

Thus, health care cannot be considered as any other commodity, to be bought and sold in the free market. Rather, access to health care must be universal and guaranteed by the state.

This is the reason, as President Obama claimed, most democratic societies guarantee the right to health care services. This is why for me the public option is actually a no brainer. Without it, one of the most basic human rights, as recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is denied.

---

11. [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/shortstack/2009/09/health\\_care\\_lessons\\_from\\_israel.html?hpid=topnews](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/shortstack/2009/09/health_care_lessons_from_israel.html?hpid=topnews)



## NEWS HOOK CALENDAR

You can use this calendar as a planning tool for opportunities to talk about human rights. Connecting your press release or op-ed to a holiday or notable/historic date in a unique way can help it get better coverage. You should add to this list events that have particular importance for your issue on constituency.

### JANUARY

- 1863: Emancipation Proclamation issued
- 1892: Ellis Island opens
- 2: 1945: Executive Order 9066 is rescinded, ending Japanese internment
- 10: 1946: United Nations General Assembly convenes for first time
- 15: Martin Luther King, Jr. was born
- 22: 1973: *Roe v. Wade* decided
- Date Varies:  
Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: Observed on the third Monday

### FEBRUARY

#### *Black History Month*

- 12: Lincoln's birthday; the NAACP is founded,
- 25: 1870: Hiram Revels first African American sworn in as a U.S. Senator

### MARCH

#### *Women's History Month*

- 6: 1857: Dred Scott case decided by the Supreme Court, ruling that people of African descent could not be U.S. citizens, whether they were slaves or free
- 8: International Women's Day
- 30: 1870: 15th Amendment is adopted, guaranteeing voting rights regardless of race
- 31: 1927: Birthday of Cesar Chavez

### APRIL

- 4: 1968: Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated
- 7: World Health Day
- 8: 1935: Works Progress Administration established by Congress, providing jobs and income to millions during the Great Depression
- 11: 1968: Fair Housing Act enacted
- 22: Earth Day

### MAY

#### *Asian Pacific American Heritage Month*

- 1: International Workers' Day
- 15: International Day of Families
- 17: 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education* decision
- 1996: *Romer v. Evans* decided by the Supreme Court, ruling against an amendment to the Colorado Constitution that allowed discrimination against gays and lesbians

### JUNE

#### *Gay Pride Month*

- 1: International Children's Day
- 2: 1924: Indian Citizenship Act guarantees full citizenship to Native Americans
- 13: 1967: Thurgood Marshall becomes first African American Supreme Court Justice
- 19: Juneteenth Day, commemorating the abolition of slavery
- 23: 1972: Title XI prohibits gender discrimination in schools
- 25: 1938: Fair Labor Standards Act establishes a minimum wage, guarantees time-and-a-half for overtime, and prohibits child labor
- 28: 1969: Stonewall Rebellion helps to spark the gay rights movement

## JULY

- 2: 1964: Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin
- 26: 1990: The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination based on disability

## AUGUST

- 7: Transgender International Rights and Education Day
- 14: 1935: Social Security Act enacted
- 18: 1920: 19th Amendment recognizes women's right to vote

## SEPTEMBER

*Hispanic Heritage Month runs Sept. 15–Oct. 15*

- 21: International Day of Peace
- 25: 1981: Sandra Day O'Connor becomes the first woman Supreme Court Justice
- 30: 1962: The National Farm Workers Association is founded

## OCTOBER

- 2: International Day of Non-Violence
  - 11: National Coming Out Day
  - 16: World Food Day
  - 17: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
  - 25: United Nations Day
- Date Varies:  
Columbus Day, also celebrated as Indigenous Peoples' Day, International Day of Solidarity with Indigenous People, and Dia de la Raza

## NOVEMBER

*American Indian Heritage Month*

- 9: Day Against Racism
  - 16: International Day for Tolerance
  - 20: Universal Children's Day
  - 20: Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by U.N. General Assembly
  - 25: International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
- Date Varies:  
Veterans Day  
Thanksgiving Day

## DECEMBER

- 1: World AIDS Day
- 3: International Day of Disabled Persons
- 10: 1948: Human Rights Day, commemorating the adoption of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 15: 1791: Bill of Rights (first 10 amendments to the Constitution) are ratified
- 16: 1966: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are both signed
- 18: 1865: 13th Amendment is ratified, abolishing slavery in the United States
- 18: 1979: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women adopted by U.N. General Assembly.
- 21: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Adopted by U.N. General Assembly.





# SECTION III:

# Public Opinion Research on Human Rights in the United States

**Overview of Research Components:** This toolkit is based, in part, on a three-year public opinion research project comprised of both quantitative and qualitative methods. In it we examined, with our research partners Belden Russonello & Stewart and Loren Siegel, how several key audiences viewed human rights in the United States as applied to social justice issues. Audiences included social justice advocates not currently using the human rights approach, state-level policymakers, persuadable segments of the public, and the general population. Their opinions were examined through a range of research strategies described in the following. Full reports on each phase of research are available at [www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org) or by emailing [partners@opportunityagenda.org](mailto:partners@opportunityagenda.org).

# RESEARCH SUMMARIES

## 2007 FOCUS GROUPS AND SURVEY

This research included six **focus groups** in Atlanta, Chicago, and Minneapolis with members of the “**persuadable**” public. The goal of the focus groups was to understand how Americans think and talk about human rights principles and their application to domestic social justice issues. These groups informed the development of the subsequent **nationwide telephone poll** of 1,500 respondents from the **general public**. The survey was offered in Spanish and English, and Asian Americans were “over sampled” to ensure their representative participation.

- ▶ Americans see a recognition of human rights as a sign that the United States has not forgotten its founding principles. Americans value human rights because they believe in treating individuals with fairness, but they also tell us that respecting human rights contributes to a better society for all—a sentiment that suggests that honoring human rights for others makes life better for oneself.
- ▶ Americans agree that “every person has basic rights regardless of whether their government recognizes those rights or not” (80% agree; 62% strongly).
- ▶ Americans agree “we should strive to uphold human rights in the U.S. because there are people being denied their human rights in our country” (81%).
- ▶ Perceptions of the role of government complicate views on human rights. Many Americans believe that the government should be a provider of human rights, expanding government programs to ensure these rights. However, a strong belief in personal responsibility leads others to argue that government should only be expected to protect human rights.
- ▶ The public is poorly informed and holds ambivalent views on the relevance of international treaties for U.S. policymaking: 46% believe that the United States should not sign and follow international human rights treaties because “it would violate our sovereignty and our government’s right to protect our interests.”

For the full report, please see *Human Rights in the U.S.: Opinion Research with Advocates, Journalists, and the General Public*.

[http://opportunityagenda.org/human\\_rights\\_report\\_2007](http://opportunityagenda.org/human_rights_report_2007)



| Americans agree that the following are human rights:  | somewhat or strongly | strongly |
|---|----------------------|----------|
| Equal opportunities regardless of gender  | 95%                  | 86%      |
| Equal opportunities regardless of race  | 94%                  | 85%      |
| Being treated fairly in the criminal justice system   | 95%                  | 83%      |
| Freedom from discrimination   | 94%                  | 83%      |
| Freedom from torture or abuse by law enforcement  | 91%                  | 83%      |
| Equal access to quality public education  | 93%                  | 82%      |
| Access to health care   | 89%                  | 72%      |
| Living in a clean environment   | 85%                  | 68%      |
|   |                      |          |
| To a slightly lesser degree, Americans believe the following should be considered human rights:   | somewhat or strongly | strongly |
| Equal opportunities regardless of whether you are gay or lesbian  | 79%                  | 57%      |
| Freedom from extreme poverty  | 78%                  | 52%      |
| Adequate housing  | 77%                  | 51%      |
| Ensuring economic opportunity   | 77%                  | 47%      |
| Abortion  | 64%                  | 40%      |
|   |                      |          |
| Americans agree that the following are human rights violations:   | agree                | strongly |
| Racial profiling  | 84%                  | 70%      |
| Lack of quality education for children in poor communities is a violation of human rights   | 81%                  | 62%      |
| Torture of terrorist suspects   | 67%                  | 43%      |
| Treatment of residents of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina   | 60%                  | 41%      |
| <b>BUT only half the public (49%) agree that “the human rights of illegal immigrants in the U.S. are violated when they are denied access to medical care”.</b> |                      |          |

## SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY

Six **moderated discussion groups** were held in Atlanta, Chicago, and Minneapolis with local **social justice advocates**. The purpose of these groups was to understand how to communicate more effectively with this audience about the human rights framework and the adoption of that approach in their work. The insights from these groups informed a later online survey of more than 600 social justice advocates.

The social justice advocates interviewed were also receptive to the notion of human rights, although they were skeptical of its power with public audiences and policymakers. Advocates personally embraced the concept of human rights and some even described their work in human rights terms, but they were not wholly convinced that it was the most effective frame for their issues. The reports on this research provide several recommendations for addressing these barriers.

For the full report, please see *Human Rights in the U.S.: Opinion Research with Advocates, Journalists, and the General Public*.

[http://opportunityagenda.org/human\\_rights\\_report\\_2007](http://opportunityagenda.org/human_rights_report_2007)

## POLICYMAKER INTERVIEWS

These interviews with **50 state-level policymakers and opinion leaders** in California and Illinois sought to uncover decision makers' views of human rights as applied to domestic issues and to find opportunities for using a human rights framework effectively with them.

- ▶ Some social justice issues, including racial equality and due process, are already considered human rights by state-level leaders in California and Illinois.
- ▶ BUT areas such as freedom from poverty and access to health care are harder places to find agreement.
- ▶ These policy leaders are wary of framing many social justice issues as human rights because of the potentially far-reaching implications of calling something a human right and of their own limitations in fulfilling the promise of that designation. Many believe they *cannot* protect and fulfill all the needs that are suggested by an expansive view of human rights; and some do not want to fulfill all of them.

For the full report, please see *State Policy Leaders' Views on Social Justice and Human Rights*.

[http://opportunityagenda.org/state\\_policy\\_makers\\_report](http://opportunityagenda.org/state_policy_makers_report)

## 2009 MESSAGE TESTING FOCUS GROUPS

These 16 **focus groups** in Atlanta; Chicago; Columbus, OH; Houston; New York City; South San Francisco; and Santa Monica, CA examined **key public audiences'** attitudes toward five social justice issues—immigration, health care, due process, life without parole for young people, and racial justice—within the context of human rights.

Findings on specific issues are available in the full report at [www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org).

- ▶ Audiences say that human rights are the rights you have by virtue of being born. Participants frequently volunteered a number of examples of human rights: equality; freedom from discrimination; freedom from torture; and life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

- ▶ However, when audiences begin to distinguish between rights that are *protected*—freedom from torture, freedom of speech, etc.—from rights that are *provided*—health care, education, etc.—there is some hesitation about calling the latter human rights. Participants begin to worry about the appropriateness and feasibility of government providing these rights to everyone in the country.
- ▶ There remains concern about the role of personal responsibility. If issues are classified as human rights concerns, participants question whether the right should be upheld for all people, even those who they believe do not contribute to society or who have broken society's rules.

For more on this research, please go to our website at [http://opportunityagenda.org/public\\_opinion\\_research\\_2009](http://opportunityagenda.org/public_opinion_research_2009). For the full report, *How To Discuss Specific Social Justice Issues Within A Human Rights Framework*, please email [partners@opportunityagenda.org](mailto:partners@opportunityagenda.org).

# Select Human Rights Resources

## General and Cross-Issue Resources

### Publications

*Bringing Human Rights Home* (Cathy Albisa, Martha Davis, and Cynthia Soohoo, 2007)

A wide-ranging three-volume publication chronicling the human rights movement in the United States produced by activists and scholars, this series includes *A History of Human Rights in the United States, From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, and *Portraits of the Movement*. You can order the volumes through the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative website.

[www.nesri.org/Bringing\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Home.pdf?sku=C8821](http://www.nesri.org/Bringing_Human_Rights_Home.pdf?sku=C8821)

*Close to Home: Case Studies of Human Rights Work in the United States* (Ford Foundation, 2004)

This report examines the work of U.S. organizations using traditional human rights tools—such as fact-finding, litigation, organizing, and advocacy to reduce poverty, promote workers' rights and environmental justice, abolish the death penalty, and end discrimination. It is available online at Ford Foundation's website.

[www.fordfound.org/pdfs/impact/close\\_to\\_home.pdf](http://www.fordfound.org/pdfs/impact/close_to_home.pdf)

*Human Rights at Home: A Domestic Policy Blueprint for the New Administration* (Catherine Powell, 2008)

The Blueprint lays out a series of recommendations for ensuring that the federal government will honor the United States' commitment to human rights in U.S. domestic policy. It points to the relevance of human rights principles to domestic issues such as inequalities in access to housing, education, jobs, and health care; the application of the death penalty; and the prohibition of torture. The Blueprint is one of a series of papers released by the American Constitution Society on "A Fresh Start for a New Administration," available on their website.

[www.acslaw.org/lawandjustice](http://www.acslaw.org/lawandjustice)

*Public Opinion: Human Rights in the United States* (The Opportunity Agenda, 2007)

This research project examines the opinion of three key audiences on human rights in the United States as applied to social justice issues: the American public, social justice advocates not currently using the human rights approach, and journalists who regularly cover social issues.

[http://opportunityagenda.org/human\\_rights\\_report\\_2007](http://opportunityagenda.org/human_rights_report_2007)

## SELECT HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCES

### *Something So Strong: A Resource Guide on Human Rights in the US* (US Human Rights Network, 2003)

This resource guide is meant to serve as a starter kit for a movement for human rights in the United States. The framework and tools included emerged from the insights and activism generated by the Second Leadership Summit on Human Rights in the United States in July 2002.

[www.ushrnetwork.org/files/ushrn/images/linkfiles/Something\\_Inside\\_So\\_Strong.pdf](http://www.ushrnetwork.org/files/ushrn/images/linkfiles/Something_Inside_So_Strong.pdf)

### *The State of Opportunity in America* (2009) (The Opportunity Agenda, 2009)

*The State of Opportunity in America* (2009) documents America's progress in protecting opportunity for everyone who lives here, with an emphasis on economic and social rights. By analyzing government data across a range of indicators, this update of 2006 and 2007 reports assesses the state of opportunity for our nation as a whole and for different groups within our society.

<http://opportunityagenda.org/stateofopportunity>

### *State Policy Leaders' Views on Human Rights in the U.S.* (The Opportunity Agenda, 2008)

This analysis of interviews in California and Illinois addresses how 50 policy leaders see human rights issues at the state level. Although health care, racial justice, due process, and economic justice are subjects of conversations on human rights at the national level, much of the policymaking and action on these issues occur at the state level. This publication offers insight into decision makers' openness to a human rights approach.

[http://opportunityagenda.org/state\\_policy\\_makers\\_report](http://opportunityagenda.org/state_policy_makers_report)

## Multimedia Resources

### 1000 Voices Archive

This curated national collection of videos features stories created by filmmakers and communities across the country. Videos span social justice and human rights issues and are accompanied by fact sheets and other resources that can help promote informed dialogue at schools, faith gatherings, and policy meetings.

[www.1000voicesarchive.org/](http://www.1000voicesarchive.org/)

### The Hub

Witness's participatory media site for human rights allows individuals, organizations, networks, and groups around the world to upload videos, audio, or photos and watch, comment on, and share what's on the site.

[hub.witness.org/](http://hub.witness.org/)

### Military Leaders Speak Out Against Torture

This Human Rights First video illustrates how using a values framework and unexpected messengers can tell a powerful human rights story. In it, retired generals denounce the use of torture as contrary to American values and call for an end to the practice.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx2Nky\\_PR1c&feature=channel\\_page](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx2Nky_PR1c&feature=channel_page)

### No Retreat, No Compromise Podcast Series

Produced by the US Human Rights Network, this bi-weekly podcast seeks to "inform, educate and arouse the fight for justice in the United States." On the website, activists can create audio and video content that their members and/or constituents can listen to or watch when they want and get more information on the issues their work addresses.

<http://ushrnetwork.podomatic.com/>

### Youth For Human Rights International Public Service Announcements

This series of ads brings to life the 30 articles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Released in 2005, the ads are all available on the Youth for Human Rights website.

[www.youthforhumanrights.org/index.htm](http://www.youthforhumanrights.org/index.htm)

## Legal Resources

### Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute

Founded in 1998, the Human Rights Institute serves as the focal point of international human rights education, scholarship, and practice at Columbia Law School. The Institute fosters the development of a comprehensive human rights curriculum and strives to build bridges between theory and practice, between law and other disciplines, and between constitutional rights and international human rights.

[www.law.columbia.edu/center\\_program/human\\_rights](http://www.law.columbia.edu/center_program/human_rights)

***Human Rights in State Courts*** (The Opportunity Agenda, 2007, 2008)

This report details the ways in which state courts have considered and interpreted international human rights law. It is intended for public interest lawyers, state court litigators, judges, and state and municipal policymakers interested in integrating compliance with international human rights law into their domestic policies.

[http://opportunityagenda.org/report\\_state\\_courts\\_and\\_human\\_rights\\_2008\\_edition](http://opportunityagenda.org/report_state_courts_and_human_rights_2008_edition)

***Human Rights, Social Justice, and State Law*** (2008): *A Manual for Creative Lawyering*

This manual is part of a training initiative for social justice lawyers working at the state level, launched by the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, the Human Rights Institute at Columbia Law School, and Northeastern Law School's Rights in the Global Economy Program.

[www.nesri.org/fact\\_sheets\\_pubs/legal\\_training%20manual.pdf](http://www.nesri.org/fact_sheets_pubs/legal_training%20manual.pdf)

## **International Treaties, Laws, and Mechanisms**

### **Core International Human Rights Instruments and Monitoring Bodies**

Each of the nine core international human rights treaties has established a committee of experts to monitor implementation of the treaty provisions by its state's parties. Full text to the treaties and other resources are available on the OHCHR website.

[www2.ohchr.org/english/law/](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/)

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United States helped to draft. The full text is available on the United Nations website.

[www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml)

## **Toolkits**

### **US Human Rights Network Resource List**

This list includes training manuals and toolkits for a range of human rights issues.

[www.ushrnetwork.org/resource\\_organizer\\_toolkit](http://www.ushrnetwork.org/resource_organizer_toolkit)

## **Issue-Specific Resources**

### **Health As a Human Right**

#### **Amnesty International USA Health Work and Petition**

Amnesty International USA is working on the human right to health care in the United States as part of the Health Care is a Human Right Coalition, in collaboration with the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, the National Health Law Program, and The Opportunity Agenda. The program page links to resources and publications and a petition underscoring the importance of approaching health care as a human right.

[www.amnestyusa.org/demand-dignity/health-care-is-a-human-right/page.do?id=1021216](http://www.amnestyusa.org/demand-dignity/health-care-is-a-human-right/page.do?id=1021216)

#### **Center for Reproductive Rights Resources**

This site is a source of free, downloadable information on reproductive rights law and policy. Among its offerings are publications and videos, a legal glossary, and a Human Rights Primer.

<http://reproductiverights.org/en/resources>

#### **Montana Voices for Health Care as a Human Right**

This series of short videos features Montana residents talking about their experiences in the health care system. The National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, the Montana Human Rights Network, and WEEL Empowers partnered with Creative Counsel and their 1000 Voices Archive to create this video series highlighting stories about the human right to health in Montana.

[www.nesri.org/programs/health\\_speaking\\_out.html](http://www.nesri.org/programs/health_speaking_out.html)



## SELECT HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCES

### National Economic and Social Rights Initiative Right to Health Program

This program works with health advocates to develop a human rights approach to protecting health and ensuring access to adequate health care for all people in the United States. To do this, it focuses on advancing a human rights approach for reforming the systems for financing and delivering health care. The program works with community partners and other health advocates to generate human rights documentation, analysis, advocacy, public education materials, and workshops.

[www.nesri.org/programs/health.html](http://www.nesri.org/programs/health.html)

### *Voices of the Vermont Health Care Crisis* (Vermont Workers' Center, 2008)

This report was compiled from personal interview surveys conducted with more than 1,200 Vermonters and human rights hearings held across the state. It found that more than 95% of Vermonters believe health care should be a human right.

[www.workerscenter.org/healthcare-report](http://www.workerscenter.org/healthcare-report)

## Due Process and Detention

### American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Resources

The ACLU works on a range of due process and detention issues, particularly as they pertain to immigrants and terror suspects. Their resource pages include links to publications, fact sheets, legislation, court cases, and press releases.

ACLU resources on due process for immigrants

[www.aclu.org/immigrants/review/index.html](http://www.aclu.org/immigrants/review/index.html)

ACLU resources on due process for terror suspects

[www.aclu.org/safefree/detention/index.html](http://www.aclu.org/safefree/detention/index.html)

### Restoring Fairness Campaign and Video

This campaign comprises a take-action website and documentary and calls on the U.S. government to restore due process and fairness to the immigration system.

[www.restorefairness.org/](http://www.restorefairness.org/)

### Rights Working Group and Detention Watch Network Publications

These organizations have compiled a range of reports on detention, due process, special populations, and enforcement.

[www.rightsworkinggroup.org/?q=DetentionReports](http://www.rightsworkinggroup.org/?q=DetentionReports)

## Ending the Practice of Sentencing Youth to Life Without the Possibility of Parole

### Frontline Interactive Map

This map tracks, state-by-state, the number of inmates serving life without parole for crimes they committed as youth, as compiled by Human Rights Watch as of 2009. Visitors to the site can scroll over each state to see the number of youth sentenced to life without parole, the lowest age at which a juvenile offender is eligible for life without parole in that state, and whether life without parole is a mandatory sentence for certain crimes in that state.

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/whenkidsgetlife/etc/map.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/whenkidsgetlife/etc/map.html)

### National Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth

This campaign is dedicated to reducing and abolishing the sentencing of any person younger than age 18 years to life without the possibility of parole. There are currently 15 state-based campaigns that work with this national campaign to fulfill its goal to require meaningful reviews of all life sentences imposed on youth. These campaigns are led by advocacy organizations, legal professionals, and family members of people serving life without parole for crimes committed in their youth.

[www.endjlwop.org](http://www.endjlwop.org)

### *The Rest of Their Lives* (Amnesty International USA and Human Rights Watch, 2005)

This report contains a national analysis of life without parole sentences for children, including statistics on numbers sentenced by state and percentage of those sentenced for first-time offenses.

[www.amnestyusa.org/us/clwop/report.pdf](http://www.amnestyusa.org/us/clwop/report.pdf)

## Racial Profiling

### ACLU Campaign Against Racial Profiling

This campaign fights law enforcement and private security practices that disproportionately target people of color and Muslims for investigation and enforcement. Their work encompasses initiatives in public education, including the creation of a film, a “Know Your Rights” brochure, and a fact sheet on Highlights in the Fight Against Racial Profiling. ACLU advocacy also includes lobbying for the passage of data collection and anti-profiling legislation and litigation of airline and highway profiling cases.

[www.aclu.org/intlhumanrights/racialjustice/index.html](http://www.aclu.org/intlhumanrights/racialjustice/index.html)

### Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at the NYU School of Law

In its work to end human rights abuses in global counter-terrorism, the Center addresses disparate impacts on particular communities, both within and outside of the United States. Two of the Center's recent reports highlight the problematic use of such profiling in the context of “shoot-to-kill” policies and in security checks for U.S. naturalization applications. The Center is currently producing a documentary based on its report on citizenship delays.

[www.chrgj.org/projects/profiling.html](http://www.chrgj.org/projects/profiling.html)

### Racial Profiling Data Collection Resource Center at Northeastern University

This site is designed to be a central clearinghouse for police agencies, legislators, community leaders, social scientists, legal researchers, and journalists to access information about current data collection efforts, legislation and model policies, police–community initiatives, and methodological tools that can be used to collect and analyze data. The website contains information on the background of data collection, jurisdictions currently collecting data, community groups, legislation that is pending and enacted in states across the country, and information on planning and implementing data collection procedures, training officers in to implement these systems, and analyzing and reporting the data and results.

[www.racialprofilinganalysis.neu.edu/](http://www.racialprofilinganalysis.neu.edu/)

### Rights Working Group Face the Truth Campaign

The goals of the Face the Truth campaign is to achieve commitments at all levels of government to ban all forms of racial and religious profiling by law enforcement.

[www.rightsworkinggroup.org/?q=FaceTheTruthCampaign](http://www.rightsworkinggroup.org/?q=FaceTheTruthCampaign)

## Immigration Resources

(See the Due Process resource section for immigrant due process and detention resources.)

### America's Voice

The mission of America's Voice is to realize the promise of workable and humane comprehensive immigration reform. They work to build the public support and create the political momentum for reforms that will transform an immigration system that does not work into a regulatory system that does. To achieve this vision, America's Voice speaks directly to key audiences through the mainstream, new, and Spanish-language media and conducts public opinion research, communications, and online campaigns.

[www.americasvoiceonline.org/pages/about\\_americas\\_voice/](http://www.americasvoiceonline.org/pages/about_americas_voice/)

### Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM)

A project of the Center for Community Change, the Fair Immigration Reform Movement is a national coalition of grassroots organizations working for immigrant rights at the local, state, and federal level. Their site includes general information on immigration issues, comprehensive immigration reform including FIRM's principles for reform, the detention and deportation of immigrants in our communities, and state campaigns for immigration reform.

[www.communitychange.org/our-projects/firm](http://www.communitychange.org/our-projects/firm)

### National Immigration Forum

Established in 1982, the National Immigration Forum's mission is to advocate for the value of immigrants and immigration to the nation. The Forum uses its communications, advocacy, and policy expertise to create a vision, consensus, and strategy that lead to a better, more welcoming America—one that treats all newcomers fairly. The Forum also works to knit together alliances across diverse faith, labor, immigrant, nonimmigrant, and business constituencies in communities across the country. These alliances come together under the Forum's leadership to develop, execute, and evaluate legislative and administrative advocacy strategies.

[www.immigrationforum.org/about](http://www.immigrationforum.org/about)

# Conclusion

We hope that this toolkit has been helpful in guiding your thinking about human rights communications. There is much room to grow public understanding of human rights domestically, and we hope that this foundation of research and recommendations helps to guide this growth.

It is a work in progress, and we will continue to develop and hone our messaging recommendations. We'd like your help in this process and encourage you to contact us at [partners@opportunityagenda.org](mailto:partners@opportunityagenda.org) to share your thoughts, feedback, and experiences for incorporation in to future tools.







# The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will  
to Expand Opportunity in America*

The Opportunity Agenda  
568 Broadway  
Suite 302  
New York, NY 10012  
Tel: 212.334.5977  
Fax: 212.334.2656

[www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org)

The Opportunity Agenda is a project of Tides Center.