



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI)**

As delivered by Chad Wilton  
at the Human Dimension Seminar, Warsaw, Poland  
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Thank you, Director Link,

Thank you to the Serbian Chairmanship and to ODIHR for organizing this event on an important topic – National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI). Thanks also to our excellent host, Poland and to Sasa Jankovic for his excellent keynote address. The United States particularly wants to acknowledge and welcome our colleagues from civil society. An active and engaged civil society, as well as a free and independent media, play an active role in helping NHRI shine a spotlight on human rights abuses and violations.

We are committed to respecting, protecting and defending human rights and recognize that all individuals must be afforded the ability to exercise the full range of their human rights. Democratic government must have a capacity for self-correction, whether this entails NHRIs or other mechanisms. Strong NHRI can and should serve this purpose. Having the capacity to correct mistakes is an important way to uphold human rights and make a country better.

Although the United States does not have a National Human Rights Institution, we have multiple complementary protections and mechanisms to reinforce our ability to guarantee respect for human rights, including through our independent judiciary at both federal and state levels and numerous state and local human rights institutions. More than 140 state and local governments within the United States have civil rights or human rights agencies or commissions, many of which participate in the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies. Over the last several years, the federal government has increased its engagement with state, local, tribal, and territorial governments on our human rights obligations through outreach to state governors and attorneys general and participation in state-sponsored training and events.

Additionally, in 2012, the U.S. Government created the Equality Working Group, co-chaired by the Departments of State and Justice, to enhance the government's domestic implementation of our international human rights obligations and commitments relating to non-discrimination and equal opportunity. This mechanism creates additional opportunities for federal agencies to work together to combat discrimination in their relevant areas of expertise, facilitate the sharing of best practices, and engage with civil society and other stakeholders.

The United States seeks to empower all citizens and civil society with the ability to raise claims of human rights abuses and violations, utilizing the freedoms of expression and association and the right to petition their government for a redress of their grievances. These rights are essential to ensure governments uphold their human rights obligations.

We are gathered here in Warsaw to talk about NHRI and how we can improve them for the benefit of our citizens. These are the same principles that the United States raises frequently in international fora: upholding the freedom of expression, respect for the rule of law, and protecting the inherent dignity of all human beings, which includes tolerance and non-discrimination toward all. We look forward to the interesting discussion before us and to engaging with panelists, civil society, and members of other delegations.

Thank you.