

**Justin Vail, DPC SAP for Democracy and Civic Participation**  
**Opening remarks for U.S. Delegation ICCPR presentation to the**  
**Committee**

*October 17, 2023*

Madame Chairperson and Members of the Committee, my name is Justin Vail, and I serve as Special Assistant to the President for Democracy and Civic Participation at the White House Domestic Policy Council. The Domestic Policy Council is charged with helping to coordinate efforts across the United States Government to develop and implement the Biden-Harris Administration's domestic agenda.

The United States delegation is honored to appear before the Committee to report on our implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I would like start by reiterating our abiding commitment to the protection and promotion of civil and political rights of all persons, both globally and at home.

Our commitment is reflected in the strong, senior-level delegation that is appearing before you today. You will hear from senior representatives of the federal agencies that play key roles in implementing the laws, policies, programs, and processes that ensure that our commitment to human rights results in tangible progress.

Our system of federalism entrusts governance and responsibilities for protecting human rights across federal, state, and local authorities. Accordingly, we are honored to have two distinguished elected officials—**Attorney General Aaron Ford of the State of Nevada and Mayor Steven Reed of Montgomery, Alabama**—join our delegation, so that we can substantively address as many of the Committee's questions as possible and, where necessary, explain the different authorities held by federal, state, and local officials.

As part of our preparation for this presentation, we sought to meaningfully engage state and local officials, as well as civil society. Over the last year, we hosted several civil society consultations on a wide variety of human rights issues and included nearly 100 participants in each consultation. We have received approximately 120 reports from civil society.

Our delegation thanks the members of civil society who joined us just yesterday for a productive consultation here in Geneva—their engagement has informed our preparation for this presentation and, more importantly, their engagement strengthens our efforts to advance and protect human rights each and every day.

We take pride in the progress made to date during the Biden-Harris Administration, and the lives that have been improved as a result. We also recognize that there is a great deal more to be accomplished. On his first day in office, President Biden directed an historic, whole-of-government effort to address systemic racism and strengthen support for underserved communities, and we are taking action to prevent discrimination and root out the persistent inequalities in our criminal justice system, and in access to health care, housing, and other aspects of life that are essential to freedom and prosperity.

The Administration is taking action to counter the hate-motivated violence that targets individuals and communities based on what they believe or who they are and that threatens our public safety and democracy.

President Biden established the for the first time a White House Gender Policy Council that leads the Administration's efforts to advance gender equity and equality.

The United States continues to advance our long-standing commitment to uphold our treaty and trust responsibilities and nation-to-nation relationship with Tribal Nations.

President Biden also established the first-ever White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention to reduce gun violence to save lives from the public health crisis of gun violence and implement and expand upon key executive and legislative action, like the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the most significant bipartisan gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years.

And, for the first time in our nation's history, the Federal Government has made it a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments flow to communities that are underserved and overburdened by pollution and the devastating impacts of climate crisis.

We are also confronting the attacks on our fundamental values and rights that we are experiencing in the United States, including attacks on the right to vote in free and fair elections; on reproductive rights and health care; and against the LGBTQ+ community.

We approach these challenges head on, resolute in our commitment to protecting and advancing human rights. Because great nations do not hide from their history or their faults. They acknowledge them and work to improve with transparency, humility, and perseverance. In doing so, we strengthen our democracy and our societies, we address past wrongs, and provide hope and motivation to human rights defenders across the globe.

We look forward to a constructive and substantive dialogue, and we remain committed to engaging with the Committee and broader

international community as we continue working to advance civil and political rights both domestically and across the globe.

**U.S. Presentation to the UN Human Rights Committee**  
**Opening Remarks by Ambassador Michèle Taylor**  
**U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Human Rights Council**  
**October 17, 2023**

Members of the UN Human Rights Committee, esteemed colleagues and dedicated civil society representatives.

The United States Delegation presents itself today for this Committee's consideration of our fifth periodic report concerning the implementation of our obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We do so with humility and are honored to appear before you today. The ICCPR has a central role in international human rights law, setting forth a broad array of civil and political rights that form the bedrock of equality and human dignity for every individual.

I wish to extend our gratitude to the Committee for its steadfast commitment to advancing civil and political rights worldwide. Your dedication has resulted in numerous improvements in law, policy, and, most importantly, in practice.

Our delegation today is a testament to our commitment to our international legal obligations with regard to civil and political rights. This delegation is composed of experts from across our government, including representatives from the U.S. State Department, White House Domestic Policy Council, and nine other federal agencies. We're also privileged to be accompanied by Attorney General Aaron Ford of Nevada, and Mayor Steven Reed of Montgomery, Alabama, reflecting the indispensable role of state and local government in fulfilling our treaty obligations.

But let me be clear; it is not merely out of obligation that we seek to live up to the standards of the ICCPR. For the Biden-Harris Administration, for the United States, it is a moral imperative at the very heart of our democracy and our pursuit of a more perfect union.

The rights enshrined in the ICCPR are foundational to the fabric of all thriving democracies. For example, ensuring the right to vote and to participate in public affairs is not only necessary to foster an active civil society and political pluralism, it is crucial to ensure equal treatment under the law and to address a broad range of human rights challenges.

We are deeply committed to the respect and protection of the rights enshrined in the ICCPR. The United States demonstrates that commitment by adopting and implementing measures to give effect to those rights.

Our commitment to the LGBTQI+ community remains unwavering, even in the face of mounting challenges. In the realm of Indigenous rights, our efforts are geared towards fostering strong ties between the Federal Government and Tribal Nations, ensuring that our policies are shaped by meaningful consultations with tribal leaders.

The United States' significant investments in maternal health and the recently unveiled blueprint to address maternal health crises underscore our commitment to reproductive rights. Many state leaders continue to develop and advance policies to address maternal mortality and protect women's access to reproductive health care. Women in all their diversity face unique challenges in realizing their many human rights.

The path to racial equity and justice remains central to our endeavors. The United States is working to advance racial equity and help realize the promise of America for members of marginalized racial, ethnic and Indigenous communities across the country. The United States has taken steps to acknowledge and address systematic racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and intolerance and the scourge of white supremacy within our own borders. Racial inequity is not an issue for a single U.S. department or agency – it is the business of the whole of the U.S. government in all our federal policies and institutions. We encourage other state parties to take a similarly holistic approach.

The United States is also working to ensure that prison conditions and sentencing are consistent with both our international obligations and our values.

We believe that no country is above scrutiny. I was to invite the Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism to visit the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. While we may not agree with all of the conclusions of the report, we recognize that these visits help the United States make progress.

As much as our government is committed to abiding by its obligations under the ICCPR and improving our approach to human rights issues across the country, we are but one stakeholder in what is, truly, a societal effort. I wish here to acknowledge that it is the vibrant tapestry of civil society that keeps us grounded,

holding us accountable to our commitments. Their shadow reports and consultations compel the introspection that allows us to adapt, evolve, and improve. At the U.S. Mission yesterday, we held our sixth consultation with civil society. These meetings are instrumental in our learning process, and we look forward to our ongoing engagement. Other topics discussed included access to housing, clean water, and food.

Reporting to and engaging with this Committee also helps the United States reflect on areas of progress and ongoing challenges. We welcome the Committee's questions and observations and will respond on as many of the questions as possible.

I'd like to conclude by repeating that the U.S. remains as committed to fulfilling our obligations under the ICCPR as we were when we ratified it. While we take great pride in our strides forward, we are equally forthright in acknowledging our areas for improvement. It is in this spirit that we present ourselves before you today.

Now, I invite my esteemed colleague from the White House Domestic Policy Council, Justin Vail, to share further perspectives.

Thank you.