



UNITED STATES  
COMMISSION ON  
CIVIL RIGHTS

624 Ninth Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20425

January 22, 1993

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights extends its heartfelt congratulations to you as the Nation's 42nd President. As you begin your term, and plan a course that will renew our commitment to full equality of rights and opportunities regardless of sex, race, national origin, religion, age, and disability, many of the choices you must make will require great courage and perseverance. Not all will be politically popular or self-evident. In your deliberations, the Commission wishes you peace of mind and spirit, clarity of vision, and unwavering resolve.

Despite gains in recent years in enacting several tough new laws, the condition of civil rights in America does not seem to be improving, and in fact, in many arenas, it is worse. Today, widespread prejudice adds to this Nation's legacy of discrimination in depriving a great many of our citizens a fair chance to realize their aspirations and full potential as human beings. The injustices suffered by racial, ethnic and religious minorities, Native Americans, women, older citizens, and persons with disabilities, is truly a national disgrace. As a direct consequence, we see distrust, fear, and hatred sharply dividing and disrupting our diverse racial and ethnic communities, causing added misery and sapping precious resources. The need to solve these deeply rooted problems is hardly a matter of special interests; it is a national imperative in the interest of *all* Americans.

In response to the rise in racial and ethnic tensions, the Commission is conducting public fact-finding hearings all across the country. Through these hearings we hope to illuminate the underlying causes of tensions and identify ways that government and private interests can work to repair this terribly destructive situation. We have held hearings in Washington, D.C. (January and May, 1992) and Chicago (June, 1992), and have scheduled the next hearing for June, 1993 in Los Angeles. Reports based on the hearings are being prepared and will be forwarded to you as soon as they are ready.

The Commission has also recently documented instances where civil rights enforcement has been weak in recent years, lacking leadership and commitment and adequate resources. For example, a recent Commission study (enclosure 1) revealed a number of serious breakdowns at the Departments of Transportation and Labor relating to federally assisted public works projects. With major Federal projects getting underway, such as those created by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, and others which you may propose,

immediate action is needed to ensure that *all* Americans have a fair chance to enjoy the economic benefits produced by such projects. Similarly, we believe the area of fair housing urgently requires attention to avoid a serious backlog in the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) complaints caseload under Title VIII. Because many State and local fair housing agencies no longer process Federal complaints, HUD must absorb thousands of new cases (enclosure 2). It is our opinion that HUD lacks sufficient resources to process these added complaints without severely curtailing the quality of the Title VIII enforcement program or other fair housing areas.

Mr. President, it is absolutely essential that you personally lead the development and execution of your administration's civil rights program. Appointing a cabinet-level civil rights task force, as recommended by the Citizen's Commission on Civil Rights, can be a first step toward a much-needed revamping of Federal enforcement operations. However, we believe that without your leadership, such steps will not be enough to ensure that existing civil rights laws are fully enforced, nor will they permit us to root out the underlying causes of racial and ethnic tensions that are disrupting so many communities across America. We believe that the President must be involved directly and continuously in shaping civil rights policies and in seeing that they are aggressively implemented.

Finally, the Commission remains deeply concerned about the Federal government's policies toward Haitian refugees (enclosure 3). A move to accelerate the processing of applicants for asylum from Haiti would be a positive step. However, extending the policy of forcibly repatriating those fleeing Haiti leaves undiminished our distress over the condition of human rights there, and the apparent disparity between our policies toward Haitian refugees and those from other nations, notably Cuba. We firmly believe that this Nation's immigration policy must be premised on a high moral standard which gives the protection of human rights a paramount place and precludes any discrimination based on race or national origin. We urge you to act swiftly to assure that immigration policies treat all refugees equitably, regardless of their race or national origin. Further, we call upon you to lead the community of nations in taking the necessary steps to protect the rights of Haitian citizens.

The Commission can be a critical resource in your efforts to define policies that will help produce a freer, more equal, and vital America. Mr. President, it is our hope that you will meet with the Commissioners at an early date. The Commission stands ready to do everything in its power to assist you and your administration to advance civil rights and make equal opportunity a reality for all Americans.

Respectfully,

For the Commissioners,

ARTHUR A. FLETCHER  
Chairperson

Enclosures(3)