

Dear Emma, Hayley, Courtney and Leah:

Thank you for writing. I have heard from many Americans concerned about human rights issues, and I appreciate your perspective.

As a free people, we stated our convictions long ago. We believe that each of us is created equal with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And for more than two centuries, we have fought to extend that fundamental promise of fairness and opportunity to all our citizens.

Many countries have made that same commitment. Nations around the world have pledged themselves to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognizing the inherent dignity and rights of all members of our human family.

But even now, we know our journey is not yet finished. Too many people still labor in the darkness of tyranny and oppression. In too many parts of the world, fundamental freedoms remain unrealized, and the protections of law extend only to a privileged few. Our values call upon us to care about those who are denied the chance to build a decent life for themselves and their families, no matter where they live. They call upon us to embrace the common endeavor of all humanity.

I believe that work begins with the example we set here at home. We know from our own history that intolerance breeds injustice, whether it is based on race or religion, gender or sexual orientation. We understand that we are stronger when all our people are granted opportunity, and when our wives and our daughters have the same opportunities as our husbands and our sons.

But our commitment to expanding opportunity cannot stop at our shores. Standing up for peace and justice means extending a hand to those who reach for freedom around the world. It means supporting Afghans as they take responsibility for their future, and people across the Middle East and North Africa as they keep reaching for their rights. It means working for an Israeli-Palestinian peace, no matter how difficult it may be. It means engaging in places like Burma, where brave people are stepping forward to play a role in determining their country's political future.

These are moral obligations, just like our moral obligation to help lift impoverished corners of the world. We promote growth, education, agriculture, and public health. These efforts are about more than charity. They are about new models of empowering people by building institutions and abandoning the rot of corruption, and creating ties of trade. Because when developing nations succeed in offering all their people the opportunity to start a business, educate their children, and improve their standard of living, America will be more successful as well.

Yet none of us can be truly prosperous when unspeakable violence continues to rob men, women, and children of the chance to live in dignity with basic rights. My Administration puts preventing genocide and other mass atrocities at the forefront of America's foreign policy, and we are bringing every tool to bear in this critical fight. And while we know too well the challenges that remain in places like Sudan, we also know that our efforts have saved lives in places like Libya and Burma, and areas of Central Africa affected by the Lord's

Resistance Army. In Syria, we continue to stand with those seeking a free, inclusive, and democratic future. We are helping lay the groundwork to hold the perpetrators of atrocities accountable while providing support to those who work for the common good of all Syrians.

Upholding our commitment to universal human rights also means combatting human trafficking, whether it occurs halfway around the world or here within our borders. The United States will continue to lead in this fight. We will keep giving countries incentives to meet their responsibilities, supporting those that pass and enforce anti-trafficking laws and calling out the worst abusers. We will keep working to put traffickers behind bars and dismantle their networks. And we will keep making sure investigators, law enforcement, and advocates have the resources they need to take meaningful, effective action. Together with nations worldwide, we must speak with one voice: our people and our children are not for sale.

No country can claim immunity from human rights abuses, or from the responsibility to confront them. By embracing that responsibility, we will help prevent mass atrocities, replace tyranny with good governance, and enlist free nations in common cause. To learn more about my Administration's human rights agenda, visit www.HumanRights.gov.

Thank you, again, for writing.

Sincerely,

Barack Obama