

September 14, 2022

The Honorable Susan Rice
Director, Domestic Policy Council
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Ambassador Rice,

We applaud the administration's efforts to address hate through the upcoming summit, *United We Stand: Countering Hate-Fueled Violence Together*. We believe that hate and hate-fueled violence, primarily perpetrated by the antidemocratic far-right extremist movement in the United States, represents an existential threat to our democracy. This threat requires immediate action to prevent it from overwhelming our state and local governments, undermining our social institutions, undercutting our international responsibilities, and ending American democracy.

The summit is an opportunity to acknowledge that the United States is facing a hate epidemic. Hate is no longer relegated to the fringes of our society but is manifest in a broad-based movement with a vast and entrenched support structure. We must address the violent and most visible components of this movement that uses mass casualty attacks and hate crimes to terrorize our immigrant, faith-based, and minority communities.

We must also recognize the legacy of hate in our policies and institutions that lends legitimacy to the movement's efforts to further entrench policies steeped in xenophobia, antisemitism, bigotry, and racism. Repairing this harm and supporting targeted communities is critical to preventing the movement's current efforts to institutionalize hate. This work will strengthen our position as a global advocate for human rights, especially when integrated into efforts to address the recent United Nations recommendations from the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the pre-summit roundtables, and look forward to continuing a dialogue on responding to hate as a follow-up to the summit. The below are areas of emphasis that we urge the administration to consider in its efforts to address hate.

Protect Local Democratic Processes and Institutions from Hate and Extremism:

The antidemocratic far-right extremist movement has for years focused its efforts on state and local democratic institutions and processes—from school boards to elections administration—to further its goal of transforming our multiracial, pluralistic society and democratic system of government into one that is largely authoritarian and organized according to race, ethnicity, religion, sex, and/or culture. The administration should prioritize support to state and local elected officials, law enforcement, and members of civil society to uphold the implementation and legitimacy of democratic processes as well as public trust in those processes. Specifically, it should support state-level efforts to expand training for poll observers, election workers, and other volunteers permitted at polls to mitigate bias, mistrust, and efforts to intimidate voters at polling places.

Address the Mainstreaming of Anti-Immigrant, Nativist Extremism:

The mainstreaming of extremist conspiracies such as the antisemitic Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory and related false “invasion” narratives at our borders is fueling xenophobic state and local policies, as well as hate-motivated violence and terrorism nationwide. These extremist narratives cast immigrants, refugees, and nonwhites as violent physical threats: pawns in a subversive scheme to overturn democracy. Fueled by a flood of mis- and disinformation, these narratives have repeatedly inspired devastating terrorist attacks, including those directed at Black people in Buffalo that killed 10 people, Latinx people in El Paso that killed 23 people, and Jewish congregants in Pittsburgh that killed 11 people. Debates over immigration policy cannot continue to legitimize violent extremism. The federal government has an urgent responsibility to counter this threat by ensuring that CBP personnel do not actively collaborate in the unlawful actions of states and that they fulfill their duties to process and screen all migrants in accordance with U.S. immigration laws; ensuring that the National Guard is never deployed for immigration enforcement; authorizing Department of Justice investigations into potential constitutional and civil rights violations when they occur; and publicly and forcefully condemning the dangerous use of “invasion” and other nativist rhetoric to characterize asylum seekers and other migrants. The mainstreaming of nativist extremism is a threat to the immediate safety and security of our communities, as well as to our democratic institutions. The administration must do more to challenge it.

Address Extremist Recruitment of the Military Community and Law Enforcement:

Antidemocratic far-right extremists are recruiting active-duty military and veterans and infiltrating law enforcement. We applaud the administration’s initial efforts to counter such actions in the U.S. military, including Secretary Austin’s all-force stand down and convening of a working group to address this challenge. The administration must prioritize this work and broader efforts to address extremism throughout the military community and all levels of law enforcement. This effort needs to examine ways extremists recruit, and provide support to those who serve, veterans, and their families. As a start, the recommendations of the 2021 Department of Defense Report on Countering Extremist Activity Within the Department of Defense should be resourced and implemented.

Support Targeted Communities:

We recognize the administration’s groundbreaking work to support targeted communities, including passage and steps to implement the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, and the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act, as well as the 2021 National Strategy to Confront Domestic Terrorism. The threat from violent extremists nonetheless continues to grow, and we encourage the administration to both institutionalize support to those communities that have been targets of the movement’s violent actions and address the hate that perpetuates injustice and harm to those communities. We must also alleviate the burden survivors currently face navigating various bureaucracies to access resources in the wake of an attack. The administration should create and provide technical support for survivors that bridges the gaps between federal, state, and local resources. Separately, the administration should prioritize pillar 4 of its 2021 strategy which acknowledges that racism and bigotry are long-term contributors to domestic terrorism and hate-fueled violence. Last, to address the significant gaps that exist in hate crime data, the federal government should incentivize law enforcement reporting of hate crimes. Only when our country understands the full scope of the threat, will we be able to develop sound policies and programs to address hate-fueled violence.

Human Rights First supports efforts to prevent hate, hate-fueled violence, and their existential threat to our democracy, and we appreciate the administration's work in this area. Thank you again for hosting this important and timely event and what we hope is the first of many conversations.

Respectfully,

Michael Breen
President and CEO
Human Rights First