

## **Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Tom Coburn, M.D.**

Hearing before the United States Senate Judiciary

Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law

*“The Law of the Land: U.S. Implementation of Human Rights Treaties”*

December 16, 2009

---

Mr. Chairman, I would like to start by thanking you for holding today’s important hearing on the implementation of human rights treaties that have been signed and ratified by the United States. To my knowledge, this is the first hearing of its kind in the Senate, and I look forward to learning from our witnesses about the mechanisms used by the U.S. government to monitor our efforts and ensure our compliance with these important treaties.

Surely there is no dispute that the United States has solemn legal obligations with respect to treaties it has signed and ratified. Especially with respect to international human rights responsibilities, I expect that the United States stands head and shoulders above much of the world. This is not to say that our record has been perfect, or that there are not still improvements to be made, but on the whole, the United States remains a beacon of human rights around the world. I am proud of our record and of the American values that lead us all to strive for the best on these issues. This hearing provides yet another example of U.S. commitment to the human rights cause.

Today, we have an opportunity to establish and build a record on at least two fronts: mechanisms for ensuring U.S. compliance with human rights treaties, and specific measures that exhibit compliance with these treaties. What I hope to learn more about today are the specific obligations the United States has undertaken with respect to each of the treaties at issue, what we have done to meet those obligations, and where we may have fallen short. Additionally, I am interested in learning more about the process by which the United States submits itself for review before U.N. committees tasked with assessing parties’ compliance.

We are fortunate to have witnesses from both the Department of Justice and the Department of State, both of which play a substantial role in implementing these human rights treaties and monitoring U.S. compliance. I am anxious to hear their testimony.

Thank you again, Senator Durbin, for calling today’s hearing. It is a pleasure working with you on the Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, partnering on issues that concern us both deeply. As usual, I send my compliments to your staff for their professional and thorough approach to the issues, as well as the courtesy they always show my staff and me.

I look forward to the testimony.