



Office of Mayor Miro Weinberger

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 12, 2013

Contact: Mike Kanarick
802.735.7962

**Mayor Miro Weinberger Announces Burlington Joins
U.S. Coalition of Cities Against Racism and Discrimination
Honors Memory of Four Young Girls Killed in Birmingham, AL Church Bombing
50 Years Ago; Highlights City's Anti-Racism and Inclusionary Initiatives**

Burlington, VT – Mayor Miro Weinberger today announced that the City of Burlington had joined the U.S. Coalition of Cities Against Racism and Discrimination and signed onto the Coalition's 10-Point Plan of Action. The Mayor shared this news during a gathering at First Congregational Church, as a number of his fellow mayors gathered in Birmingham, AL at a U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting and other mayors around the country took similar steps as part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church that left four young girls dead in 1963. The Mayor also highlighted some of the ways that Burlington is and will continue to pursue the action plan, including:

- Implementation of inclusionary City policies and procedures;
- Engaging in difficult, yet productive community conversations about race; and
- Working with the school system to promote education about differences, tolerance, and respect.

"Today, we remember the four young girls who gave their lives 50 years ago – we remember Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair," stated Mayor Weinberger at a news conference at Burlington's First Congregational Church. "And we honor their memory through tangible action steps to do better as a City and as a nation – steps that will help our community be more effective at preventing racism and discrimination, teaching tolerance, and advocating and working toward greater inclusion."

The First Congregational Church of Burlington, United Church of Christ, hosted the Mayor's announcement. Reverend Peter Cook, Senior Minister of First Congregational Church, shared the following thoughts: "We at First Congregational Church are pleased to work with the City and Mayor Weinberger to address the challenges of racism in our community. While we have come a long way in the last 50 years, there is much work that remains to address great racial and economic inequalities in our society."

Also, the Mayor was joined by Roy Hill, President of the Vermont Ecumenical Council and Bible Society and Charter Member of the New Alpha Missionary Baptist Church, whose congregation meets for prayer and other activities at First Congregational Church, who stated: “It seems right and just that we members of the human family, including mayors and faith community leaders, commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Birmingham church bombings because it was in some ways the worst of times and the best of times. That horrific deed to our children left us with the resolve to remember that all God’s children, red and yellow, black and white, are precious in His sight. And so it is the hope of the faith community, including the Vermont Ecumenical Council and Bible Society, as well as the New Alpha Missionary Baptist Church, and others that we continue to address the fact that racism is sin, evil, and a violation of God’s intention for humanity. As the New Alpha covenant reminds us, we must continue ‘to engage, to watch over, to pray for, to exhort, and to stir up each other unto every good word and work.’”

Inclusionary City policies and procedures

The City of Burlington is focusing on improving its policies and procedures to ensure that they promote inclusion and do not discriminate. This work, made possible in part by a recently secured federal grant and through newly designated funds in the fiscal year 2014 budget, includes:

- New efforts by the Human Resources Department to provide all its employees with cultural competency training;
- The continuation and expansion of the “We All Belong” program, a City leadership executive education program; and
- Development of new, inclusionary public engagement protocols for City departments that take into account our richly diverse community.

Additionally, the City is continuing to work on a new Diversity and Equity Strategic Plan.

City of Burlington Human Resources Director Susan Leonard shared her enthusiasm about the new and improved City policies and procedures, stating: “For the first time as HR Director, I have been provided with budgetary resources specifically designated for diversity training for all City staff, so we can ensure that we use our best efforts to see that all members of our community get equitable access to City services and resources.”

Community conversations about race

At today’s event, University of Vermont Professor Emily Bernard, professor of English and an award-winning author whose areas of expertise include African-American and 20th-Century American literature, Critical Theory, and Race and Ethnicity in Literature, highlighted three important, upcoming anti-racism events and applauded the City’s current efforts to prevent and fight against racism:

- City of Burlington anti-racism community conversation – fall 2013 at the ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center;
- UVM Teach-in – September 27, 2013 on the UVM campus; and
- Tim Wise presentation – November 20, 2013 – Wise, who is white, is known to be one of the most prominent anti-racist writers and educators in the nation – event sponsored by Champlain College, UVM, ECHO, and the City of Burlington.

“Mayor Weinberger already has demonstrated a willingness to engage in difficult conversations around race and racism in Burlington, as well as encourage community participation in reflections that are both celebratory and somber as we experience the richness of growing diversity,” stated

Professor Bernard. “I am heartened further by his commitment to join mayors around the country in a collective national effort against racism and discrimination.”

Promote education about differences, tolerance, and respect

Mayor Weinberger also signaled his ongoing support of two separate, but related, efforts in the schools to end racial disparities and promote inclusion. First, the Burlington School District continues its efforts toward closing the achievement gap in our City’s schools through implementation of its diversity plans.

Nikki Fuller, Burlington School District Senior Director of Diversity, Equity, & Employee Relations, stated: “The Burlington School District has worked diligently on ‘Diversity: Our Gift and Our Future 2012’ and now has moved into our 2013 plan. Through this process, we have gained an even greater understanding of the importance of equity and inclusion to the success of every student. We recognize that we must do more than just tolerate our differences. We must engage and value those differences – every face, every voice, every perspective. It is only then that we can truly achieve excellence as a community.”

Second, the Partnership for Change, a philanthropically-funded initiative, now is in its second year of operation, focusing on expanding student-centered learning in the Burlington and Winooski high schools so that all children can succeed.

Hal Colston, Executive Director of the Partnership for Change, shared: “If we are to fully evolve as human beings to move beyond racism and the ultimate ‘ism’ of classism, we must remember our past and honor all of our unsung civil rights heroes, whether their skin pigment is black, white, red, or yellow so we may follow in their footsteps on the march to justice.”

Other officials who participated in today’s news conference, included: Reverend Adrienne Carr, Associate Minister, First Congregational Church of Burlington; Kesha Ram, Public Engagement Specialist, Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO); and Beth Truzansky, Director, CEDO’s “We All Belong” Program.

To learn more about the U.S. Conference of Mayors anti-racism efforts in conjunction with Empowerment Week, commemorating Birmingham’s key involvement in the civil rights movement of 1963, please visit <http://usmayors.org/pressreleases/uploads/2013/0903-advisory-empowermentweek.pdf>.

**Please see attached U.S. Coalition of Cities Against Racism and Discrimination 10-Point Plan of Action.*

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THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

1620 EYE STREET, NORTHWEST
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006
TELEPHONE (202) 293-7330
FAX (202) 293-2352
TDD (202) 293-9445
URL: www.usmayors.org/uscm

U.S. Coalition of Cities Against Racism and Discrimination 10-Point Plan of Action

In the 50 years since the murder of Medgar Evers in Jackson, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham which killed four young girls, and the march on Washington led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., much progress has been made in addressing past grievances and in assuring the civil and human rights of all Americans. Federal civil and voting rights laws have been passed and to a great extent implemented. But much remains to be done.

For all of the progress we have made in civil rights in America, serious racial and ethnic disparities persist: Black and Hispanic Americans are more likely to be poor than their white counterparts. Black children are three times more likely to be poor than white children. Black children are one and one-half times more likely to be uninsured than white children and twice as likely to die before their first birthday. Blacks and Hispanics have a higher unemployment rate than the white population.

Crime disproportionately affects the black community, particularly black men and boys. African Americans account for 13 percent of the population, but nearly half of total homicide victims are black, and 85 percent of these are men. Black children and teens are 17 times more likely to die from a gun homicide than white children and teens. Racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented in the prison population. Among male prisoners in state and federal facilities, 39 percent are black and 23 percent are Hispanic. Among state prisoners serving time for drug offenses, 65 percent are either black or Hispanic. Compounding the impact of these incarceration statistics have on blacks and Hispanics are policies – in both the public and private sectors – which make it difficult, if not impossible, for people leaving prison to return to their communities, secure employment and housing, and become contributing members of society.

For decades America's mayors, through The United States Conference of Mayors, have taken a strong position in support of civil rights and in opposition to racism and discrimination of all kinds. The Conference's adopted policies have supported voting rights, affirmative action, fair housing, gay rights and same sex marriage, efforts to build tolerance and peacefully resolve conflict, and the integration of immigrants into our communities. They have opposed discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, and gender. They have opposed discrimination in employment and housing. They have opposed hate crimes and encouraged mayors to speak out against them whenever they occur. In more recent years they have turned their attention to human trafficking and gender violence.

The Conference has called for policies and programs to reduce unacceptable rates of poverty in cities and the disparities affecting too many city residents: creating jobs that pay, and training people to fill them; providing safe, affordable child care so that parents are able to take advantage of the jobs available; improving education to provide young people the opportunity to succeed and fill the jobs of the future; assuring the availability of affordable, quality health care and nutritious food; revitalizing neighborhoods and assuring an adequate supply of decent, affordable housing; and reducing crime and violence – gun violence, in particular.

Individually, mayors and their city governments have worked to eliminate a broad range of discrimination in housing, employment, education, health care, city services, contracting, procurement, and other vital areas. As community leaders, many mayors have spoken out against discrimination and injustice when it has occurred and undertaken efforts to build tolerance and understanding within their local communities. In recent years, cities have undertaken efforts to integrate immigrants into their communities and adopted a variety of policies to include fully and treat equitably their LGBT residents.

Again, much progress has been made, but much remains to be done.

Working with UNESCO and the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Conference of Mayors is establishing the U.S. Coalition of Cities Against Racism and Discrimination. To join this coalition, mayors will pledge to undertake the following 10 action steps:

Through The U.S. Conference of Mayors:

1. Continue collective efforts to speak out against racism and other forms of discrimination and propose solutions, and join with national civil rights organizations in this effort;
2. Advocate for inclusion and non-discrimination in all federal laws, policies, and programs;
3. Work toward sentencing and prison reform to reduce disparities between blacks and Hispanics and whites in sentences and incarceration rates;
4. Improve the ability of people released from prison, who are disproportionately black and Hispanic, to reenter their communities through increased federal support for Second Chance programs and changes in policies and procedures which make it difficult, if not impossible, to become productive members of society;
5. Continue calling for an expanded national effort to reduce poverty, which disproportionately affects minority communities, and create employment opportunities by increasing job creation, job training, child care availability, transportation availability, affordable housing, and other needed assistance.

In cities:

6. Ensure that city policies and procedures promote inclusion and do not discriminate and that employees are provided the training needed to implement them;
7. Use the bully pulpit to provide leadership on issues of concern, engage in the difficult conversations that may be needed, speak out against hate crimes and all discriminatory acts whenever they occur, and provide comfort and assistance to victims of discrimination;
8. Work with the school system to promote education about differences, the importance of tolerance, and behavior that respects differences among people;
9. Facilitate the integration of immigrants and other new residents into the community;
10. Encourage community activities which celebrate diversity and educate city residents about the different cultures that compose a city's population.

The U.S. Coalition is part of the International Coalition of Cities Against Racism and Discrimination, which was established by UNESCO in 2004 and is a global network of cities interested in sharing experiences in order to improve their policies to combat racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and exclusions. The U.S. Coalition joins other coalitions of cities which have formed in Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Arab nations, and Asia and the Pacific.