

i s s u e s o f
D e m o c r a c y

*All human beings are
born free and equal in
dignity and rights.*



F R E E A N D E Q U A L

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION

OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT

50

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Free and Equal

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 50

DECEMBER 10 MARKS the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To commemorate the occasion, the U.S. Information Agency has produced this special edition of the electronic journal *Issues of Democracy*. It is dedicated to the legion of human rights defenders across the globe. Their selfless actions in the name of the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration are an inspiration to men and women everywhere.

This journal focuses not only on the Universal Declaration and the importance of the 30 principles it details, but also on the growth of the international human rights movement it inspired. President Bill Clinton underlines this point in a special message prepared for this publication. The president's statement is followed by excerpts from a speech given by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton to the United Nations General Assembly on Human Rights Day 1997, which marked the beginning of the 50th anniversary of the Declaration.



*Eleanor Roosevelt with the completed
Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

John Shattuck, outgoing assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor, looks back on his tenure in a wide-ranging interview conducted by Consulting Editor Rick Marshall. Shattuck cites examples of progress made in realizing the vision of the Universal Declaration and discusses the world's unfinished human rights agenda.

In "Perspectives on Human Rights," eight individuals—two members of the U.S. Congress, two representatives of the United Nations, and four legends in the struggle for human rights—share their thoughts on the Universal Declaration, on progress made since its adoption, and on the challenges that lie ahead.

The importance of human rights is a key element in the world's major religions. But religious freedom, one of the principles in the Universal Declaration, has never been universally observed. This issue is discussed by Felice Gaer, director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights. Her essay is accompanied by a selec-

tion of quotations dealing with human rights drawn from a variety of sacred writings.

The story of the effort to draft and adopt the Universal Declaration is recounted by Managing Editor David Pitts. There were many peaks and valleys in that effort, which took more than two years to accomplish. But on December 10, 1948—for the first time in the history of the world—a specific set of rights and freedoms was affirmed for all people everywhere.

The journal concludes with an article by William Korey, author of numerous books on human rights law and history, including the just-published *NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "A Curious Grapevine."* Korey examines the growth of the international human rights movement following the adoption of the Universal Declaration, including the UN mechanisms that evolved over the years and the role of nongovernmental human rights organizations.

C o n t e n t s

issues of Democracy

October 1998

6

A MESSAGE FROM BILL CLINTON
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

8

ON THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton reflects on the significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including its impact on women.

14

HUMAN RIGHTS: THE LEGACY AND THE FUTURE
AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SHATTUCK
Outgoing Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor John Shattuck discusses progress made in realizing the vision of the Universal Declaration and the human rights agenda for the future.

18

PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN RIGHTS
FROM THE U.S. CONGRESS
Representative Tom Lantos, Co-Chair of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, and Senator Alfonse D'Amato, Co-Chair of the Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, provide a congressional view on the Universal Declaration, accompanied by a congressional resolution commemorating it.

FROM THE UNITED NATIONS
UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson provide statements on the universality of human rights and the importance of the Universal Declaration.

FROM FOUR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, Czech President Vaclav Havel, Aung San Suu Kyi, General Secretary of the National League for Democracy in Burma, and South African President Nelson Mandela, four of the most prominent human rights champions in the world, speak to the importance of the Universal Declaration from a personal standpoint.

30

PROTECTING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Felice Gaer, director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, argues that religious freedom is guaranteed not only by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but by important components of international law as well. Accompanying her essay are quotations on human rights from a variety of sacred writings.

35

THE NOBLE ENDEAVOR

Managing Editor David Pitts tells the story of the two-year effort to draft and adopt the Universal Declaration.

42

NGOs: FIFTY YEARS OF ADVOCATING HUMAN RIGHTS

Noted human rights scholar William Korey examines the growth of the international human rights movement following the adoption of the Universal Declaration.

49

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Recent books and articles on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and human rights in general.

51

INTERNET SITES

Sites on the World Wide Web that feature the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The opinions expressed on other Internet sites listed here do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. government.

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PUBLISHER	Rosemary Crockett	CONTRIBUTING EDITORS	Estelle Baird	EDITORIAL BOARD	Howard Cincotta
EDITOR	Mark Smith		Susan Cleary		Rosemary Crockett
MANAGING EDITOR	David Pitts		Mona Esquetini		John Davis Hamill
CONSULTING EDITOR	Rick Marshall		Stuart Gorin		
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		REFERENCE SPECIALISTS	Carol Norton		
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		GRAPHICS ASSISTANT	Sylvia Scott		

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A Message from the President

AS WE CELEBRATE the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is appropriate to examine how it has affected our lives and the challenges that lie ahead in fulfilling its noble principles. It was born out of the depths of human desperation following World War II, when human beings discovered how far they could go to dehumanize one another. Now, a half century later, the majority of people on the globe freely choose their own governments. And those democratic governments know that they are accountable to the people who elected them and are bound to protect the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration.

This Declaration is one of the most important documents of the 20th century, indeed of human history, for it represents the first time men and women sought to articulate the core aspirations of all the world's people. The authors of the Universal Declaration struggled



President Bill Clinton

to understand and harmonize their differing cultural traditions and convictions during a three-year debate that culminated in a set of rights recognized by all as transcending national, social, and cultural boundaries. The 18 delegates who met under the wise, compassionate leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt and framed the Universal Declaration did not refer simply to men, or to the privileged, or to any specific race or religion. The language of the document clearly states: "All human beings are born free and equal."

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration without a single dissenting vote. Over the past half century, the Declaration's 30 articles have entered the consciousness of people around the world. They are now invoked routinely in constitutions and courts. They set a standard against which we must all now measure ourselves. Threats to freedom persist, and human rights are still at risk. In the United States, we have not completely purged ourselves of bigotry and intoler-

ance. Elsewhere, democracy has yet to take root; in other places those roots are still shallow. Societies are besieged by forces ranging from drug cartels to organized crime. Too many women in the world suffer from wide-ranging injustices. The right to worship according to one's conscience is not universally honored. Even as powerful forces of the information age are chipping away at the barriers, bringing us closer together, there are still attempts to keep people locked in and ideas locked out. And in too many countries, the rule of law, including the protection of minority rights, is not guaranteed.

The newborn child does not know how to hate. That has to be learned. It is just as easy to nurture the values of love and respect to ensure that all children have the opportunity to allow their innate capabilities to flourish, to give strength to the human spirit. There is no better way to honor the great citizens of the world who gave us this remarkable gift, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Bill Clinton

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

On the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

by Hillary Rodham Clinton

Excerpts from the remarks of U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at a December 10, 1997, special ceremony at the United Nations marking the beginning of the 50th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

FORTY-NINE WINTERS ago, the world acknowledged a new, common standard for human dignity—a code for the peoples of the world to live by.

One of the people who labored to create that code was Eleanor Roosevelt, then the United States representative to the UN Commission on Human Rights. The place was Paris. The delegates who came together to craft the language hailed from countries as diverse as Lebanon, Chile, France, China, and Ukraine. And the dream was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—the first international agreement on the rights of humankind.

Some of humanity's bravest lessons emerge only after the deepest tragedies. This Declaration took shape in a world ravaged by the horrors of militarism and fascism. In the wake of the most violent revelation of the depths to which human beings can dehumanize one another, the world as a whole was ready at



First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

last to accept an agreed-upon standard for human rights.

Let me read a passage from that document: “Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.... The advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want have been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.... Therefore, the General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all people and nations.”

The document goes on to state what should be obvious but too often is not: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

How radically idealistic an act it was at first for the nations of the world to ascribe publicly to this Declaration. That act did not, how-

ever, take place in a vacuum. It was a response to evil—and I use that word deliberately.

Those who study the Holocaust know that the Nazis were able to pursue their crimes precisely because they were able progressively to constrict the circle of those defined as human. From the moment they came to power they proceeded, step-by-step, to dehumanize, through laws and propaganda, the mentally ill, the infirm, Gypsies, homosexuals, Jews—those whom they identified as “life unworthy of life.”

This dark, cold region of the human soul—where people withdraw first understanding, then empathy, and finally even the designation of personhood, from another human being—is not, of course, unique to Nazi Germany. This human vice, this ability to dehumanize, has been witnessed in all times and places. And it is precisely this vice that the Declaration sets itself up to resist.

Thankfully, in the half century since the birth of the Declaration, we have as a global people managed progressively to expand the circle of full human dignity. Because of this document, individuals and nations alike have a standard by which to measure fundamental rights. Many of the countries that have emerged in the last 50 years have drawn inspiration from the Declaration in their constitutions. Courts of law look to the Declaration; it has laid the groundwork for the world’s war crimes tribunals; and it has prompted governments to set up their own commissions devoted to safeguarding basic liberties.

At the United Nations Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, it was the power of the Declaration that inspired the establishment of a high commissioner on

human rights. And let me add how lucky the UN—and indeed the world—is that Mary Robinson fills that post. At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, it was the strength of this Declaration that enabled us to say, for all the world to hear, that human rights are women’s rights and that women’s rights are human rights.

And yet in spite of this half century of progress, we have not expanded the circle of human dignity far enough. There are still too many of our fellow men and women excluded from the fundamental rights proclaimed in the Declaration; too many whom we have hardened our hearts against—those whose human suffering we fail fully to see, to hear, and to feel.

Any look back at history shows that every nation has had its blind spots that have kept people out of the promised circle of full humanity. Take the example of my own country. We in the United States have had our own difficult experiences with the selective or unequal application of the rights established in the American Constitution. Even the Founding Fathers, whose ideas of human dignity were so far ahead of their time—proclaiming that “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence—inscribed slavery in the Constitution. It has taken most of our 220 years, some of them bloody, few of them easy, to extend the benefits of citizenship to African Americans, those without property—and women. Eleanor Roosevelt herself was 35 years old before she could vote.

Even today, we circumscribe the circle through what we choose not to see. Black South Africans describe what it was like to work all

day in white environments in which one was literally not seen. In the Balkans, people have willed themselves not to see the humanity of those whose heritage is different from their own. We ourselves in the industrialized world often choose not to see the child labor that goes into our beautiful carpets or our comfortable shoes.

And in too many places today, what we fail to see are the injustices done to women.

We choose not to see the injustice of legal systems around the world that continue to treat women as less than complete citizens. In too many places, female heirs receive less inheritance than male heirs. Inequitable divorce laws compel women to remain in cruel marriages. And courts of law require the testimony of two women to equal that of a solitary man.

Our vision is limited in other areas, as well. We choose not to see the contribution of women to the economic lives of our countries. In too many places, women are discriminated against for bank loans, first jobs, and promotions. They are denied pay equal to that of men—or any pay at all. And they live disproportionately in poverty, making up 70 percent of the world’s poor.

We also circumscribe the circle through what we choose not to hear. Freedom and equality for all depend first on whether a citizen truly has a voice.

It is telling that even in the drafting of the Universal Declaration there was a debate about women’s voices. The initial version of the first article stated, “All men are created equal.” It took women members of the commission, led by Mrs. Hansa Mehta of India, to point out that “all men” might be interpreted to exclude

women. Only after long debate was the language changed to say, “All human beings are born free and equal.”

Today, we still choose not to hear the voices of many women. In too many places, women are blocked from participating in the political lives of their countries. In too many places, girls and women never even learn to project their voices.... Two-thirds of the 130 million children out of school are girls. Two-thirds of the 96 million people worldwide who can neither read nor write are women....

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press—the rights to petition the government and to assemble—all these are essential. But think how much weaker these rights are in a nation where the majority of young women are illiterate. Rights on paper that are not protected and implemented are not really rights at all.

We further circumscribe the circle of human rights through what we choose not to feel. As Eleanor Roosevelt put it, “When will our conscience grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?” In too many places, the suffering of women is defined as trivial; explained away as a “cultural phenomenon.” Perhaps it is for this reason that women do not receive proper health care, including access to family planning. Perhaps that is why genital cutting, which in some countries more than 90 percent of women have undergone, continues.

Perhaps that is why domestic and sexual violence remain the most serious, under-reported, and widespread human rights violations in the world. In almost every country in the world, domestic violence is one of the leading causes of injury to women. In my country, 30 percent of

female murder victims are killed by a current or former partner. As Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has said, domestic violence can never again be dismissed, as it so often has, as part of a country’s norm, or as a set of private assumptions about family life. Let us say it so loudly that the entire world can hear us: We do not believe that violence against women is simply cultural; we believe it is simply criminal.

And perhaps that is why rape and sexual assault continue to be tactics of war. It is the cruelest injustice, I should add, that so many wars end not in peace for women and their families, but in refugee crises that trap women and children in lives that go from bad to worse. Women and children make up 80 percent of the world’s 23 million refugees.

The full enfranchisement of the rights of women is unfinished business in this turbulent century....

As I have been privileged to travel around the world, I have met countless women who know nothing of this Declaration and its promises, but are eloquent in their belief that they deserve respect and better treatment in their families, workplaces and societies.

And yet some critics continue to dismiss women’s sufferings as minor. Are they? In 1958, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote, “Where do human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in...the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimina-

tion. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.”

Other critics dismiss human rights violations as harmless. A report released this week by the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict proves otherwise. According to the report, “An upsurge of egregious human rights violations is almost always a powerful warning of dire events to come, including massive refugee flows and civil wars.”

Still others say that human rights are a Western luxury—not inalienable, but alien. But I believe—and the women I’ve listened to believe—that human rights are as essential to life as air or water, and that they are felt, beyond culture and tradition, as innate. The women I have met do not feel that human rights are a foreign concept invented by theorists. Rather, they know, in spite of everything they are told by culture and tradition, in their very hearts and souls, that these are God-given rights that they were born with as surely as they were born into the human family.

For if they are not innate, how have people throughout history known to fight for them so valiantly?

Paradoxically, the proof of universality lies with the perpetrators of human rights violations themselves. Why have those who have dishonored humanity run to cover their tracks were it not for the knowledge that wrong had been done? The Nazis tried to hide their concentration camps. Communism kept its terrors in the shadow of the Iron Curtain. Scores of bodies are hidden in the hard ground of Bosnia and in the deep forests of Rwanda. Throughout my hemisphere, people and ideas have “disappeared.”

Why go to the trouble?

Because human rights transcend individual regimes and customs. The beliefs inscribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were not invented 50 years ago. They are not the work of a single culture or country. They have been with us forever, from civilization’s first light. Sophocles wrote about them 2,500 years ago when he had Antigone declare that there were ethical laws higher than the laws of Theban kings. P. C. Chang, who helped draft the Universal Declaration, pointed out that Confucius articulated them in ancient China. The belief that we must respect our neighbors as we would respect ourselves resides at the core of the teachings of all the major faiths of the world.

The principles inscribed in the document whose birth we mark today are not constructed but revealed; every great religion exposed and taught their truths.

If I were to tear up this Declaration, its values would abide.

If I were to burn this document, its meaning would remain.

If I were to forbid someone from hearing its words, they would still ring as loud as ever in the hearts of men and women.

It is because every era has its blind spots that we must see our own unfinished business—now, while we stand at the threshold of a new millennium. We must rededicate ourselves to completing the circle of human rights once and for all. We must challenge ourselves to see more sharply, to hear more clearly, to feel more fully.

And we must do something else. We must support democracies—new and old—that work to fulfill the aspirations of this Declaration.

It is time for us as a global community to commit ourselves once and for all: We have run out of excuses not to. Here we are, at the very close of the 20th century, a century that has been scorched by war time and time again. If the history of this century teaches us anything, it is that whenever the dignity of any individual or group is compromised by the derogation of who they are, of some essential attribute they possess, then we will leave ourselves open to nightmares.

Conversely, if the century has a lesson for us that is redeeming, it is that by extending the circle of citizenship and human dignity to include everyone—without exception—then we have the basis for new worlds of hope to flourish.

So let us walk toward these worlds. And let us do so knowing that the path will never be easy. These rights are eternal, but so, too, is the struggle to attain them. Though the darkness in the human heart may recede, it will never go away. It must be with realistic eyes that we look toward human rights. And it must be with clean hands and open hearts that in this—the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—we rededicate ourselves to their fulfillment.

Human Rights: The Legacy and the Future

An Interview With John Shattuck

John Shattuck is the outgoing assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor. He has been nominated to be the next U.S. ambassador to the Czech Republic. This interview was conducted at his office on September 28, 1998, by Consulting Editor Rick Marshall.

Question. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be 50 years old in December. Many organizations are preparing to commemorate the event. How would you view this past half century in terms of human rights?

Shattuck. I think the period of the last half century has been a huge paradox in many respects. It's been the time when the groundwork for an international rule of law has been laid. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations were the collective global effort to say "never again" to the kind of abuses witnessed during World War II and the Holocaust. They have given voice to millions of people around the world who would otherwise have



*John Shattuck, Assistant Secretary of State
for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*

their efforts to achieve freedom and to establish basic human rights dissipated because no one would pay attention.

On the other hand, over this past half century we have seen continuing crises of basic and fundamental liberties. During the Cold War, for example, Stalinist forces moved in to crush the aspirations for liberty in Eastern Europe—of course, they had already done so in the Soviet Union. Many of the same phenomena occurred in parts of Asia, particularly in China.

At the same time, our own country struggled with the terrible legacy of slavery and the legacy of having done much to destroy basic indigenous cultures of Native Americans. These were the other side of the paradox.

Now in the United States, what we've seen during this period is a tremendous, powerful domestic movement to put behind us—or at least to develop remedies for—the terrible abuses of civil rights and civil liberties that occurred in slavery and in the period after that.

And we've also seen some progress in recognition of the importance of indigenous rights, and great progress on giving voice and rights to other disenfranchised groups—particularly women—but also other groups and national minorities in this great American melting pot.

But we have a long way to go and are continuing on that road.

In many ways, the symbol of human rights progress, above all in this period, was the development of a multiracial democracy in South Africa out of the ruins and devastation of apartheid. So there are victories that have been achieved during this period, though there have been many continuing and horrendous abuses. Most recently, of course, we've seen the emergence of terrible conflicts that have led to genocide such as in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. These are a constant reminder that no matter how good rights may be on paper, cynical leaders can stimulate conflict and destroy whole countries and huge civilian populations through their manipulations.

Q. What kind of role has the human rights movement played in the history of this half century?

A. The human rights movement has achieved greater and greater legitimacy over these 50 years. It's a movement that reflects the growing positive forces of globalization and the desire of all human beings to lead their own lives in freedom and relative peace. So when the world comes together and adopts a document like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then projects it over these five decades, that's a very powerful legitimizing force. I think it did have a role in the Helsinki Process in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

I think it's having a role today among those struggling for human rights in China, Indonesia, Burma, and Nigeria, places where very strong authoritarian regimes have succeeded in suppressing human rights. In the end, the pressures are great to change those systems. I think the human rights aspirations and the legitimacy given by the Universal Declaration have an impact. There is a relationship between what actually happens in a country and what the international community recognizes as legitimate.

A major event that occurred at the beginning of this administration was the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the Vienna Conference. There for the first time the countries of the world actually went beyond the words of the Universal Declaration and adopted a position that human rights are a legitimate subject for international diplomacy and discussion. That was very important. You even had countries like China reluctantly sign on to that, along with many other countries that were taking a position that internal matters could not be looked at from a human rights standpoint.

I also think that what we've seen in the last five years for the first time are international coalitions coming together exclusively to address human rights crises. That was the case in Haiti, and it was the case, very belatedly, in Bosnia. Normally, international coalitions, particularly those that have a military component, come together for reasons of national self-interest. In this case, with the United Nations behind them and for almost no other reason than the terrible human rights abuses, they were put together.

The biggest disappointment I've had in these years is that the terrible crisis in Rwanda did not achieve the kind of international consensus for direct action in time to save the estimated 500,000 or more who were killed in the Rwanda genocide. But I think the precedents have been set with Haiti, with Bosnia. I think with the growing international resolve around Kosovo, that there can be practical steps taken by the international community to deal with the worst human rights abuses.

This has got a very long way to go before it becomes a truly effective international system with an enforcement process, however.

Q. Where you do think human rights will be in another 50 years?

A. I think there are many trends here that are competing. If the good can overcome the bad, then this system of international protection of human rights can be significantly advanced. But that will mean much greater acceptance of the principle that internal developments inside a country that severely impact on the human rights of citizens are a matter of legitimate international concern. Right now that proposition is not as widely accepted as it should be.

It will mean that the trend toward increasing ethnic and religious conflict will have to be checked by international systems for preventing those conflicts in advance—by a combination of diplomatic and sometimes military means as well as by developing civil societies. So far, we have not put together a very effective preventive system for stopping these religious and ethnic conflicts before they really get out of hand.

I think the global economic system will have to be accompanied by growing respect for basic international labor rights, worker rights,

and protection of vulnerable populations from being exploited—women, child labor. The United States has taken the lead in trying to make sure that those protections come into being, but there are a lot of countries resisting that.

I also think that our own country will have to continue to take steps to recognize the international system that is so important for the protection of human rights, such as ratifying the various treaties. The United States has been very actively involved in drafting them, and we were there at the creation of the Universal Declaration. It is now incumbent upon us to step up to the plate and fully endorse the international human rights legal system.

We will have to develop better international systems of justice, too. We've made a start by, for the first time, developing war crimes tribunals for cases of genocide and crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. But we need to take steps now to develop an effective international justice system along the lines that have been debated over recent years around the International Criminal Court. There was a lot of disagreement about details, but in the end, we need a system that can get at the terrible abusers that exist in many other countries outside of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.

These are all the kinds of things that are on the agenda for the next 50 years. And it will take that long to really work on them. They're all things that won't happen overnight. I would hope that by the 100th anniversary celebration, some or maybe even all of these systems will have developed much further than they are today.

Perspectives on Human Rights

From the U.S. Congress, the United Nations,
and Four Human Rights Defenders

From the U.S. Congress

On September 14 a resolution was passed overwhelmingly in the U.S. House of Representatives, with the concurrence of the U.S. Senate, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The resolution affirmed “the commitment of the United States to the fundamental human rights enunciated a half century ago” and expressed “the determination to work for the implementation of, and observance of, international human rights and international human rights agreements.”

Following are some thoughts on the Universal Declaration from Representative Tom Lantos (Democrat–California), co-chairman of the House Human Rights Caucus, and Senator Alfonse D’Amato (Republican–New York), co-chairman of the Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as the text of the resolution.

The Honorable Tom Lantos,
U.S. House of Representatives

FIFTY YEARS is a long time, and it is most appropriate for us to recommit ourselves and this body and our nation to this vital document. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most monumental events in the history of human rights. It is the accepted international definition of human rights, and the Declaration continues to serve as the basis for subsequent international human rights law and treaties. And it is the critical starting point for future international agreements on human rights.

Now I am not naïve, and I understand that in scores of countries, this Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not observed. But that painful fact makes it all the more important that we recommit ourselves in a solemn way to the principles embodied in this document.

The drafters of the Universal Declaration were not concerned with inventing new political concepts and rights that would be granted or extended to people around the world; rather, they were concerned with defining the fundamental rights that are at the root of our human nature, rights that are the essence of our humanity. The purpose of the Universal Declaration was to enumerate these rights and to establish the standards that all nations should observe.

The nations that founded the United Nations at the San Francisco Conference in 1945, the city I have the honor to represent in this body with my friend the gentlewoman from

California (Representative Nancy Pelosi), came to the conclusion that new tools and international mechanisms were needed to protect the basic rights of all human beings. They directly responded to the atrocities of World War II committed by Nazi Germany and others, where fundamental rights were violated in an unprecedented and systematic attack that produced inconceivable levels of human suffering.

In 1946, the United Nations established the Commission on Human Rights, the principal decision-making body charged with the global defense of human rights. The first chair of the Human Rights Commission was Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Under her inspired leadership, this commission took it upon itself to develop a comprehensive and universal catalogue of human rights definitions that could serve as the basis for future legal codifications in the defense of human rights.

After almost 1,400 rounds of voting on practically every word in the draft declaration, the General Assembly unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948, in Paris at the Palais de Chaillot. Hence, we annually celebrate December 10 as International Human Rights Day. Subsequently some 60 human rights treaties and declarations were negotiated at the United Nations on the basis of the Universal Declaration.

Unfortunately, many of the rights enunciated in the Universal Declaration are under attack across the globe. I urge my colleagues to join me and continue our fight for all human rights for all human beings, even if that means from time to time making some unpopular

decisions. As the sole remaining superpower, we have a special global obligation to the poor, to the tortured, to the prosecuted, to the persecuted, to the refugees and the voiceless. Anything less than full commitment to these human rights would be a betrayal of our own convictions and beliefs as a nation and of our responsibilities spelled out in our Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

The Honorable Alfonse D'Amato,
United States Senate

ON DECEMBER 10, 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Visionaries like Eleanor Roosevelt and René Cassin had succeeded in creating a document that confirmed the dignity of all human beings. The Universal Declaration's first 50 years have left an enduring legacy.

The Declaration shattered the idea that national sovereignty shields governments from scrutiny of their human rights records. Previously, any country could claim that how it treated its own residents was strictly an internal affair, and thus immune from international review. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the Universal Declaration captured the world's revulsion against that traditional norm of international relations and created a new norm: How a state treats its own people is a legitimate concern of all states and is not only an internal affair.

The Universal Declaration listed inalienable and universal rights that could be the subject of scrutiny. Expanding on the references to

human rights contained in the UN Charter, the Declaration provided the foundation upon which every regional and global human rights agreement has been built. Although support for the Declaration was originally withheld by a small number of countries, it is today considered universally binding on all countries, including all newly created states. While countries may "interpret" the Universal Declaration in self-serving ways, none dares renounce it.

But the battle for respect for these rights is not yet won. After the end of the Cold War, old antagonisms and new ambitions have fueled bloody genocides and supported lesser violations of human rights around the world from Kosovo to Sudan to Burma. Much work remains to be done to make these rights real and effective for all human beings. While declared "universal," these rights also embody fundamentally American values and thus have the full support of the American people.

Text of the Resolution

WHEREAS on December 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, after it was adopted by the General Assembly without a dissenting vote;

WHEREAS the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was modeled on the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution and it was developed with strong United States leadership, and in particular the personal involvement of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, who served as chair of the United Nations Human Rights Commission;

WHEREAS the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets forth fundamental human rights including the right to life, liberty, and security of person; freedom of religion; freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of assembly; self-government through free elections; freedom from slavery and torture; the right to a fair trial and to equality before the law; presumption of innocence until proved guilty; the right not to be subjected to retroactive laws; freedom of movement within one's state and freedom to leave or return to it; the right of asylum; the right to a nationality; the right to found a family; the right against arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence; the right to own property; to social security and to work; the right to form and join trade unions; the right to an adequate standard of living, to education, and to rest and leisure; and the right to participation in the cultural life of the community;

WHEREAS the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has become the most widely accepted statement identifying human rights and is referred to in resolutions and covenants adopted by numerous international organizations, in multilateral and bilateral treaties, in national constitutions, and in local laws and decrees; *and*

WHEREAS the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, though it is not a treaty or a binding international agreement, is "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations":

NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), that the Congress

(1) reaffirms the commitment of the United States to the fundamental human rights enunciated half a century ago in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which are a reflection of the fundamental civil and human rights that are enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and in the United States Constitution, and in particular in the Bill of Rights;

(2) expresses the determination to work for the implementation of and observance of international human rights and international human rights agreements; *and*

(3) urges the government leaders of all nations, representatives of private international human rights organizations, business and labor leaders, local government officials, and all Americans to use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an instrument to promote tolerance, understanding, and greater respect for human rights.

PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SEPTEMBER 14, 1998.

From the United Nations

Kofi Annan is the seventh person to serve as secretary-general of the United Nations. Since taking office for a four-year term on December 1, 1997, Secretary-General Annan has spoken many times and on several continents about human rights. Following are some of his thoughts on human rights, taken from various addresses. These and others appear on the United Nations home page under the heading "The Quotable Kofi Annan."

Mary Robinson became the United Nations' second high commissioner for human rights on September 12, 1997. Two months later, on November 11, she delivered the Romanes Lecture 1997 at Oxford University in England, in which she reflected on the significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Mrs. Robinson previously served as president of the Republic of Ireland from 1990 until 1997. Excerpts from her address at Oxford follow the secretary-general's comments.

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General
of the United Nations

I AM AWARE of the fact that some view [the concern for human rights] as a luxury of the rich countries for which Africa is not ready. I know that others treat it as an imposition, if not a plot, by the industrialized West. I find these thoughts truly demeaning, demeaning of the yearning for human dignity that resides in every African heart.

Address to the Annual Assembly
of Heads of State and Government
of the Organization of African Unity
Harare, 2 June 1997

Do not African mothers weep when their sons or daughters are killed or maimed by agents of repressive rule? Are not African fathers saddened when their children are unjustly jailed or tortured? Is not Africa as a whole impoverished when even one of its brilliant voices is silenced?

Address to the Annual Assembly
of Heads of State and Government
of the Organization of African Unity
Harare, 2 June 1997

Freedom knows no borders.... a fiery voice of liberty in one country can raise the spirits of another far away.

Address at the John Fitzgerald
Kennedy Library
Boston, 6 June 1997

Violence against women has become the most pervasive human rights violation, respecting no distinction of geography, culture or wealth.

Address to the UN General Assembly
on the opening of the 52nd session
New York, 22 September 1997

Let there be no doubt: There are some very basic standards of human behavior, violations of which are simply unacceptable. Fundamental human rights are a product of human nature—indeed human life—itself.

Address to the Facing History
and Ourselves benefit
New York, 14 October 1997

Where slavery exists, human dignity itself is denied, and brings shame to all who claim to be compassionate or committed to the weak and the vulnerable of our world. Human rights are nothing if not the insistence on freedom from bondage and coercion in all aspects of life. And yet, on the threshold of a new millennium, we still find the old and, sadly, also new forms of slavery. Hundreds of thousands of people the world over live and die as slaves in one form or another.

Message on the International Day
for the Abolition of Slavery
2 December 1997

When we speak of the right to life, or development, or to dissent and diversity, we are speaking of tolerance. Tolerance promoted, protected and enshrined will ensure all freedoms. Without it, we can be certain of none. In the words of one wise man: “Faith elicits respect, and fanaticism provokes hate....”

Human rights are the expression of those traditions of tolerance in all cultures that are the basis of peace and progress.... Human rights...are foreign to no culture and native to all nations.... Tolerance and mercy have always and in all cultures been ideals of government rule and human behavior. Today, we call these values human rights.

Address at the University of Tehran
on Human Rights Day
Tehran, 10 December 1997

One cannot pick and choose among human rights, ignoring some while insisting on others. Only as rights equally applied can they be rights universally accepted. Nor can they be applied selectively or relatively, or as a weapon with which to punish others. Their purity is their eternal strength.

Address at the University of Tehran
on Human Rights Day
Tehran, 10 December 1997

There is no single model of democracy, or of human rights or of cultural expression for all the world. But for all the world, there must be democracy, human rights, and free cultural expression.

Address at the University of Tehran
on Human Rights Day
Tehran, 10 December 1997

When we talk of human rights being a Western concept, doesn't the Iranian mother or the African mother cry when their son or daughter is tortured? Don't we all feel when one of our leaders is unjustly imprisoned? Don't we all suffer from the lack of the rule of law and from arbitrariness? What is foreign about that?

What is Western about that? And when we talk of the right to development, the need to live their lives to the fullest and to be able to live their dreams, it is universal.... When you talk to the individuals, have you ever come across a victim, somebody who has been tortured, talking against human rights? Do you hear the people generally rejecting human rights which are intended to protect them? Everything we do, whether it is economic development, whether it is security or whatever, it is a human being that is at the center. And that is what we mean when we talk about human rights, when we talk about cultural expression, political rights, economic rights.

Press conference at the Summit of the
Organization of the Islamic Conference
Tehran, 11 December 1997

We should reaffirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and get the public to understand, the individual to understand, that those rights are his. It is not something that is given to him by a government, like a subsidy that can be taken away. It is intrinsic, it is inherent, and [I hope] we can really use this fiftieth anniversary to get that message across.

Press conference at UN Headquarters
24 February 1998

Mary Robinson, United
Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights

NEXT YEAR we mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration, I believe, ranks as one of the great aspirational documents of our human history. It embodies the hopes and even dreams of people still scarred from two world wars, newly fearful of the Cold War, and just beginning the great liberation of peoples that came about with the dismantling of the European empires.

The Universal Declaration proclaims the fundamental freedoms of thought, opinion, expression, and belief, and enshrines the core right of participatory and representative government. But just as firmly and with equal emphasis, it proclaims economic, social, and cultural rights and the right to equal opportunity. It was to be “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations,” and the rights and freedoms set forth therein were to be enjoyed by all without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

Twenty years after its adoption, the basic tenets of the Declaration were endorsed in the Tehran Proclamation of 1968. These rights and freedoms were developed in greater detail in two United Nations Covenants, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, both of which entered into force in 1976.

The Universal Declaration is a living document. To commemorate it in the closing years of this millennium, the debate must give more

priority to current complex human rights issues: The right to development, the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples, the rights and empowerment of people with disabilities, gender mainstreaming, and issues of benchmarks and accountability in furtherance of these and other rights.

There are now many more participating governments than were present on 10 December 1948 and also many more voices from the wider civil society. The challenge will be to engender a similar commitment to a shared vision that these rights are encompassed in the opening words of the preamble to the Universal Declaration: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world....” And that they form part of a renewal in our time of that vision.

The international system’s achievements to date in implementing human rights standards cry out for fresh approaches. As we prepare for the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration, I have told my colleagues that I do not see this as an occasion for celebration. Count up the results of 50 years of human rights mechanisms, 30 years of multibillion-dollar development programs, and endless high-level rhetoric, and the global impact is quite underwhelming.

We still have widespread discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religious belief, and sexual orientation, and there is still genocide—twice in this decade alone. There are 48 countries with more than one-fifth of the population living in what we have grown used to calling “absolute poverty.”

This is a failure of implementation on a scale that shames us all. So much effort, money, and hopes have produced such modest results. It is no longer enough to hide behind the impact of the Cold War and other factors limiting international action in the past. It’s time instead for a lessons-learned exercise. One lesson we need to learn, and to reflect in our approach, is that the essence of rights is that they are empowering....

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From Four Human Rights Defenders

At the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, on April 15, 1998, guests of the U.S. delegation to the Commission on Human Rights and the U.S. Information Service in Geneva met to celebrate the release of a draft report on “Human Rights Defenders” prepared by a United Nations working group. Joining those assembled, via videotape, were three of today’s most valiant defenders of human rights—Kim Dae Jung, president of the Republic of Korea; Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic; and Aung San Suu Kyi, general secretary of the National League for Democracy in Burma.

In addition, on September 21, 1998, another hero of the struggle for human rights, Nelson Mandela, president of the Republic of South Africa, shared his thoughts on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the United Nations General Assembly.

Excerpts from the remarks of these four internationally known defenders of human rights follow.

President Kim Dae Jung,
President of the Republic
of Korea

SINCE THE BEGINNING of time, wherever there have been human beings there have been human rights.

Wherever there was power, human rights were infringed upon. Wherever there was some infringement of human rights, there have been those who fought to defend them. They are our heroes.

Jesus Christ said: Those who serve the least of these my brethren, who are suffering and ill-treated, serve God. And those who did not serve them, they did not serve God, and that they would be rewarded or punished accordingly.

The Buddha proclaimed that an individual personality is the most noble thing in this universe.

The Confucian tradition asserted that subjects have the right on behalf of all humans to expel a king who infringes on the rights of the people.

With the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50 years ago, the countries of the world recognized human rights to be universal and fundamental. Since that time, numerous human rights organizations, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, and human rights fighters have made enormous sacrifices and strenuous efforts in the defense of the rights of repressed people throughout the world.

I believe firmly that so long as such sacrifices and efforts for mankind continue, the human rights of all suffering people will expand day by day. I was persecuted by dictators for 40 years. I fought for human rights undauntedly, surviving five brushes with death and experiencing six years in prison and 10 years of exile or house arrest.

From this day on, for the rest of my life, I will continue to devote myself to furthering human rights.

I am grateful to all my friends around the world who are fighting in the defense of human rights.

God bless you all.

President Vaclav Havel,
President of the Czech
Republic

I ALWAYS EMPHASIZE again and again that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, similarly as after all a number of other documents and legal norms of this kind, is something more than a technical agreement.

That it is a mirror of certain values; values we profess, we believe in, values that seem to be bestowed upon us from above, values we also in a way guarantee.

That is the difference between truth, value, ideal on one hand and information on the other hand. Information is freely transferable, it can flit on the Internet from one computer to another through cables. Truth must be guaranteed; it is guaranteed by human beings.

That is why I consider it very important that we do not forget those who fight for human rights, those who are able to bring even certain personal sacrifice to this fight.

For it is they who by their very being, as people really guarantee those values, who bear witness to the fact that what is at stake is more than some kind of information, that it is truly the truth.

Aung San Suu Kyi,
General Secretary of the
National League for
Democracy in Burma

THE CASE FOR human rights is hardly one that should need to be argued, and yet again and again we have to appeal to the world to think of human rights, to remind them that it is pertinent to all human beings, not just to a few of us in underprivileged countries. The case of human rights is the case of human dignity, of human security, of human beings. Because we are all human beings, I think we should all care about whether or not there are people in this world who are suffering because we cannot live as human beings. Repressed human beings are not the same as those who are free and secure. Something happens to us when we are repressed, when we are intimidated, when we have to worry every day about our security.

The case for Burma is not just for one country. It is a case for all those who are suffering under authoritarian regimes. The sufferings of our people are the sufferings of all those whose human dignity is not protected by the law. I hope that in arguing the case of Burma,

I shall be arguing the case for all peoples in the world who are suffering from violations of human rights.

It is difficult to select what to talk about when we bring up the case of human rights violations in Burma. There are so many violations of so many kinds. But I think many of these have been made known to the international community by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, by other human rights organizations, by NGOs, and by those who are working for democracy in Burma.

We are working for democracy in Burma not because we think that democracy is a magic word that will resolve all the problems of our country. We are working for democracy because we understand that democracy is a system which believes in the protection of the basic human rights of the people. Unless our people enjoy basic human rights, we will not enjoy peace or prosperity in this country.

I would like to conclude by thanking the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and all the NGOs who have done so much for the human rights situation in Burma. It does make a difference that the international community is keeping an eye—I hope more than one eye—on Burma and the situation of human rights in Burma. I hope that you will continue to do so. I hope that you will persevere in spite of all the obstacles in your way, because it does help us a great deal. Thank you.

Nelson Mandela,
President of the Republic
of South Africa

QUITE APPROPRIATELY this 53rd General Assembly will be remembered through the ages as the moment at which we marked and celebrated the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Born in the aftermath of the defeat of the Nazi and fascist crime against humanity, this Declaration held the hope that all of our society would in the future be built on the foundations of the glorious vision spelled out in each of its clauses.

For those who had to fight for their emancipation, such as ourselves, who, with your help, had to free ourselves from the criminal apartheid system, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as the vindication of the justice of our cause. At the same time, it constituted a challenge to us that our freedom, once achieved, should be dedicated to the implementation of the perspective contained in the Declaration.

Today we celebrate the fact that this historic document has survived a turbulent five decades that have seen some of the most extraordinary developments in the evolution of human society. These include the collapse of the colonial system, the passing of a bipolar world, breathtaking advances in science and technology, and the achievement of the complex process of globalization.

And yet, at the end of it all, the human beings who were the subject of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights continue to be afflicted by wars and violent conflict. They have

as yet not attained their freedom from fear of death that will be brought about by the use of weapons of mass destruction, as well as conventional arms. Many are still unable to exercise the fundamental and inalienable democratic rights that would enable them to participate in the determination of the destiny of their countries, nations, families, and children, and to protect themselves from tyranny and dictatorship.

The very right to be human is denied every day to hundreds of millions of people as a result of poverty and the unavailability of basic necessities such as food, jobs, water and shelter, education, health care, and a healthy environment. The failure to achieve the vision contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights finds dramatic expression in the contrast between wealth and poverty, which characterizes the divide between the countries of the North and the countries of the South, and within individual countries in all hemispheres.

It is made especially poignant and challenging by the fact that this coexistence of wealth and poverty, the perpetuation of the practice of the resolution of inter- and intrastate conflicts...and the denial of the democratic rights of many across the world, all result from the acts of commission and omission, particularly by those who occupy positions of leadership in politics, in the economy, and in other fields of human activity.

What I'm trying to say is that all these social ills, which constitute an offense against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are not a preordained result of the forces of nature.... They are the consequences of decisions that men and women take or refuse to

take, all of whom will not hesitate to pledge their devoted support for the vision conveyed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights....

This declaration was proclaimed as universal precisely because the founders of this organization and the nations of the world who joined hands to fight the scourge of fascism, including many who still had to achieve their own emancipation, understood this clearly, that our human world was an interdependent whole. Necessarily, the value of happiness, justice, human dignity, peace, and prosperity have a universal obligation, because each people and every individual is entitled to them.

Similarly, no people can truly say it is blessed with happiness, peace, and prosperity where others, as human as itself, continue to be afflicted with misery and conflict and terrorism and deprivation.

Thus can we say that the challenge posed by the next 50 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by the next century whose character it must help to fashion, consists in whether humanity, and especially those who will occupy positions of leadership, will have the courage to ensure that at last we build a human world consistent with the provisions of that historic Declaration and other human rights instruments that have been adopted since 1948.

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Protecting Religious Liberty

by Felice D. Gaer

Religious freedom, as Felice Gaer argues in the following article, is guaranteed not only by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but by important components of international law as well. Gaer is director of the American Jewish Committee's Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights.

In recent years, some national governments, most prominently the United States, have taken action to reaffirm the importance of religious freedom. The Clinton administration's efforts in this regard include the establishment of an Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad within the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. A senior coordinator on religious freedom, of ambassadorial rank, soon will be nominated, whose task will be to encourage U.S. government support for religious freedom worldwide as a factor in the policy-making process.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY the great religions have stressed respect for the dignity and humanity of each individual. Yet conflicts over religious identity and affiliation have too often spurred acts of intolerance, persecution, violence, militancy, and war. The quest to protect religious liberty was buoyed by the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

That remarkable “parent” document of the human rights movement was forged in the years immediately following the Holocaust, after six million Jews, more than a million of whom were not yet in their teens, were killed in Nazi concentration camps and gas chambers. The tragic results of the attempt to annihilate all the Jews and many others as well were all too fresh, too visible to be ignored. Former U.S. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the Commission on Human Rights, reminded delegates that the people of the world expected immediate action on a Declaration that would outlaw such behavior.

The Universal Declaration refers not only to every person’s right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, but affirms repeatedly that discrimination on the grounds of religion is impermissible. Two key aspects of the right are set forth: the right to believe—an internal aspect of the right—and the right to manifest that belief—externally, whether alone or together with others.

The Declaration explicitly affirmed the right to change one’s religion. However, this provoked such controversy (particularly among representatives of Islamic states) that it has been modified linguistically in the years since, artfully maintaining reference to everyone’s right to “have or adopt” a religion or belief—thus, to maintain it, alter it, or, for that matter, drop it.

Role of the International Covenant

The UN’s 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has the force of an international treaty, makes guaranteeing free-

dom of thought, conscience, or religion legally binding on the signatory states. Reiterating each person’s right to manifest belief in four areas—worship, observance, practice, and teaching—it suggests that these external aspects of the right may be subjected to some limits, but only those “necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.”

No limits may be permitted on the right to believe in itself, not even in time of public emergency. Notably, public safety could be a reason to limit certain religious practices, but not the more vague “national security.” Thus, efforts were made to ensure that the Covenant’s limitations could not be a pretext for a state to suppress manifestations of religion or belief.

Concern over the key role of state-sponsored education in promoting a particular religion or of militant atheistic approaches that were common during the height of the Cold War in the Soviet Union prompted inclusion of a paragraph specifically guaranteeing to parents the right to determine and ensure the religious education of their own children.

For all these limitations and clarifications, the Covenant, like the Declaration, makes no attempt to define what constitutes “religion” or, for that matter, “freedom of thought” or “conscience.” It took nearly 20 years for the United Nations to forge agreement on another instrument, the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance, which clarifies further what comprises the right to freedom of “thought, conscience, religion, and belief.”

This declaration, adopted in 1981 with a substantial boost from the African states,

outlines prohibitions on both state-imposed and private discrimination; freedom to manifest a religion or belief without unwarranted government interference; and the commitment of governments to adopt both legal and educational measures to eliminate religious intolerance.

Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance

With an emphasis since then on implementation of the declaration, the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1986 established the post of special rapporteur on religious intolerance, an individual investigator appointed to look into and report annually to the Commission on Human Rights on incidents of religious intolerance. Two individuals who have held this post have traveled to examine religious intolerance in countries as diverse as the Soviet Union, China, Iran, Pakistan, Germany, India, Sudan, Australia, and, most recently, the United States. And their reports have covered a much wider array of states.

The special rapporteur has indicated that the most common kinds of violations connected to religious intolerance are: (1) physical attacks (including killings and torture); (2) limits on proselytizing and possessing religious articles; (3) closing and destroying places of worship, limiting religious publications, and controlling the right to elect one's own religious leaders; (4) discrimination in education, employment, housing, the right to own property, access to credit, and the like; (5) forced exile and expulsion of local religious believers; and (6) excessive limitations on freedom of expression and assembly. Often, public officials are responsi-

ble, but quite often it is private individuals or communities of individuals that perpetrate these acts.

The effort to address this topic robustly has not been easy; states have asked the special rapporteur to emphasize dialogue in addition to monitoring violations. For its part, the UN moved slowly and hesitantly in addressing this issue in the Cold War years. Even the dissemination of the 1981 declaration in certain official UN languages was held up; for years, copies were not reproduced or distributed in Russian, Chinese, or Arabic.

UN bodies dealing with the human rights of women have pointed to problems when culture or religion are used as an excuse to sanction violence against women or other abusive traditional practices. In numerous forums, including the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, states have repeatedly affirmed that such claims cannot be used to justify those (or any other) human rights violations.

Many extremist religious organizations have established measures to enforce subordination and obedience from women and deny them their rights to equality and liberty. In Afghanistan, Taliban authorities have denied women the right to maintain jobs outside the home and have sanctioned physical beatings—in the streets and in the home—as a means of enforcing submission from women.

Recent years have seen efforts by some Asian states to press for recognition of cultural relativism in the application of human rights norms, in part on the basis of religious diversity. Numerous UN bodies, most significantly the World Conference on Human Rights convened in Vienna in 1993, reaffirmed the universality

of rights forthrightly. They acknowledged that diversity (religious and cultural) must be borne in mind, but stressed that, nonetheless, the duty of states is to uphold all human rights.

Interconnection of Abuses

UN special rapporteurs have found that religious intolerance and human rights abuses are commonly manifested in combination with other human rights abuses. The interconnectedness of human rights becomes profoundly apparent when one examines cases of religious intolerance.

Elizabeth Odio Benito of Costa Rica (a special rapporteur, now second vice president of her country) has pointed out that the piety of one religious group or leader can be a mask for other prejudices that have nothing to do with religion. The hostility may reflect historical, cultural, or physical factors. Yet the teachings of religion may be twisted and construed to condone the prejudice. The causes of religious persecution are many. They range from ignorance to specific conflicts to an absence of contact and dialogue to the pursuit of power.

Combating religious intolerance requires a broad and diverse arsenal: norms, monitors, public reports, dialogue, functioning courts that can provide accountability and justice for the perpetrators of such acts, and the attentiveness of nongovernmental organizations themselves. René Cassin, one of the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, once noted that the inclusion of freedom of religion in that document came about in large measure because of the ideas, talents, and persistence of

nongovernmental organizations, particularly religious ones.

To prevent acts of religious intolerance, these and other organizations will have to encourage UN investigators and others to pay more attention to the violations of freedom of religion or belief and persecution of religious practitioners that continue to take place around us in so many places today. ❖

Virtually without exception, the world's major religions have striven to advance the idea of the dignity of the individual, of his or her entitlement to rights that are universal and fundamental.

Baha'i

Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind.

'ABDU'L-BAHA
The Secret of Divine Civilization

Buddhism

However, life itself is the most precious of all treasures. Even the treasures of the entire universe cannot equal the value of a single human life.

NICHIREN
CIRCA 1270 C.E.

Christianity

As for you, my brothers, you were called to be free. But do not let this freedom become an excuse for letting your physical desires control you. Instead, let love make you serve one another. For the whole Law is summed up in one commandment: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." But if you act like wild animals, hurting and harming each other, then watch out, or you will completely destroy one another.

THE BIBLE
GALATIANS 5: 13-15

Hinduism

May the members of our society have similar goals. May our hearts be full of love for each other, and may we be united in one thought. May the individual efforts be put together to achieve our common goal.

VAIDIKA MANTRAS
RIGVEDA, MANDAL 10, HYMN 191, MANTRA 4

Islam

You mankind: We [God] have created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you might get to know and cherish one another and not to despise one another; verily the most honorable of you before God are the most righteous.

THE KORAN
SURA 49:13

Judaism

The preservation of a single life is tantamount to preserving a whole world, and the destruction of any person's life is tantamount to destroying a whole world.

THE TALMUD
SANHEDRIN 4:5

Sikhism

In the dwelling of the womb, there is no ancestry or social status. All have originated from the Seed of God.

GURU GRANTH SAHIB
SIKH SCRIPTURES

The Noble Endeavor

by David Pitts

Managing Editor David Pitts recounts the story of the effort to draft and adopt the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME was by no means assured when the UN Commission on Human Rights held its first session in January 1947 in New York. Its purpose was the completion of a task never before accomplished in all of human history—the drafting of a universal declaration of human rights for every man, woman, and child on the planet.

From the beginning, those who attended knew the task would not be easy. Differences in ideology, culture, and history divided even countries with similar economic and social systems. But in one sense they were united. They all shared a profound moral revulsion over the colossal loss of life in the recently concluded war—an estimated 50 million people.

In the middle of the 20th century, in the heart of Europe, one of the world's most advanced states had sought to extinguish even the most basic human rights and, for a while, with its Axis partners, succeeded in doing so over large parts of the globe. That fact, above

all, created a determination to succeed among all who gathered in New York during the winter of 1947. A universal declaration of human rights was the clear and unambiguous goal.

Even before World War II had concluded, in 1941, the momentum toward worldwide recognition of inalienable human rights had taken hold—in the Atlantic Charter and, a few months earlier, in U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech to Congress. In Britain, Prime Minister Winston Churchill echoed the American president’s views, declaring that an allied victory would mark the “enthronement of human rights.” And across the world, colonized peoples were coming to the realization that freedom and human rights were not just the preserve of Europeans and Americans, but of all men and women everywhere.

While the world was beginning to think of such fundamental concepts as freedom and justice in a new way, war crimes trials in Nuremberg and Tokyo firmly established the precedent that human rights violators should be brought to account and that there should be clear and precise mechanisms to deal with those guilty of human rights crimes, particularly on a mass scale, whether during wartime or not.

The United Nations Charter, adopted in 1945, set the goal of “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms of all without distinction as to race, sex, language, and religion.” Governments played a key role in the drafting of the charter. But, not so well known, so also did nongovernmental human rights organizations—over 1,300 of them, according to one source.

Although the UN Charter gave human rights a new international legal status, it did not specifically include an international bill of rights, which many advocates wanted. That task was assigned to the Commission on Human Rights.

The Contributors

A key figure in the evolution of the Universal Declaration was Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of President Franklin Roosevelt, who had died in 1945. She was selected to be the first U.S. representative to the commission by her husband’s successor, President Harry Truman.

By all accounts, Roosevelt had a good deal of autonomy in formulating U.S. policy toward the drafting of the document. “In effect, Mrs. Roosevelt set the policy,” writes Joseph Lash in his book *Eleanor: The Years Alone*. “She was a presidential appointee, a woman of world stature, and the State Department was eager to do what she wanted.” Perhaps because of her reputation not only in the United States but around the world, the delegates to the commission unanimously elected her chairperson.

Eleanor Roosevelt chaired a drafting committee under the auspices of the commission, which included Charles Malik of Lebanon, P.C. Chang of China, Canadian John Humphrey, director of the UN’s Human Rights Division, and René Cassin of France, among others.

As rapporteur within the commission, Malik played a key role, particularly in shaping the final draft. Malik’s fellow delegates credit him with being a driving force behind the inclusion of forceful substance in the document.



Eleanor Roosevelt (right) confers with Charles Malik (left) and René Cassin (second from left).

Chang, one of two vice chairs on the commission, was a powerful voice for Asian nations, which were concerned that the Declaration not reflect too parochial a view of human rights. “It should incorporate the ideas of Confucius as well as Thomas Aquinas,” he said. In addition, Chang is credited with resolving numerous stalemates in the negotiating process.

The UN Secretariat supported the work of the commission and the drafting committee principally through Humphrey. Among his many contributions was authorship of a 408-page blueprint for the Declaration. His outline proved invaluable once the drafting process began.

Cassin, the other commission vice chair, composed the first full draft of the Declaration, which contained much of the language that would later be included in the final document.

Many of the other representatives from the more than 50 governments involved also played a vital role, especially in the final drafting. But according to scholars of the Universal Declaration, the UN officials, with Eleanor Roosevelt at the helm, largely were responsible for making the dream of a universal declaration of human rights into a reality during the laborious days and months of meetings during 1947 and 1948. Their drive, their vision, and, in particular, their skill in reconciling the many opposing points of view were vital to the success of the effort.

A Difficult Task

But it was not an easy task. There were marked differences among member states concerning the rights of women and racial minorities, religious liberty, the point at which human life

begins, the extent to which freedom of speech should be protected, the right to dissent, and the role of economic and social rights.

The most serious disagreements stemmed from the entirely different conceptions of the West and the Soviet bloc of such fundamental human rights principles as freedom and democracy. Roosevelt argued there was no “true individual freedom in the Soviet Union because the rights of the individual were subservient to the state.”

Soviet bloc representatives countered that “the cult of individualism” led to economic exploitation and that economic rights were more important than political rights. “This declaration must uphold as a model for all humanity the figure of free men, not well-fed slaves,” responded the British delegate during one famous exchange. Fundamental philosophical and ideological distinctions such as these framed the commission’s debates as the drafting of the Declaration proceeded.

The delegates representing Communist countries strongly objected to the course of the commission’s deliberations, sometimes delivering eight-hour speeches nonstop in an effort to steer the wording of the Declaration to their point of view. As chairperson, Roosevelt allowed them considerable latitude, but, she recalled in her autobiography, she was determined to complete the task by Christmas of 1948. “I drive hard, and when I get home I will be tired. The men on the commission will be also,” she said.

In addition to disputes about the articles in the document, there were two overarching views about whether it should be explicitly backed by the force of international law. One group, com-

posed primarily of smaller nations, believed it should be. The other group, which included the United States, argued the case for a declaration of principles to be followed by legally binding covenants at a later date. The feeling of this group was that it was difficult enough to achieve agreement on a declaration of human rights; insisting on legally binding provisions would likely delay agreement for years. This view ultimately prevailed.

There were many peaks and valleys in the two-year effort, but Roosevelt and her team of true believers achieved their goal. In the early hours of December 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Of 58 members represented at the session, 48 voted in favor, none voted against, eight abstained, and two were absent.

The Soviet Union and its satellites constituted the majority of the abstentions; the Soviet representative said the Declaration overemphasized “18th century rights” at the expense of economic rights. Saudi Arabia abstained because, in its opinion, the Declaration was too Western-oriented. South Africa, whose long embrace of apartheid began that same year, also abstained, arguing that the Declaration embodied too expansive a view of human rights.

Despite the abstentions, the vote in favor was overwhelming. Speaking before the General Assembly, Roosevelt stressed the epoch-making value of the Declaration:

We stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind. This Declaration may well become the international Magna Carta of all men every-



where. We hope its proclamation by the General Assembly will be an event comparable to the proclamation of the Rights of Man by the French people in 1789, the adoption of the Bill of Rights by the people of the United States, and the adoption of comparable declarations at different times in other countries.

The Importance of the Achievement

The scope of the achievement was obvious to all. Never before in world history had the community of nations successfully identified specific rights and freedoms not just for one nation, not just for one category of persons, but for all people, everywhere, for all time.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration set the tone for a broad range of political, social,

and economic rights that are set forth as a common standard of achievement for all nations: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and human rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

In the wake of the most barbarous war in history, the world had finally adopted a set of principles that, it was hoped, would set humanity on a new course—to hold all nations to account for their actions, both internally and externally.

As a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, however, the Universal Declaration had no force of law. Resolutions of the Assembly are recommendations to states, not binding obligations. But as Jack Donnelly and Rhoda Howard stress in the *International Handbook of Human Rights*, over the years “the

Universal Declaration has come to be something more than a mere recommendation.”

The Declaration inspired a number of regional human rights conventions in Europe, Latin America, and Africa and influenced the drafting of many of the constitutions of the new independent states that would emerge onto the world stage in the 1950s and 1960s, and later in the 1990s. Provisions of some 90 national constitutions drafted since 1948 can be traced to the Declaration, according to the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute in New York.

The norms and precepts encompassed in the Universal Declaration also were further elaborated in a series of covenants, most notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The covenants are legally binding on the states that are signatory to them, as the architects of the Declaration had intended.

The Commission's Work Continues

Each year, the UN Commission on Human Rights, the same organization chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt a half century ago, meets in Geneva to assess the compliance of states with human rights standards and to hold violators to account. Although the tools at the commission's disposal for enforcing the will of the international community have been criticized by many human rights advocates as inadequate, the importance of its ability to expose human rights violators to public scrutiny cannot be underestimated.

As Geraldine Ferraro, the U.S. representative to the commission from 1994 to 1996, has said:

We at the commission have an obligation to speak out, a responsibility to our fellow human beings. We must be heard. Ours is the voice of the victims: the child who has no food, the boy forced to shoulder a soldier's gun, the girl who bears a rapist's child, the mother who weeps because she cannot feed her family, the father who sits in chains because he dared to speak his mind.

Thus the work of the commission and other UN agencies to make the Universal Declaration a reality continues. So does the work of the governments that regard its principles as sacred. So also does the work of the thousands of nongovernmental human rights organizations around the world that take their inspiration from the document whose birth 50 years ago we celebrate this December.

Eleanor Roosevelt's Role

Tamora Hareven, one of many biographers of Eleanor Roosevelt, writes in *An American Conscience* that the former first lady, as chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights, aggressively argued for a strong, precise definition of human rights, while “trying to bridge the gaps between different members and reconcile different points of view deriving from different cultures.” Many scholars of the Universal Declaration suggest that were it not for Eleanor Roosevelt’s leadership, the effort might not have succeeded.

That is the view of Molly Bruce, who attended many of the early meetings of the commission and watched Roosevelt in action. “She was particularly skillful in negotiating,” she recalled in an interview, “a very independent lady.” Bruce, who was with the UN Secretariat at the time and later became head of the women’s program there, also recalled that Roosevelt “had a way of winning points and forging



progress without antagonizing those who disagreed with her.”

“There is no question about it; the success of the effort owes much to Eleanor Roosevelt, who doggedly participated in many of the meetings personally,” remembers Ann Cottrell, a reporter then covering the story for the *New York Herald Tribune*. In a recent interview, Cottrell paid tribute to Roosevelt’s “eloquence and determination” in getting the job done. “She was particularly concerned with women’s rights and the rights of minorities, but really she fought for the rights of everyone.”

Above: Ann Cottrell, then a reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune*, interviews Eleanor Roosevelt.

NGOs: Fifty Years of Advocating Human Rights

by William Korey

William Korey examines the significant role played by nongovernmental organizations in the growth of the international human rights movement during the past 50 years. Korey is the author of numerous books on human rights law, including *NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "A Curious Grapevine."*

THE PHRASE "human rights" rarely appeared in the media, textbooks, or diplomatic discourse 50 years ago. Today, however, it occupies a critical place in the public arena. Much of the reason for this can be attributed to nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs. Whether they are exhorting governments and the United Nations machinery or mobilizing support for their goals through the media and local grass-roots organizations, NGOs have been a major force in the human rights movement throughout the world over the last half century.

Much of the impetus for the NGO human rights movement was a result of World War II and the 50 million deaths that were its legacy. NGOs played a major role, particularly in urging the incorporation of human rights provisions into the charter for the then newly created United Nations.

Early proposals for the UN Charter had contained only a passing reference to human

rights. The NGO community, both within the United States and internationally, led the drive to redress this. For example, the Pan-American Human Rights conference in Mexico City “consolidated Latin American determination to see human rights included in the charter,” according to the Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt Institute in New York.

In the United States, three NGOs took the lead in advocating the inclusion of human rights provisions in the charter: the American Jewish Committee, the Federal (later National) Council of Churches, and the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace. In May 1945, after winning the support of a broad range of civic organizations, the spokesperson for the three persuaded U.S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius of the importance of emphasizing human rights in the charter; without that, the new UN might suffer the same fate as the League of Nations and be rejected by the U.S. Senate.

Stettinius then persuaded U.S. allies to support the idea at the convention in San Francisco that was already drafting plans for the UN’s creation. As a result, human rights became a central feature of the UN Charter. Seven of its provisions relate specifically to human rights, and one led to the creation of a UN Commission on Human Rights.

Drafting of the Universal Declaration

The first task of the Commission on Human Rights, under the exemplary leadership of former U.S. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, was to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After nearly two years’ work, the

Universal Declaration was formally adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948, a day now celebrated throughout the world as Human Rights Day.

The Declaration’s 30 articles cover civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. Overall, they constitute an ambitious and far-reaching program for governments throughout the world, for they seek to place individual human freedom and well-being at the forefront of international activity.

René Cassin of France, a leading figure in drafting the Universal Declaration, called it “an authoritative interpretation of the UN Charter.” To Burma’s U Thant, UN secretary-general in the 1960s, the Declaration was “the Magna Carta of mankind.”

One of the key figures in the commission’s early years was Lebanon’s Charles Malik, who credited NGOs with playing a strong role in helping to draft the Universal Declaration by acting as “unofficial advisers to the various delegations, supplying them with streams of ideas and suggestions.” Cassin would later stress the crucial role NGOs had played in publicizing the Universal Declaration. They were, he said, “the first to make the principles of the Declaration widely known” through brochures, periodicals, and articles, and at numerous conferences.

The NGOs’ goal of a United Nations that would actively pursue actual human rights violations, however, met with considerable difficulty. As early as 1947, the UN Commission on Human Rights officially declared that it would not act on formal human rights complaints. Despite approving the Universal Declaration, many UN members, particularly those with totalitarian governments, were anxious to avoid

scrutiny. Indeed, many nations with poor human rights records remain so to this day.

NGOs continued to pressure the commission to change its approach. But the power of the Soviet Union and other totalitarian regimes was such that it took two decades for the commission to agree to examine “gross violations” of human rights that show a “consistent pattern.” Even then, the procedures it adopted limited effective action, and many cases of government-sponsored torture, disappearances, and arbitrary killings were met with silence. NGOs that protested these violations were warned that they could lose their consultative status at the UN if they disclosed particulars at UN meetings.

The Upsurge in NGOs

Frustration with the UN led the International League for the Rights of Man (now the International League for Human Rights) to bypass it altogether and instead focus attention on human rights violations through published studies and the media. The League was thus one of the earliest NGOs to practice the “shaming” of totalitarian regimes, military dictatorships, and even democratic societies.

One of the most effective human rights NGOs has been Amnesty International, which was formed in London in 1961. Its research department is unmatched in accumulating data on human rights violations. Paralleling the shaming technique, Amnesty began adopting victims of state repression as “prisoners of conscience.” In 1974, Amnesty disclosed that 61 regimes engaged in torture, and its reports spelled out the horrors that were perpetrated.

Revelations about military repression in Latin America were especially effective and resulted in the organization’s being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977.

International exposure has its limitations, however, for there are some regimes too brutal to be shamed. The answer to this problem, the NGO community believed, was international mechanisms that would act upon the information they provided.

While the NGOs continued to advocate the creation of such mechanisms, the Helsinki Final Act was adopted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European neutral and nonaligned nations, and the Warsaw Pact on August 1, 1975. One of the key events in the evolution of the international human rights system, the Helsinki Accords demanded that its signatories adhere to “human rights and fundamental freedoms” (principle 7). Follow-up fora in Belgrade, Madrid, and Vienna allowed the airing of ideas that would challenge Soviet totalitarian rule and ultimately contribute to the collapse of the Communist empire.

In May 1976 the Moscow Helsinki Group was formed by Yuri Orlov. This group was enormously important in preparing detailed documents on Soviet human rights violations that the West would use at various Helsinki meetings and in its international broadcasts to Eastern Europe.

Another NGO oriented to the Helsinki process was Poland’s Committee of Workers Defense (KOR). Established in September 1976, the committee became the framework from which the Solidarity movement emerged. The Polish initiative was followed by the



Voters in Soweto wait to cast their ballots in South Africa's first universal suffrage, multiracial election in April 1994.

creation of Charter 77, headed by Vaclav Havel, in January 1977.

Another NGO of great importance to Eastern Europe was Helsinki Watch, formed the following year. Director Jeri Laber traveled frequently to Prague and Warsaw, met with Helsinki activists, and served as a conduit for information about them, which was then effectively publicized in the West. When Vaclav Havel paid his first visit to the United States after the Prague revolution, he insisted upon visiting the headquarters of Helsinki Watch in New York, where he said: "Perhaps without you our revolution would not be."

Like their counterparts in Eastern Europe, activists in Africa and Asia, struggling to free their countries from colonial domination, took heart from the message of the Universal Declaration.

So too did the legions of human rights defenders and the hundreds of NGOs across the globe that helped bring an end to apartheid in South Africa. Indeed, the role that the United Nations played alongside human rights organizations in the struggle to end apartheid is one of the best examples of the force the international community can bring to bear in defense of fundamental human rights.

South African President Nelson Mandela acknowledged as much when he addressed the UN General Assembly in September 1998: "For those who had to fight for their emancipation, such as ourselves, who, with your help, had to free ourselves from the criminal apartheid system, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as the vindication of the justice of our cause."

Support from the United States

The growth and power of the NGO movement and its involvement in human rights was reflected in U.S. policies as well. In his inaugural speech in January 1977, President Jimmy Carter stressed that the country's "commitment to human rights must be absolute." Acting on the basis of congressional legislation, Carter went on to establish a bureau of human rights within the State Department and to issue the first country reports on human rights conditions throughout the world. The first reports, in 1977, covered only countries receiving U.S. aid, then numbering 82; the reports for 1997 covered 184 countries.

Carter also encouraged frequent dialogue between the U.S. government and the human rights organizations. Such access helped bring the administration critical information that could be used to pressure governments in Latin America and the Soviet orbit. This emphasis on human rights "saved thousands and thousands of lives," according to Argentine newspaper editor Jacobo Timerman. An active critic of the Argentine military's "dirty war," his release from house arrest owed much to the pressure NGOs like B'nai B'rith, as well as the U.S. government, were able to exert. The Carter administration also worked to support the right of NGOs to participate more fully in the United Nations. Their combined efforts began to pay dividends in 1980, when the Commission on Human Rights voted to create a Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. This was followed two years later by the creation of a Special Rapporteur on Arbitrary and Extrajudicial Killings. Another special rappor-

teur was created to investigate incidents of government-backed torture in 1985.

Soon special rapporteurs were also established for religious intolerance, racism, and violence against women, as well as to investigate particularly notorious abuser regimes like Iran, Iraq, Burma, Cuba, and Sudan. These landmark developments stemmed largely from NGO initiatives. Nongovernmental organizations also played an important role in making these procedures more effective, furnishing working groups and special rapporteurs the information they needed—information governments often refused to provide. In fact, even some members of the Commission on Human Rights continue to deny special rapporteurs permission to visit their countries, an act of defiance the United Nations remains powerless to overturn.

Another aspect of the international human rights system, the various human rights covenants and conventions, also owes much to NGOs. The two most important of these are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. These have the force of international treaties and were originally conceived to give legally binding status to the Universal Declaration.

The Covenant on Civil and Political Rights came into force in 1976, although it was not ratified by the United States until early in the Clinton administration. A key feature of the covenant is that parties to it must report on their compliance to the Human Rights Committee, a body composed of experts elected by the ratifying states. During the last two decades, the committee has taken on considerable authority

and become a major vehicle for NGO input. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, in particular, has provided the committee with essential documentation, along with advice concerning specific violations by contracting states.

Several other UN human rights conventions pressed by NGOs have also come into force. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1981), the Convention Against Torture (1987), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). Like the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, these conventions include an implementing body to which NGOs provide essential material aimed at bringing about compliance with treaty provisions.

The World Conference on Human Rights

One of the most important milestones in advancing human rights through the United Nations system occurred at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, Austria, in June 1993. Here, as previously, NGOs played a crucial role, organizing an effective worldwide campaign to ensure their participation. At the same time, they won the active support of the Clinton administration, then in its first months. In fact, the U.S. delegation at Vienna included members of the American NGO community as well as government officials, just as U.S. delegations to other international fora have done for several years.

Working together and with like-minded delegations from other nations, the NGOs and governments were able to achieve a number of major breakthroughs at Vienna, including winning unanimous endorsement for the creation of

a UN high commissioner for human rights and a declaration reaffirming the universal nature of human rights. The office of the high commissioner, now held by Mary Robinson, is charged with promoting human rights within the UN system as well as defending rights in the international arena.

The emergence of a whole new generation of NGOs from Asia, Latin America, and Africa at the Vienna Conference, a process that had been building for several years, marked a new factor in the international human rights system; fully 3,000 NGOs would be registered by the time the conference convened. Particularly notable was the preparatory meeting in Bangkok, at which Asian NGOs adopted a declaration insisting that international human rights standards be fulfilled and calling for a high commissioner for human rights.

The Vienna Conference also focused international attention on women's rights and their integral place in human rights in general. Its strong support for women's rights laid the groundwork for the historic Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the acknowledgment that women's groups are gaining throughout the world today.

For years, the horrendous character of 20th century abuses had prompted NGOs, especially Human Rights Watch, to emphasize the need for accountability with respect to both justice and historical truth. By the time of the Vienna Conference, the war in Bosnia had convinced many that a new mechanism was needed to hold perpetrators accountable for the most egregious human rights abuses, such as genocide and crimes against humanity.

Thus, the UN Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 1993. In support of this, Human Rights Watch provided the tribunal with documentation that its chief prosecutor, South Africa's Richard Goldstone, considered "invaluable." Another NGO, Physicians for Human Rights, was lauded by the tribunal for its assistance in the forensic examination of exhumed bodies. European NGOs extended crucial psychological and welfare assistance for witnesses.

The following year, the UN created a similar tribunal for Rwanda, with its operating arm in Arusha, Tanzania. Although the U.S. government and the NGO community have had their share of disagreements over the years, both sides have attached great importance to the work of the two tribunals and the principles of human rights accountability. Indeed, the United States has supplied the lion's share of the funds to sustain them.

The Global NGO Movement

As the 20th century ends, the involvement of nongovernmental organizations in every aspect of human rights has grown extraordinarily. Today there are human rights activists and organizations in virtually every country of the world. Some are risking their lives and livelihoods for the sake of free speech, democracy, and religious and racial tolerance. Others are speaking out against torture, arbitrary imprisonment, and contemporary forms of slavery. Still others are working to influence international financial institutions, promote development, limit child labor, ban landmines, and eliminate trafficking in women and girls.

The world is still far from eliminating even the grossest human rights violations, and the principles detailed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are far from being realized in much of the world. But the strength and vigor of the international human rights movement yields at least the hope that the next century will result in greater progress. And one should always be mindful of the victories already won, not least in the corners of the human mind.

In 1948, when the Universal Declaration was adopted, vast numbers of people believed in autocratic ideologies, colonialism was still prevalent, racism endemic, and sexism barely challenged. That all these evils are now questioned by increasing numbers of people around the world is testimony to how far we all have come.

Photo page 45 by Denis Ferrell, Wide World Photos.

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Arabic

http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/1/arabic_menu.htm

Chinese

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English

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Portuguese

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O T H E R H U M A N R I G H T S W E B S I T E S

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

<http://www.unhchr.ch/>

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 50th Anniversary Page

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/50th/50anniv.htm>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 50th Anniversary Page

<http://www.udhr50.org/>

Sponsored by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, this page hosts a national coalition of nongovernmental organizations, corporations, labor unions, religious groups, national and international agencies, academic institutions, professional associations, and individuals—all with a deep commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights

<http://www.ihf-hr.org/>

A self-governing group of nongovernmental, non-for-profit organizations that act to protect human rights throughout Europe, North America, and the Central Asian republics formed from the territories of the former Soviet Union.

University of Minnesota Human Rights Library

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/>

One of the most comprehensive sites to find any and everything on the subject of human rights, including documents, bibliographies, and links to other human rights-related sites.

Human Rights Internet (HRI)

<http://www.hri.ca/>

Founded in 1976, HRI is a world leader in the exchange of information within the worldwide human rights community, supporting the work of the global nongovernmental community in its struggle to obtain human rights for all. See HRI's new publication and website, *For the Record 1997: The UN Human Rights System*, at <http://www.hri.ca/fortherecord1997/>

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Affairs

http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/index.html

USIA's Human Rights Page

<http://www.usia.gov/topical/rights/hrpage/>

Includes links to nongovernmental organizations prominent in human rights.

Introduction to Human Rights

<http://www.usia.gov/topical/rights/hrpamp/hrintro.htm>

USIA's human rights pamphlet, newly updated.

Congressional Human Rights Caucus

<http://www.house.gov/lantos/caucus/caucuswebpage.htm>

The Congressional Human Rights Caucus was founded in 1983 by Congressmen Tom Lantos and John Edward Porter to focus broad bipartisan attention on the most fundamental American values: the sanctity of the individual and the inalienable rights upon which the Founding Fathers created the United States.

i s s u e s o f
D e m o c r a c y

*All human beings are
born free and equal in
dignity and rights.*



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VOLUME 3 NUMBER 3