

Philanthropy for Human Rights

A Brief Guide

The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights is unequivocal: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Regardless of nationality, religion, gender, or political opinion, we are innately entitled to "life, liberty and security of person." Each of us has the right to be recognized as a person before the law; no one should be a victim of torture. Each of us has the right to freedom of movement; no one should be subjected to arbitrary detention or exile.

Yet human rights abuses remain horrifyingly widespread. Amnesty International reports that in 2001, extrajudicial executions took place in 47 countries, torture or ill-treatment by officials in 111, arbitrary killing of civilians and hostage taking by armed opposition groups in 42. The list of crimes against human dignity is distressingly long.

In addition, such abuses are notoriously hard to quantify. By their very nature, violations occur in the dark, all too often going unreported. As a result, experts working in the field say that compiling statistics is virtually impossible. We may never know the full extent of forced labor in Burma, or how many foreign domestic workers have been beaten, enslaved, or sexually assaulted in America. And surely the only thing worse than suffering such horror would be to suffer in silence, knowing that the perpetrators of human rights abuses will never be held accountable for their crimes.

Who Can Help Put an End to Human Rights Abuses?

Governments, corporate interests, small businesses, local communities, religious institutions, non-profit groups, and individuals everywhere all have a part to play in protecting vulnerable populations from those who would abuse them. Governments that aggressively maintain the rule of law within their own borders; international businesses that foster a corporate culture respectful of human rights; small groups that organize letter-writing campaigns; and people of conscience who support organizations at the forefront of the fight for human dignity each play a crucial role in making the world a safer, more humane place.

How Can Private Philanthropists Help?

There are a variety of organizations fighting for universal human rights, all of which need regular financial support from concerned individuals.

- **Investigation of violations:** Many human rights groups focus on inquiry and reportage. When abuses are investigated and brought to light, those responsible can be held accountable.
- **Campaigning/lobbying:** Educating the general public and lobbying those in power to uphold international standards is a key part of the human rights struggle. Change often comes only after intense pressure has been brought to bear on offending parties.
- **Legal advocacy:** If human rights are to be universally established, it is vital that legal structures and institutions be established and maintained. This involves everything from the academic study of existing legal systems to the uncompromising pursuit of known criminals.
- **Support for victims:** Putting a stop to human rights abuses is really only the first step. Attention must then turn to the care and rehabilitation of victims and their families – physical therapy, counseling, relocation, job training – anything that is needed to help survivors reclaim their lives.
- **Dissemination of information:** Some organizations exist largely as clearinghouses for the information gathered by others. By giving greater exposure to crucial data and creating networking opportunities, they provide human rights advocates with a superior set of tools and resources.

Where Can You Go to Learn More?

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Read the historic United Nations document at:
www.un.org/Overview/rights

Convention on the Rights of the Child

In 1989 the UN determined that children are in need of special consideration. Read the convention at
www.unicef.org/crc

The United States and Somalia are the only countries that have not yet ratified the treaty, although they have signed the treaty, indicating their intention to ratify.

Amnesty International

In over 40 years of campaigning across the world, Amnesty has worked on more than 45,000 cases of torture, political killings, prisoners of conscience, and other human rights abuses.

www.amnesty.org

(For information on specific regions or countries, click on "Links", then on "Other Human Rights Related Sites" and finally on "Human Rights: Specific Countries".)

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch has investigated and exposed human rights abuses and violators for 24 years in its struggle to uphold political freedom, protect people from inhumane conduct, and bring offenders to justice.

<http://www.hrw.org>

Coalition of International NGOs Against Torture

CINAT was established in Geneva in 1999 to coordinate the activities of several organizations, some of which focus specifically on victim rehabilitation. The CINAT website features a press release explaining the rationale behind the coalition and links to its member NGOs.

www.cinat.org

Center for Victims of Torture

The center was founded in 1985 to provide care and rehabilitative services to torture survivors and their families in the US; estimates suggest that half a million such victims currently live in America.

www.cvt.org

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights

The committee's programs focus on building legal institutions and structures that will guarantee human rights in the long term. Strengthening independent human rights advocacy at the local level is a key feature of its work.

www.lchr.org

The Fund for Global Human Rights (FGHR)

FGHR will work to strengthen and support the human rights movement around the world by identifying and assessing local, national, and regional human rights organizations, providing funding to those organizations, and assisting donors who wish to support human rights work. FGHR is expected to begin grantmaking in early 2003. For more information contact Josh Mailman at siriusb@pipeline.com

Women's Human Rights Resources

Women's rights often go unrecognized as one category of human rights issues. The Bora Laskin Law Library at the University of Toronto has compiled an exhaustive list of articles, documents, and websites dealing specifically with women's issues.

www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/diana

Defence of Children International

Based in Geneva, DCI works in 60 countries to ensure practical, systematic action to promote and protect the rights of the child. The Geneva office offers a library of close to 15,000 indexed documents relating to children's rights; the website provides information on international standards on children's rights, juvenile justice around the world, and links to other organizations.

www.defence-for-children.org

Children's Rights Information Network (CRIN)

CRIN seeks to meet the information needs of, and provide networking tools for, organizations and individuals who support and promote children's rights.

www.crin.org