

# Philanthropy for Human Rights

## A Brief Guide

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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.

Despite the UN's Declaration, today human rights abuses remain horrifyingly widespread. According to Amnesty International, in 2002:

- **Extrajudicial executions/unlawful killings** took place in 42 countries;
- **Torture** or ill-treatment by officials in 106 countries;
- **Arbitrary arrests/detention without charge** in 54 countries;
- Serious human rights abuses by **armed opposition groups** in 32 countries.

In addition, throughout the world:

- **Children** are forced to serve as slave labor, are kidnapped to serve as soldiers, and suffer from sexual and domestic abuse.
- **Women** are subject to discrimination based solely on their gender, are forced into marriages, denied legal rights including the right to own property, and are trafficked as sex slaves. In many places, domestic violence against women is culturally acceptable.
- People who are **HIV positive** are refused treatment by doctors, children with HIV are kicked out of school, and access to wells and other public resources is denied to those who are infected. Some governments suppress information that would help people protect themselves from becoming infected.

### 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 Philanthropists Help?

There are a number of fronts in the fight for human rights, all of which need support from concerned individuals:

- **Investigating and exposing 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](http://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](http://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.

### **Human Rights Watch**

Human Rights Watch has investigated and exposed human rights abuses and violators for 27 years in its struggle to uphold political freedom, protect people from inhumane conduct, and bring offenders to justice.

[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

### **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](http://www.amnesty.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 press releases and position announcements as well as links to its members' sites.

[www.cinat.org](http://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](http://www.cvt.org)

### **Human Rights First**

Formerly the **Lawyers Committee for Human Rights**, Human Rights First works to improve justice, human dignity, and respect for the rule of law. Some of HRF's activities include advocacy on behalf of asylum seekers, protecting human rights defenders, and ensuring human rights laws and principles are enforced.

[www.humanrightsfirst.org](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org)

### **International Human Rights Funders Group**

The IHRFG website provides the latest news on a long list of human rights issues, as well as relevant reports and lists of foundations actively funding human rights projects.

[www.hrfinders.org](http://www.hrfinders.org)

### **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](http://www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/diana)

### **Child 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](http://www.crin.org)

### **Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers**

CSC is a network that works to prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, to secure their demobilization, and to ensure children are rehabilitated and reintegrated into society.

[www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)