

Human right movements

Human rights movement refers to a nongovernmental social movement engaged in activism related to the issues of human rights.

The foundations of the global human rights movement involve resistance to colonialism, imperialism, slavery, racism, segregation, patriarchy, and oppression of indigenous peoples

A key principle of the human rights movement is its appeal to universality: the idea that all human beings should struggle in solidarity for a common set of basic conditions that has to be followed by all.

History

Human rights activism predates the 20th century, and includes, for example, the anti-slavery movement. Historical movements were usually concerned with a limited set of issues, and they were more local than global. One account identifies the 1899 Hague Convention as a starting point for the idea that humans have rights independent of the states that control them.

The activities of the International Federation for Human Rights (originally the International Labor Organization)—founded in France by the international labor movement in the 1920s—can be seen as a precursor to the modern movements. This organization was quickly embraced by the United States and European powers, perhaps as a way to counteract the Bolshevik call for global solidarity among workers.

Changes in the 1970s

Since the 1970s the human rights movement has played an increasingly important role on the international scene. Although government support for human rights decreased, international organizations increased in strength and number. Some of the events of the 1970s, which gave global prominence to the human movements issue, included the abuses of Chilean Augusto Pinochet and American Richard Nixon administrations; the signing of the Helsinki Accords (1975) between the West and the USSR; the Soweto riots in South Africa; awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Amnesty International (1977); and the emergence of the Democracy Wall movement in China. Nixon was succeeded by the Jimmy Carter administration, much more supportive of the human rights issues. Even before Carter made human rights central to his foreign policy, progressives in Congress had institutionalized human rights in the State Department and passed legislation tying human rights to foreign aid considerations.

Pressure from the international human rights movement brought human rights increasingly to the political agenda of numerous countries and diplomatic negotiations.

Since the 1990s

The global human rights movement has become more expansive since the 1990s, including greater representation of women's rights and economic justice as part of the human rights umbrella. Economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights gained new prominence.

Advocates for women's human rights (sometimes identifying as part of the feminist movement), criticized the early human rights movement for focusing on male concerns and artificially excluding women's issues from the public sphere. Women's rights have nevertheless gained prominence in the international human rights movement, particularly insofar as they include protection from gender-based violence. In Latin America, the issue of women's human rights intersects with the struggle against authoritarian governments. In many cases women's groups were some of the most prominent advocates of human rights in general. Mainstream acceptance of women's human rights within the international human rights movement has increased since 1989.

The human rights movement has historically focused on abuses by states, and some have argued that it has not attended closely enough to the actions of corporations. In the 1990s, some first steps were taken towards holding corporations accountable for human rights abuses. For example, the Parliament of Britain approved a resolution to censure British Petroleum for funding Colombian death squads. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch also began to pressure other nongovernmental organizations to take human rights into account. In 1993, Human Rights Watch successfully lobbied the International Olympic Committee to vote against awarding the 2000 Olympic Games to Beijing because of China's human rights record.

Issues and activities:

The international human rights movement is concerned with issues such as deprivation of life and liberty, deprivation of the right of free and peaceful expressions, gatherings and worship, equal treatment regardless of individual background, and opposition to unjust and cruel practices such as torture. Other issues include opposition to the death penalty and to child labor.

Much of the human rights movement is local in nature, concerned with human rights violations in their own countries, but they rely on an international network of support. The international nature of the movement allows local activists to broadcast their concerns, sometimes generating international pressure on their home government. The movement generally espouses the principle that sovereignty ends where human rights begin. This principle justifies intervention across borders to rectify perceived violations.

The human rights movement is also credited with supplying local activists with a vocabulary to use in support of their claims.

Organizations

Particularly since the 1970s, the international human rights movement has been mediated by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Major international human rights organizations include Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Historically, the influence of the International Federation for Human Rights is seen as highly important on the movement.

The creation of the International Criminal Court at the turn of the 21st century is seen as another achievement of the international human rights activists.