

HUMAN RIGHTS: A TIME FOR REDEDICATION

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Morals, values, ethics, the basic philosophies that underlie American society: Is there room for these in foreign policy? Is there room for them in the conduct of international business relationships?

How should American government and business respond to demonstrations of torture, gross abuse of human liberties, imprisonment without trial, deliberate economic deprivation, disappearance in the night, mass murder, genocide -- sanctioned by other governments?

Do we -- the American people -- have some obligation to our fellow human beings in other parts of the world? Can we use the considerable influence that is at our disposal to try to end these abuses? Can we enlist other nations in the same cause? Should we try?

In the more than two hundred years from the founding of our country, it is easy to overlook the reasons for our existence.

We exist because settlers in this land came from the Old World in search of religious and other freedoms. In

1606, the First Charter of Virginia proclaimed that "all . . . our subjects . . . shall have and enjoy all liberties." The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution with the Bill of Rights, and subsequent legislation asserted strongly and forcefully the concept of human rights. Our country experienced a civil war over what was essentially a human rights issue -- whether slavery was right or wrong.

In short, human rights and human freedom are the foundation of our society. They are part and parcel of our way of life. We must not forget that the current efforts of our government originated with the American people and belong with them.

Given these roots, then, how can we not apply our values in the conduct of our international relationships, whether private or governmental?

Thirty years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt -- as Chairman and the first U.S. Representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights -- forged the way for a visionary document: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With Nazi atrocities still very much on their minds, the members of the UN General Assembly adopted it on December 10, 1948, without a dissenting vote.

This year the United Nations is moving toward a major celebration of the 30th anniversary of that Declaration. It is time that all of us -- in government, in business, in education, in all sectors of our society -- take this opportunity to rededicate ourselves and our institutions to respect the principles of that Declaration.

Making progress on human rights is not easy. Concern about human rights is not the only objective of American government or business. Americans cannot achieve success in this area without the help of others.

But this is what we can do:

- We can recognize that a nation with our background and value system, with our greatness, need not feel ashamed to inject its values into the conduct of its foreign relations. Indeed, we have an obligation to do so.
- We can improve our credibility with other nations by ensuring that all charges of human rights abuses within the United States -- discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age; or allegations of overcrowded prisons, police brutality, or imprisonment on

unjustified charges -- are fully investigated, addressed through our established legal and governmental procedures and exposed to the public.

- We can also strengthen our leadership efforts by ratifying international human rights agreements. President Truman signed the Genocide Convention and sent it to the Senate in 1949, but it still sits there. 1979 should be the year for ratification of that treaty.
- We can keep human rights concerns front and center in our governmental and business dealings with other nations. Human rights cannot be our only policy, nor can it be the only test of our relations. But we must remember to throw human rights into the balance of our relationships, and to make it clear that we care.
- We can use our leverage to achieve human rights progress when the opportunity appears. This need not always be punishment, such as withdrawal of economic or military assistance, reduction of trade, or limitation of private investment, although those are certainly options.

We can also encourage progress in other countries by acknowledging positive human rights efforts, by promoting employment and training opportunities for those who have traditionally suffered human rights abuses, and by providing experience to lawyers and judges from other nations in modern legal processes.

- We can contribute to multilateral and bilateral assistance programs (both private and governmental) that work to meet the needs of millions of impoverished people for food, housing, health care, education and jobs -- those economic human rights that are just as important to developing nations as political and civil rights.
- And we can enlist others in promotion of this cause -- governments, businesses, educational institutions, regional organizations and private groups concerned about human rights. In that regard, work through the United Nations becomes particularly important.

In sum, we have a long agenda in front of us. The 30th anniversary celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the occasion for raising a new challenge,

the challenge to rededicate our efforts -- at home and abroad, in both public and private life -- to the implementation of ideals that are basic to our historical roots.