



STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS

What role does The Carter Center play in the human rights community?

The Carter Center is guided by a fundamental commitment to human rights and the alleviation of human suffering. Built on the human rights principles embraced and implemented by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter during his presidency, The Carter Center is known worldwide as a nonpartisan organization. With unique access to governmental leaders and international organizations, the Center is viewed as a credible and valuable partner.

The Carter Center is at the forefront in support of human rights defenders worldwide and hosts the Human Rights Defenders Policy Forum, where activists—many of whom have been jailed or tortured for their outspoken commitment to human rights in their own countries—gather to discuss national and global issues affecting civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights and freedoms.

Are there international human rights protections in place?

International human rights bodies such as the U.N. Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC), coupled with international treaties and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, serve to reinforce fundamental standards of human rights around the world. When human rights abuses are present, there is a tension between the autonomy of national governments and internationally recognized rights and laws. International bodies like the Council and

treaty monitoring committees, while not legally binding on nonmember governments, can bring global pressure to bear on governments for abuses of rights, often resulting in steps toward change. The ICC has the mandate to investigate and try cases of wars crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

The international human rights community wields significant power in its ability to name and confront violators, to bring about change, and to encourage successor governments to investigate and punish the serious acts of violence that occurred.

Why is U.S. leadership in human rights critical today?

Historically, the United States has been a global leader in defense of human rights and justice. But increasingly, instead of being viewed as a beacon for human

rights, the United States has become increasingly perceived globally as a violator of human rights, especially in light of controversies surrounding torture at Abu Ghraib Prison, conditions of detainees at Guantanamo Bay, and abandonment of international treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions. Ironically, the “war on terror,” waged in the name of freedom, has led to the deterioration of rights in many countries.

Despite claims by political leaders about the value of democracy and human rights in creating a more secure world, there is a gap between rhetoric and reality on the ground.

To address this, the Carter Center’s 2008 Human Rights Defenders Forum organized its discussions around issues most relevant to the new U.S. president by bringing together leading human rights



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organizations and human rights defenders from around the world to highlight key actions the Obama administration can take to move the United States back in line with international standards and resume a constructive leadership role on the issue of human rights.

What can average people do to advance human rights?

Activism begins in our own families

and communities—wherever injustice is found. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes “the inherent dignity and ...the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family (as) the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world,” and as members of the global community, we are obligated to speak out when our own—or another’s—rights are violated. There are many international organizations that present opportunities for direct action on human

rights issues through their websites, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights First, and the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

Awareness, education, and action are key to the advancement of human rights, whether locally or globally. Global change starts with the activism of one child, one woman, one man.