The International Human Rights Movement: Past, Present, and Future

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I. Overview

The human rights movement is one of the most successful social justice movements of our time, establishing universal principles that govern how states should treat citizens and non-citizens, and helping to challenge dictators and authoritarian rulers in many regions, including Southern Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Over the last three decades, national human rights organizations have proliferated; today, a human rights community of some sort exists in virtually every country of the world. On the global level, simultaneously, the International Human Rights Movement (IHRM) has become a powerful force. The movement strengthens—and is strengthened by—a complex web of institutions, laws, and norms that constitute a functioning global system that builds on itself progressively, animated by strong NGOs.

In the 21st Century, the international human rights movement faces new challenges and new opportunities. Building on the standard-setting successes of the past few decades, human rights organizations are finding new ways to implement and enforce rights, moving beyond law and norm development to make rights real for more people and to demonstrate that the global human rights system can work. To do this, they are using new tools to better document, analyze and publicize human rights abuse and to better advocate for changes in policy and behavior. And they are focusing on new spaces for international engagement, from Brasilia to Beijing.

The focus of this class is the NGOs that drive the movement on the international level (e.g. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Commission of Jurists, Witness, International Center for Transitional Justice, etc.); on the regional level (e.g. Forum-Asia, West African Human Rights Defenders Network, Center for Justice and International Law); and the national/domestic level (e.g. Centro de Estudios Legales y sociales, Kenyan Human Rights Commission; Legal Resources Center, etc.). Indeed, each class will highlight the experience of at least one major human rights NGO. Drawing of two decades of working closely with these organizations, the instructor will bring countless examples from the field into the classroom, including internal debates about strategy development, institutional representation, research methodologies, partnerships, networks, venues of engagement (e.g. regional systems, Human Rights Council), campaigning, fundraising and, perhaps most importantly, the fraught and complex debates about adaptation to changing global circumstances, starting with the pre-Cold War period and including some of the most up-to-date issues and questions going on in this field today.

Students will leave with a deep appreciation of what it means to work in or with Human Rights NGOs: challenges, strategies, dilemmas, theories of change, etc. and be uniquely prepared to both analyze this sector and/or work in it as a staff person, consultant, or NGOs leader.
I. Schedule of classes

Tuesday, January 28th
Defining the international human rights movement: The Global Context.
READ:
Reading pack titled “Globalization Reader”
- Boli and Thomas, “World Culture ...”, pp. 306-312
- Bond, “The Backlash against NGOs”, pp. 318-323
- Berkovich, The Emergence “”, pp. 295-299
- Boyle, “The Evolution of Debates...”, pp. 300-305
- Chandraoke, “How Global ...”, pp. 324-331
- De Jonge Oudraat and Haufler, “Global Governance ...” pp. 332-337
- Keck and Sikkink, “Environmental Advocacy ...”, pp. 451-458
- Khagram, “Toward Democratic...”, pp. 459-465

Tuesday, February 4th
Understanding the global dynamics of the international human rights movement
READ:
- Aryeh Neier, The International Human Rights Movement: A History, chapter 1, 6
- Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, The Persistent Power of Human Rights p. 3-42

NGO case-studies: Amnesty International and International Commission of Jurists

February 11th
The International Movement after the Cold War: Adaptation and critique
- Aryeh Neier, The International Human Rights Movement, chapters 7-10
- James Ron, et al, “what shapes the west’s human rights focus?” (on NYUClasses)

NGO case-studies: Human Rights Watch and Human Rights First

February 18th
The Compliance Gap
- Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, The Persistent Power of Human Rights, chapter 3 (Beth Simmons); and chapter 5 (Xinyuan Dai)
- Jo Becker, Campaigning for Justice, chapters 1 and 5

NGO case-studies: FIDH and Global Rights

February 25th
Vernacularization
- Watch: Sally Engle Merry, UNPACKING THE VERNACULARIZATION PROCESS March 5, 2009 (1 hour and 39 minutes) (scroll down on this site: http://www1.uwindsor.ca/socialjustice/video-conferences)
• (optional): Sally Engle Merry, “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle” (on NYUClasses)

**NGO case-studies: Conectas and DeJusticia**

**March 4th**  
**Private Wrongs**
- Jo Becker, *Campaigning for Justice*, chapter 10, LGBT rights  

**NGO case-studies: AWID and IGLHRC**

**March 11th**  
**Business and Human Rights**
**READ**
- Jo Becker, *Campaigning for Justice*, chapter 2, ILO and workers rights

**NGO case-studies: BHRRC and Justica Global**

**March 18th**  
**Academic Holiday**

**March 25th**  
**PAPER PROPOSAL DUE TODAY**  
**Economic and Social Rights**
**READ**
- “Who will be Accountable”: CESR (on NYUClasses)

**NGO case-studies: ESCR-Net and CESR**

**April 1st**  
**Transitional Justice**
**Guest speaker**
**READ:**
- Jo Becker, *Campaigning for Justice*, chapters 6 and 8

**NO NGO case-studies today**
April 8th
Emerging Powers, multi-polarity, and human rights advocacy in the 21st Century
READ:
- Aryeh Neier, The International Human Rights Movement, chapter 5
- Conectas, “Foreign Policy and Human Rights” (see NYUClasses or here: http://www.conectas.org/arquivos/editor/files/CONECTAS%20ing_add_LAURA.pdf)

NGO case-studies: International Service for Human Rights (Geneva) and Forum-Asia

April 15th
The future: digital revolution and what it means for the human rights movement
READ:
- Andrew Puddephatt, “New Frontier, Old Problem: The Digital Revolution and the Human Rights Movement” (on NYUClasses)
- Jo Becker, Campaigning for Justice, ch 9

NGO case-studies: Advancing Human Rights and Human Rights Program, Benetec

April 22
Measuring Impact of Human Rights NGOs
READ:
- “Monitoring and Evaluation for Human Rights Organizations” (on NYUClasses)
- (OPTIONAL) Michael Ignatieff (ed), Measurement and Human Rights (Carr Center)

NGO case-studies: ICTJ (especially M&E program) and CELS

April 29th
The future of the International Human Rights Movement
READ:
- Aryeh Neier, The International Human Rights Movement, chapter 12, 13
- Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, The Persistent Power of Human Rights, ch 8, 9
- Jo Becker, Campaigning for Justice, “lessons for the future”

NGO case-studies: TBD

May 6th
Last class—TBD

PAPERS DUE TUESDAY, MAY 13TH BY EMAIL TO LNB2@NYU.EDU
II. Required readings
There are three types of required readings

A. Books and articles (see syllabus). Please purchase:
   - Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, Kathryn Sikkink (eds) (2013), The Persistent Power of Human Rights; From Commitment to Compliance;
   - Jo Becker, Campaigning for Justice: Human Rights Advocacy in Perspective (Stanford, 2013)

B. Follow OpenGlobalRights (at OpenDemocracy) and read existing debates

C. Website analysis and twitter feeds of NGOs featured on the syllabus (incl. brief presentations about organizations)

D. Recommended book: Made in Latin America (entire book available on NYUClasses)

III. Written Assignments and Grading
Students will be graded on the following:

1. PROPOSAL: Paper proposal (10%): One page maximum.
2. NGO reports (two each): 2-pages (single-spaced) (10% each=20%)
3. FINAL PAPER (50%): 10-page (maximum) single-spaced paper leading to recommendations.
4. PARTICIPATION (20%)

NGO reports

1. Examine the website of assigned NGOs. Consider following social media or doing basic web-based research about the NGO.
2. Prepare a concise (7 minute) report-back to class about the organization, using the website in class, focusing on:
   a. Basic description: Mission, staff size, location of office(s), basic structure
   b. Context/subfield in which they locate themselves
   c. Specific goals/objectives
   d. Theory of change
   e. Tactics/activities (2-3 emblematic examples)
   f. Other details (board members of note)
   g. Analysis of effectiveness
   h. Unanswered questions
3. Lead a discussion for 7 minutes
4. After the presentation, within one-week, prepare a 2-page (single-spaced) analysis focusing on theory of change (see http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/)

5. Follow this (or another) NGO for rest of the semester on social media

Final Paper
Details to be announced/discussed in class. Basic assignment: 10-page (single-spaced) analysis of a sub-field of human rights, including key actors.

III. Instructor
Louis Bickford runs the Global Human Rights program at the Ford Foundation. Prior to joining the Foundation in 2012, he served on the executive leadership team at the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights (2010-2012) and, before that, was a founding staff member and a director at the International Center for Transitional Justice (2001-2009). From 1999-2001, he was Associate Director of the Global Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He has also done independent consulting for numerous institutions and in various world regions, including in Afghanistan, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and for institutions including the Center for Strategic and International Studies; the Expert Working Group on Transitional Justice (appointed by the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina); and the Oak Foundation, where he undertook a strategic review of human rights programs.

Bickford teaches regular graduate seminars on human rights and transitional justice at Columbia University (Institute for the Study of Human Rights) and New York University (Wagner School). He received a Ph.D. from McGill University (1999) and a MA degree from the New School (1991), both in political science.