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## Human Rights or Inhuman Wrongs

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## Human Rights or Inhuman Wrongs

### Abstract

The project of promoting universally recognized human rights, that is, the commitments of the U.N. General Assembly-ratified Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), is in danger. Military and political intervention, including economic sanctions, to stop genocide and ethnic and other political mass murder is under attack. Apparently the lessons of Hitler's holocaust, the Turkish genocide of Armenians, Pol Pot's slaughter of innocents, and the loss of life in Rwanda are being rethought and un-taught. So-called peace is now preferred over prevention. The dead may have died in vain.

### Keywords

Human rights, Sudan, Darfur

## Human Rights or Inhuman Wrongs

by Edward Friedman

The project of promoting universally recognized human rights, that is, the commitments of the U.N. General Assembly-ratified Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), is in danger. Military and political intervention, including economic sanctions, to stop genocide and ethnic and other political mass murder is under attack. Apparently the lessons of Hitler's holocaust, the Turkish genocide of Armenians, Pol Pot's slaughter of innocents, and the loss of life in Rwanda are being rethought and un-taught. So-called peace is now preferred over prevention. The dead may have died in vain.

Ethnic struggles (actually political struggles in which demagogues mobilize haters utilizing social stereotypes) are found to be too complex—Jews and Germans, Armenians and Turks, Khmer Rouge and non-KR, Hutu and Tutsi—who can sort it out? It is better to do nothing, it is claimed, than to try to end the annihilation of non-Arabic-speaking Black Africans in Sudan. We are advised to heed the propaganda of the killers that the victims are also responsible. All stories have two sides, we are told.

Personally, I'd heed the cries of the victims. Preventing their gratuitous suffering is largely what a commitment to human rights is about.

To be sure, no one doubts that "Sudan's army and a variety of militia" have "caused 300,000 deaths in Darfur since 2003." But, hey, "everyone" commits atrocities, we are told. The African Union actually wants "all of the parties involved in the Darfur conflict" to talk. But, we are instructed, we should empathize first and foremost with the view of the genocidal regime in Khartoum, Sudan that "such meetings would...unify the rebels." Apparently peace is possible only on the terms of the executioners. Human rights activists are dismissed as trouble-makers. This kind of analysis reflects a transvaluation of values similar to finding fascist racism superior to multicultural constitutionalism.

Yes, ending the slaughter requires talking to the leaders of the murderers, especially if one rules out organizing to control, stop and punish the murderers. But getting involved in trying to actually stop the *genocidaires* risks, it is said, being used by "the rebels and bandits...and the distinction between the two is frequently unclear." Worse yet, lord alone knows what the head of the government of the killers might do if the International Criminal Court (ICC) moves ahead with an effort to bring the leader of the *genocidaires* to the bar of justice. Isn't it better to maintain "stability," we are asked, the stability and peace of the killing fields? Surrendering to the blackmail of the killers leaves no space for promoting human rights.

The general critique of human rights intervention that has been rising goes even further. It suspects human rights motives and highlights political interests. Didn't the EU invite the U.S. to lead an effort in Yugoslavia to stop the killing by the Serb racist Milosevic in part because of European interests in keeping Europe democratic and not solely because the Europeans cared about rights and wrongs? Given these selfish interests, we are told, isn't the most basic issue whether one is for or against the imperialist intervention of the capitalist West? Human rights activism is re-presented as evil imperialism.

In this discourse, the actual victims become irrelevant. It is enough to know that Pol Pot was against the CIA, that Hitler was against liberalism, that Khomeini stood against the so-called “West.” Which side are you on is the question. The wrong side is liberal constitutionalism. Potential victims of systemic crimes against humanity are not to be saved; they are to be found guilty of being on the side of universal human rights, supposedly a bourgeois imperialist agenda.

But these are not isolated individuals who have launched this assault on human rights. Underlying this screed against human rights is the rise of authoritarian powers, from China to Saudi Arabia. China backs the *genocidaires* in Sudan. It armed Pol Pot. It provided machetes to the killers in Rwanda. It backed Milosevic. It saw the attempt to democratize Yugoslavia—as the [Color Revolutions in Asia](#)—as practice runs for trying to subvert Chinese Communist Party (CCP) authoritarianism in Beijing, with the supposed hidden motive of restoring American global hegemony. To be on the side of human rights, it is claimed, is to be on the side of American imperialism.

That any serious person takes this CCP type propaganda amazes me.

Actually, human rights are the agenda of societal groups who embrace the UDHR as truly universal. They criticize capital punishment by the government in the USA and the torture policies of outgoing U.S. President George W. Bush. They denounce discrimination against Muslims by governments in Europe. They in fact do embrace [universal values](#). They are on the side of the cause of humanity, of the democratizers in places like Burma and Zimbabwe and Iran. They try to pressure their governments and international organizations to act on some basic moral principles.

More is at stake in this debate than the fate of millions of innocents in Darfur, though that would be more than enough. The deeper issue is whether the universal human rights agenda in general will even survive, let alone flourish. But should promoters of human rights surrender or struggle?

According to democracy-promoter Larry Diamond in his book, [The Spirit of Democracy](#), the freedom agenda is increasingly unattractive to the international community. “Singapore...could foreshadow a resilient form of capitalist-authoritarianism in China, Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia” in an age where authoritarian “Asia will determine the global fate of democracy” and human rights.

Right now, it is not looking good for human rights. The apologists for the killers—hiding under a cloak of non-intervention and anti-imperialism—fare winning. The world is changing for the worse.

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