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The United Nations and Human Rights: A Critical Appraisal

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again in order to help the population of Somalia. History has proven them wrong in the intervention that ensued. Should we then infer the emergence of a "new right of interference" in the form of armed humanitarian interventions led by the U.N. Security Council? Perhaps the authors will soon address this question in a follow-up volume.

Geraldine J. Cummins

THE UNITED NATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL; Edited by Philip Alston; Oxford University Press, New York (1992); ISBN 0-19-825450-4; 675 pp. (hardcover).

In this book, Alston has compiled sixteen essays, each analyzing and assessing a different aspect or subdivision of the United Nations' human rights regime. This medium provides the impetus for an insightful and thought-provoking treatment of the growth and status of human rights in the United Nations. Additionally, a multitude of instruments, institutions, and bodies are treated, leaving the reader with a solid working knowledge of current issues and access to many avenues for further exploration.

The book is divided into three sections: "UN Charter-Based Organs," "Organs Monitoring Treaty Compliance," and "Other Issues." The first section contains eight essays, each analyzing a separate body relative to the global pursuit of human rights. Essays by Antonio Cassese and John Quinn each discuss the role assumed by the General Assembly in the human rights arena. Cassese presents a historic evaluation of the General Assembly, taking into account political and structural factors that have played significant roles during the first forty years of General Assembly existence. Quinn discusses General Assembly action in the 1990's and evaluates the current situation of this organ. Other commissions discussed in this section include the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, and several other relevant commissions.

The second section of the book is devoted to an analysis of five separate committees established to oversee the implementation of their respective human rights instruments. Karl Partsch assesses the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, presenting both a view as to the formation and evolution of the Committee and suggestions as to how the Committee could become more effective. The essay by Philip Alston charts the history of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, identifies obstacles and weaknesses facing the Committee, and proposes specific solutions to many of the problems he assesses. Additional essays examine the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the Committee Against Torture. The strength of this section of the book lies in its systematic evaluation of the various representative committees and identification of areas for improvement in light of their given purposes.

The final section of the book contains three separate essays: "The Role of the United Nations Secretariat" by Theo Van Boven, "Lessons

from the Experience of the International Labour Organisation” by Virginia Leary, and “Human Rights Co-ordination within the UN System” by Klaus Samson. Van Boven’s piece identifies the various obligations assumed by the Secretariat with respect to the promotion of human rights and examines the roles of the International Civil Service, the Center for Human Rights, and the Executive Head for Human Rights Secretariat. This piece is particularly useful in light of the preceding treatment of the other main organs of the United Nations.

The United Nations and Human Rights is an invaluable source of information on the development and current posture of the United Nations’ human rights regime. This value is two-fold. On the one hand the book, read as a whole, paints a detailed picture of the pursuit of human rights within the United Nations system. On the other hand the essays, when considered as independent pieces, provide keen descriptions, assessments, and evaluations of their subjects.

In sum, Alston’s insightful compilation on the workings of the current United Nations’ human rights regime should not go unread by serious students of international human rights.

William G. Klain