

ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN ETHICS, JUSTICE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

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Summary

The organizations dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights were defined under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights codifying fundamental rights. However, such organizations have changed and multiplied over the years both to meet the need to assert such rights and because the rights themselves have expanded and been modified by social and political changes, and changes introduced by science and technology. The current panorama of human rights organizations is complex and further modifications are now being made to involve previously extraneous sectors.

1. Human Rights Organizations

Since December 10, 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was formally adopted, human rights have become central to the implementation of international law. At the outset many states acknowledged them only formally, but since the 1970s they have become decisive for the credibility of countries in which they were previously ignored. In that period, together with the political and sociocultural changes that were altering the international physiognomy, a transformation commenced of what has been defined the “operational significance” of human rights, namely awareness of links among all human rights and the possibility of seeing them concretely realized for

the first time in different national contexts. In this respect, not only has the role of many supranational institutions proved fundamental, so has the increasingly active contribution of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Awareness of the close connection between all human rights was emphasized by the Tehran Proclamation of 1968, which stated: “Since human rights and fundamental freedoms are indivisible, the full realization of civil and political rights without the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is impossible.” The connection was reiterated by the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly Resolution 32/130 of December 16, 1977 (and by the subsequent resolutions on “Alternative approaches and ways and means within the U.N. system for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms”), which, insofar as it asserted the universality and indivisibility of human rights and their connection with development and democracy, sought to “reconcile” different generations of rights.

The problems relating to the protection of the environment, which began to capture international attention at the U.N. Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment of 1972, strengthened the sense of unity of all human rights. The Stockholm declaration affirmed the inextricable link that exists not only between the environment and human rights (right to freedom, equality, and dignity), but also between the environment and the right to development (right to live under adequate conditions and in an environment of a quality that permits a life of well-being and dignity).

By involving, *de facto*, both economic relations and the political arrangement of states, the environment has proved the means for effectively bringing together problems connected with development and democratic participation. Partly on account of the challenges that collective and globalizing enjoyment of the environment lay down for individual rights, environmental issues have provided a concrete context for the harmonization of different rights. The 1992 U.N. Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro emphasized the importance both of the economy and of democratic participation in relation to the environment, albeit emphasizing above all the dimension of economic sustainability. Subsequently the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights on June 25, 1993, placed particular emphasis on participatory democracy, solemnly stating: “Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Democracy is based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives.”

Yet the environment is also the most evident example of how scientific-technological enterprise has deeply affected both external nature and the life of human beings, simultaneously menacing the ecosphere and creating new possibilities for the restoration of natural systems, throwing into crisis traditional human roles and values, but also building original possibilities for human development and relations among human beings.

The attempt to rethink the bonds that exist between rights and new connections between the environment, development, and scientific-technological evolution is the necessary

premise both for understanding the new direction in which human rights are moving and for identifying the organizations that are or may be involved in this process. In fact, new economic or political situations, such as the evolution of scientific knowledge or the impact of new technologies, have brought to the surface new, previously unimagined, connections within the ambit of human rights and also made significant the role of organizations previously extraneous to issues of ethics and justice. If awareness that the pursuit of synergies at different levels—government, nongovernment, international, national, and local—is now essential for the realization of human rights, procedures for effective cooperation between institutions have still largely to materialize and the instruments for the implementation of requests still seem, in part, to be inadequate.

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Biographical Sketches

Mariachiara Tallacchini teaches science, technology and the law in the Law Faculty at the Catholic University of Piacenza, Italy, and bioethics in the Faculty of Biotechnology at the State University of Milan, Italy. In 1997, she took part in the European Technological Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program in Kyrgyzstan. She collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office in Rome on environment and health. In 2000, Dr. Tallacchini was appointed as a representative for the U.N. of Geneva in the Working Group on Responsibilities and Liabilities for the Revision of the U.N. Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Water Convention and the UNECE Accident Convention. She has been a fellow at Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University), working on the constitutional implications of technological change. Dr. Tallacchini is the author and/or editor of several books on the environment, biotechnology, and the law, including *Law for Nature* (1996); *Land Ethics* (1998); *Biotechnology and Informed Consent* (1999); *A Legal Code for Animals* (2001); and *Science and Law: The Relationship among Institutions, Experts and the Public in Biotechnology* (2001). Dr. Tallacchini has also published more than 70 articles.

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