

EMERGING HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS FOR NON-STATE ACTORS

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Chapter Summary. States are the main actors in the international law of human rights. This chapter examines steps that have been taken and the extent to which non-state actors can be held accountable under international human rights law for their actions that affect the enjoyment of human rights.

The United Nations and Human Rights Other Procedures within the UN System Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me. In the course of the preparatory work, the two German NGOs further decided to publish two versions: So far, three English versions served as a basis for translations into eleven languages. Taken together, 19 editions in 12 languages appeared, inter alia, in Greek , Turkish , French , Georgian , Armenian , Arab and Hebrew Adaptations to the specific country situations were published in German and , Russian and , and Bulgarian and The preparation of the manual has been guided by optimistic, not by sceptical realism. Referring to the increasing number of 4 How to File Complaints on Human Rights Violations ratifications of UN human rights instruments, of the treaty bodies in charge of the supervision of state-reporting systems, and of NGOs engaged in human rights activities as well as of NIHRs, the fight against human rights violations “ whenever and wherever they occur ” is important and a must for all citizens. Of course, the silence of governments when other governments abuse the human rights of their own citizens occurs too often. And national sovereignty remains a reality although Article 2, para 7, of the UN Charter no longer offers a legal defence mechanism to Member States violating human rights. Unfortunately, the United Nations has failed so far to achieve its stated goal, namely to stop gross violations of human rights in many countries around the world. But all this means that NGOs must increase their efforts together with the governments of good will and with the UN machinery responsible for human rights. The world-wide fight against human rights violations demands a higher degree of transparency both at the international and national level. The United Nations Human Rights Website opened on 10 December was a very important and most successful step towards that end [http: This Website improved tremendously in terms of content and presentation over the last decade. It became the major source of information and guarantees a high degree of transparency. In view of grave violations and atrocities in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, two ad hoc tribunals were established by the Security Council. For a long time, an international criminal court remained the missing link in the international legal system which could remedy the deficiencies of ad hoc tribunals and could take over when national criminal justice institutions are unwilling or unable to act. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court ICC adopted in entered into force on 1 July and led to the establishment of a permanent international court with the power to exercise its jurisdiction over individuals who have committed the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole. Dramatic changes and enormous progress has been made in recent years. Special attention deserves the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council as a new mechanism under which the human rights record of all UN Member States will be reviewed until In , new legal instruments entered into force: It includes, inter alia, important addresses, eresources, charts describing the different procedures, and model forms for communications. This fifth, updated and enlarged English edition is available as a ready-to-print manuscript as well as in a CD-ROM format. The author wishes to express his thanks for the technical support received from the two editors and for the assistance of Claudia Schlaak during the preparation process. All opinions expressed in this manual are, of course, those of the author in his personal capacity and not of the two institutions he is affiliated to. UN Commission on Human Rights vs. UN Human Rights Council: Reports of the States Parties International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Convention on the Rights of the Child: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Examination of Cases and Questions Committee on Conventions and Recommendations: Number of Communications annually received, ” Organizational Set-up of the International Labour Organization Procedures of the UN Treaty Bodies Status of Ratifications, ” Chronology of Main Human Rights Instruments It would be a](http://www.unhcr.org/refugees/1999/12/10dec.htm)

mistake to treat human rights as though there were a trade-off to be made between human rights and such goals as security or development. We only weaken our hand in fighting the horrors of extreme poverty or terrorism if, in our efforts to do so, we deny the very human rights that these scourges take away from citizens. Strategies based on the protection of human rights are vital for both our moral standing and practical effectiveness of our actions. Since its establishment, the United Nations has committed itself to striving for a world of peace and justice grounded in universal respect for human rights – a mission reaffirmed five years ago by the Millennium Declaration. But the system for protecting human rights at the international level is today under considerable strain. Human rights is woven as an important guiding thread throughout the fabric of the UN Charter see Articles 1, para. The Preamble to the Charter and its Article 1, para. Through the Charter all UN Member States are legally bound to strive towards the full realization of all human rights and freedoms. Although the San Francisco Conference decided in not to include an international bill of human rights in the Charter itself, it explicitly demanded in Article 68 the establishment of a commission for the promotion of human rights which had as its first task the drafting of the international bill of human rights. Although it has only the character of a recommendation, the Declaration played a key role in the further development of human rights instruments and became the foundation upon which the international system for the protection and promotion of human rights has been built. The basic rights laid down in the Universal Declaration have given birth to over international treaties, declarations or other instruments within the UN system see document 1. Towards a System of Human Rights Protection In order to create a system of human rights protection, the following order of steps was necessary: In the UN Charter we find the programme as expressed in Article 1, para. This programme formulation increasingly led to in the exclusion of the universal observance of human rights from "matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state" Article 2, para. Organs of the UN are allowed to discuss those issues. Moreover, actual human rights violations could be dealt with after the creation of the necessary instruments. It took almost 20 years of drafting the two International Covenants which – together with the Universal Declaration – form the International Bill of Rights. In , the General Assembly adopted the documents which entered into force ten years later, in Many countries have included provisions from the basic instruments of the UN directly in their national constitutions or have directly incorporated them in national law. The UN itself developed a wide range of procedures for observing respect for the international code of human rights. In this context, four major methods can be identified: Under these procedures, the practice of sending urgent action cables has been developed. Each year, over 1, particularly urgent cases are transmitted to governments by e-mail, fax and telegram and much more are sent by letter. Together with the preservation of international peace and security and the furtherance of economic and social development, the promotion of human rights constitutes one of the three principal objectives of the UN that has undergone a great expansion both in terms of mandates and activities. Over the last 20 years we have witnessed a major expansion of UN activities in the field of human rights. This relates not only to the human rights treaty system but also to the UN human rights programme as a whole. These developments are generally recognized as most impressive achievements of the UN human rights programme. Today, the UN human rights treaty system see chart 2 has reached a critical point where additional measures must be undertaken in order to further guarantee an efficient and effective implementation of UN instruments on human rights: The treaty bodies are confronted with serious difficulties in seeking to induce the relevant States parties to submit their overdue reports. Also, the problem of inadequate reports must be attacked; a one-page report, for instance, cannot serve as a serious basis for discussion. The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights Machinery The World Conference on Human Rights in June , where representatives of over States met for the first time in 25 years to reaffirm their commitment to protect human rights, was unequivocal in confirming the universality, interdependence, indivisibility and interrelatedness of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. A call was made on all States to 16 How to File Complaints on Human Rights Violations observe international standards of behavior, to ratify international instruments and to strengthen the human rights machinery at both the

national and international level. The Conference examined in detail the progress achieved in human rights, and obstacles to their full enjoyment, as well as the application of international instruments and the effectiveness of the methods and machinery established by the UN in the field of human rights. Emphasis was placed on protecting the rights of the most vulnerable groups, including racial, religious and ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, women and children, casualties of war, the poor, and the disabled. Through the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference, the States declared their commitment to ensure that human rights remain a priority objective of the UN. In fact, the World Conference resulted in an upgrading of human rights within the UN. To-day, human rights are recognized as one of the three pillars, alongside security and development, of the UN. Since 15 September, Mary Robinson Ireland served a four-year term as High Commissioner for Human Rights; then, she asked for a one-year extension to September. Her successor, Sergio Vieira de Mello Brazil, was elected to serve a four-year term. He was nominated special representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq on 27 May for a period of four months, where he became victim of a terrorist attack on the UN Headquarters in Baghdad. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Human rights activities have been expanding as a result of recent global events after the end of the East-West confrontation which led to a series of new mandates by legislative organs for peaceful and constructive solutions to human rights problems: The Office employs more than staff, based in Geneva and New York and in seven regional offices and in eleven country offices. Originally, the Commission consisted of nine core members acting in their individual capacity; later, the Commission of representatives of 53 Member States was elected for three-year terms by ECOSOC on the following regional basis: In 1947, the Commission met for the first time; its sole function was to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the full text see annex VI. The Commission accomplished this task within one year: For the first 20 years the Commission concentrated its activities on standardsetting. The progress achieved can be best characterized by the fact that in the Commission "recognized that it had no competence to deal with any complaint about violations of human rights". Since then, the Commission has developed special procedures for the protection of human rights. These non-treaty procedures, country-orientated or thematic operating through special rapporteurs and working groups, shall monitor the compliance by States with international human rights law and investigate alleged violations of human rights, among others, through fact-finding missions to countries in all parts of the world. In the 1980s, the Commission has increasingly turned its attention to the provision of advisory services and technical assistance in order to overcome the existing obstacles and to secure the enjoyment of human rights by all. Also, more emphasis has been put on the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development and the right to an adequate standard of living, as well as on the protection of the rights of the vulnerable groups in society, such as minorities and indigenous people, and of the rights of women see section III. The Commission acted as the main policy-oriented UN body responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights. Since 1993, the Commission has been authorized to meet exceptionally to consider particularly grave human rights situations provided that a majority of at least 27 of its 53 members so agreed for instance, human rights violations in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, East Timor and in Palestine have been treated in special sessions. In 1993, the year before the Commission was replaced by the Human Rights Council see section II, seven working groups established by the Commission dealt with the following issues: The Commission met once a year in Geneva for six weeks, beginning in March. During the public meetings governments which are not members of the Commission and non-governmental organizations NGOs which have been granted consultative status with ECOSOC could attend and make written and oral statements concerning issues on the agenda. Often, NGO investigations and reports provided useful information available to the Commission about human rights abuses in various parts of the world. For the first time, more than 40 national human rights institutions NHRIs were invited to take part in the work of the Commission.

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Under international human rights law, states are required to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide redress for acts of violence against women. Accordingly, the due diligence standard presents a way to measure whether a state has fulfilled its obligations to prevent and respond to violence against women.

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