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FREEDOM FROM FEAR

On 10 December 2006, while the world celebrated International Human Rights Day, I was in Jayyus on the West Bank. The small village is now divided by the Wall – or more accurately a high iron fence. Built in defiance of international law, and ostensibly to make Israel more secure, the Wall's main effect has been to cut off the local Palestinian population from their citrus groves and olive orchards. A once prosperous farming community is now impoverished.

"Every day I have to suffer the humiliation of checkpoints, petty obstructions and new restrictions that stop me from getting to my orchard on the other side. If I cannot cultivate my olives, how will I survive?" cried one angry Palestinian farmer.

As I listened to him, I could see in the distance the neat red roofs and white walls of a large and prosperous Israeli settlement. I wondered if those who lived there believed that a Wall threatening the future of their neighbours could truly enhance their security.

Earlier that week, I had visited Sderot, a small town in the south of Israel, which had been subjected to rocket attacks from Palestinian groups in Gaza.

"We are frightened," one young woman resident told me. "But we know that there are women like us on the other side who are also suffering, who are also afraid, and who are in a worse situation than us. We feel empathy for them, we want to live in peace with them, but instead our leaders promote our differences and create more distrust. So we live in fear and insecurity."

**FEAR DESTROYS
OUR SHARED
UNDERSTANDING
AND OUR SHARED
HUMANITY**

This brave Israeli woman understood what many world leaders fail to comprehend: that fear destroys our shared understanding and our shared humanity. When we see others as a threat, and are ready to negotiate their human rights for our security, we are playing a zero-sum game.

Her message is sobering at a time when our world is as polarized as it was at the height of the Cold War, and in many ways far more dangerous. Human rights – those global values, universal principles and common standards that are meant to unite us – are being bartered away in the name of security today as they were then. Like the Cold War times, the agenda is being driven by fear – instigated, encouraged and sustained by unprincipled leaders.

Fear can be a positive imperative for change, as in the case of the environment, where alarm about global warming is forcing politicians belatedly into action. But fear can also be dangerous and divisive when it breeds intolerance, threatens diversity and justifies the erosion of human rights.

In 1941, US President Franklin Roosevelt laid out his vision of a new world order founded on "four freedoms": freedom of speech and of religion; freedom from fear and from want. He provided inspirational leadership that

overcame doubt and unified people. Today far too many leaders are trampling freedom and trumpeting an ever-widening range of fears: fear of being swamped by migrants; fear of "the other" and of losing one's identity; fear of being blown up by terrorists; fear of "rogue states" with weapons of mass destruction.

Fear thrives on myopic and cowardly leadership. There are indeed many real causes of fear but the approach being taken by many world leaders is short-sighted, promulgating policies and strategies that erode the rule of law and human rights, increase inequalities, feed racism and xenophobia, divide and damage communities, and sow the seeds for violence and more conflict.

The politics of fear has been made more complex by the emergence of armed groups and big business that commit or condone human rights abuses. Both – in different ways – challenge the power of governments in an increasingly borderless world. Weak governments and ineffective international institutions are unable to hold them accountable, leaving people vulnerable and afraid.

History shows that it is not through fear but through hope and optimism that progress is achieved. So, why do some leaders promote fear? Because it allows them to consolidate their own power, create false certainties and escape accountability.

The Howard government portrayed desperate asylum-seekers in leaky boats as a threat to Australia's national security and raised a false alarm of a refugee invasion. This contributed to its election victory in 2001. After the attacks of 11 September 2001, US President George W Bush invoked the fear of terrorism to enhance his executive power, without Congressional oversight or judicial scrutiny. President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan whipped up fear among his supporters and in the Arab world that the deployment of UN peacekeepers in Darfur would be a pretext for an Iraq-style, US-led invasion. Meanwhile, his armed forces and militia allies continued to kill, rape and plunder with impunity. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe played on racial fears to push his own political agenda of grabbing land for his supporters.

Only a common commitment based on shared values can lead to a sustainable solution. In an inter-dependent world, global challenges, whether of poverty or security, of migration or marginalization, demand responses based on global values of human rights that bring people together and promote our collective well-being. Human rights provide the basis for a sustainable future. But protecting the security of states rather than the sustainability of people's lives and livelihoods appears to be the order of the day.

FEAR OF MIGRATION AND MARGINALIZATION

In developed countries, as well as emerging economies, the fear of being invaded by hordes of the poor is being used to justify ever tougher measures against migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, violating international standards of human rights and humane treatment.

Driven by the political and security imperatives of border control, asylum procedures have become a means for exclusion rather than protection.

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Across Europe, refugee recognition rates have fallen dramatically over the years, although the reasons for seeking asylum – violence and persecution – remain as high as ever.

The hypocrisy of the politics of fear is such that governments denounce certain regimes but refuse to protect those escaping from them. The harsh policies of the North Korean government have been condemned by western governments but these same governments are far less vocal about the fate of some 100,000 North Koreans reportedly hiding in China, hundreds of whom are deported forcibly to North Korea every week by the Chinese authorities.

Migrant workers fuel the engine of the global economy – yet they are turned away with brutal force, exploited, discriminated against, and left unprotected by governments across the world, from the Gulf states and South Korea to the Dominican Republic.

Six thousand Africans drowned or were missing at sea in 2006 in their desperate bid to reach Europe. Another 31,000 – six times higher than the number in 2005 – reached the Canary islands. Just as the Berlin Wall could not stop those who wanted to escape Communist oppression, tough policing of the borders of Europe is failing to block those seeking to escape abject poverty.

In the long term, the answer lies not in building walls to keep people out but in promoting systems that protect the rights of the vulnerable while respecting the prerogative of states to control migration. International instruments provide that balance. Attempts to weaken the UN Refugee Convention or shun the UN Migrant Workers Convention – which no western country has ratified – are counter-productive.

If unregulated migration is the fear of the rich, then unbridled capitalism, driven by globalization, is the fear of the poor. Booming markets are creating enormous opportunities for some, but also widening the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots". The rewards of globalization are heavily skewed, both across the world and within countries. Latin America is burdened with some of the highest levels of inequality in the world. In India, there have been average growth rates of 8 per cent over the past three years, but more than a quarter of its population still lives below the poverty line.

These statistics reveal the dark underbelly of globalization. The marginalization of large swathes of humanity should not be treated as the inevitable cost of global prosperity. There is nothing inevitable about policies and decisions that deny individuals their economic and social rights.

Amnesty International's growing programme of work on economic and social rights is laying bare the reality of people's fear: that in many parts of the world people are being tipped into poverty and trapped there by corrupt governments and greedy businesses.

As the demands for mining, urban development and tourism put pressure on land, across Africa, Asia and Latin America, entire communities – millions of people – are being forcibly evicted from their homes with no due process, compensation or alternative shelter. Often, excessive force is used to uproot them. Development-induced displacement is not a new problem, yet little appears to have been learnt from past experience. In Africa alone more than 3 million people have been affected since 2000, making forced evictions one

of the most widespread and unrecognized human rights violations on the continent. Carried out in the name of economic progress, in reality they leave the poorest of the poor homeless and often without access to clean water, health, sanitation, jobs or education.

Africa has long been the victim of the greed of western governments and companies. Now, it faces a new challenge from China. The Chinese government and Chinese companies have shown little regard for their "human rights footprint" on the continent. The deference to national sovereignty, antipathy to human rights in foreign policy, and readiness to engage with abusive regimes, are all endearing China to African governments. But for those same reasons, African civil society has been less welcoming. The health and safety standards and treatment of workers by Chinese companies have fallen short of international standards. As the biggest consumer of Sudan's oil and a major supplier of its weapons, China has shielded the Sudanese government against pressure from the international community — although there are some signs that it may be modifying its position.

Weak, deeply impoverished, and often profoundly corrupt states have created a power vacuum into which corporations and other economic actors are moving. In some of the most resource-rich countries with the poorest populations, big business has used its unbridled power to gain concessions from governments that deprive local people of the benefits of the resources, destroy their livelihoods, displace them from their homes and expose them to environmental degradation. Anger at the injustice and denial of human rights has led to protests that are then brutally repressed. The oil-rich Niger Delta in southern Nigeria, torn by violence for the past two decades, is a case in point.

Corporations have long resisted binding international standards. The United Nations must confront the challenge, and develop standards and promote mechanisms that hold big business accountable for its impact on human rights. The need for global standards and effective accountability becomes even more urgent as multinational corporations from diverse legal and cultural systems emerge in a global market.

The push for land, timber and mineral resources by big conglomerates is threatening the cultural identity and daily survival of many Indigenous communities in Latin America. Subjected to racial discrimination and driven into extreme poverty and ill-health, some of the groups are on the brink of collapse.

Against this background, the failure of the 2006 UN General Assembly to adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was yet another unfortunate testimony to powerful interests trumping the very survival of the vulnerable.

Although the rich are getting richer every day, they do not necessarily feel any safer. Rising crime and gun violence are a source of constant fear, leading many governments to adopt policies that are purportedly tough on crime but in reality criminalize the poor, exposing them to the double jeopardy of gang violence and brutal policing. Ever higher levels of criminal and police violence in São Paulo and the presence of the army on the streets of Rio de Janeiro in 2006 demonstrated the failure of Brazil's public security policies. Providing security to one group of people at the expense of the rights of

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another does not work. Experience shows that public security is best strengthened through a comprehensive approach that combines better policing alongside provision of basic services such as health, education and shelter to the poor communities; so that they feel they too have a stake in a secure and stable society.

At the end of the day, promoting economic and social rights for all is the best approach to addressing the fears of the rich as well as the poor.

FEAR BREEDS DISCRIMINATION

Fear feeds discontent and leads to discrimination, racism, persecution of ethnic and religious minorities and xenophobic attacks against foreigners and foreign-born citizens.

When governments turn a blind eye to racist violence, it can become endemic. In Russia hate crimes against foreigners and minorities are common but until recently were rarely prosecuted because they fed into the nationalist propaganda of the authorities.

As the European Union expands eastwards, the acid test of its commitment to equality and non-discrimination will be the treatment of its own Roma population.

From Dublin to Bratislava, anti-Roma attitudes remain entrenched, with segregation and discrimination in education, health and housing and exclusion from public life persistent in some countries.

In many western countries, discrimination has been generated by fears of uncontrolled migration and, post-9/11, aggravated by counter-terrorism strategies targeting Arabs, Asians and Muslims. Fear and hostility on one side have led to alienation and anger on the other.

Increasing polarization has strengthened the hands of extremists at both ends of the spectrum, reducing the space for tolerance and dissent. Incidents of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are increasingly evident. In many parts of the world, anti-western and anti-American sentiments are at an all-time high, as demonstrated by the ease with which some groups fomented violence following the publication in Denmark of cartoons that many Muslims found offensive.

The Danish government rightly upheld free speech but failed to affirm strongly and immediately its commitment to protect Muslims living in Denmark from discrimination and social exclusion. The Iranian President called for a debate to promote the denial of the historical fact of the Holocaust. The French parliament passed a bill making it a crime to deny that the Armenians suffered genocide at the hands of the Ottomans.

Where should the line be drawn between protecting free speech and stopping incitement of racial hatred?

The state has an obligation to promote non-discrimination and prevent racial crimes but it can do that without limiting freedom of speech. Freedom of expression should not be lightly restricted. Yes, it can be used to propagate lies as well as truth, but without it there is no way to argue against lies, no way to seek truth and justice. That is why speech should be curtailed only where there is clear intent to incite racial or religious hatred, not where the purpose is to express opinion, however distasteful.

In *Albert-Engelman-Gesellschaft MBH v Austria* (January 2006) the European

Court of Human Rights described freedom of expression as "one of the essential foundations of a democratic society and one of the basic conditions for its progress and each individual's self-fulfilment... freedom is applicable not only to 'information' or 'ideas' [that are deemed acceptable] but also to those that offend, shock or disturb; such are the demands of pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness without which there is no 'democratic society'."

FEAR OF DISSENT

Freedom of expression is fundamental to the right to dissent. Where there is no dissent, the right to free speech is endangered. Where there is no dissent, democracy is stifled. Where there is no dissent, tyranny raises its head.

Yet, freedom of expression and dissent continue to be suppressed in a variety of ways, from the prosecution of writers, journalists and human rights defenders in Turkey, to political killings of left-wing activists in the Philippines.

In the US prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, the only form of protest arguably left to detainees is hunger strike. In 2006 some 200 detainees who resorted to it were force fed by tubes inserted through the nose – a particularly painful and humiliating method. When three men were reported to have committed suicide, the US taskforce commander at Guantánamo described it as "asymmetrical warfare".

National security has often been used as an excuse by governments to suppress dissent. In recent years heightened fears about terrorism and insecurity have reinforced repression – or the risk of it – in a variety of ways.

"Old fashioned" abuses of freedom of expression, assembly and association have gained a new lease of life in North Africa and the Middle East. In liberal democracies the ever-widening net of counter-terrorism laws and policies poses a potential threat to free speech. In 2006, for example, the UK adopted legislation to create a vaguely defined crime of "encouraging terrorism", incorporating the even more baffling notion of "glorifying terrorism".

In the USA the authorities showed more interest in hunting down the source of the leak behind the story in *The Washington Post* on CIA "black sites", than in investigating the policies that led to the establishment of these secret prisons in the first place in contravention of international and US laws.

The authoritarian drift in Russia has been devastating for journalists and human rights defenders. Having intimidated or taken over much of the Russian press, President Vladimir Putin turned his attention to Russian and foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 2006 with a controversial law to regulate their funding and activities. In a public relations exercise just prior to the meeting of the G8, he met with a group of international NGOs, including Amnesty International. Informed of the damaging impact of his NGO law on civil society in Russia and urged to suspend it pending further consultations on amendments, he responded: "We did not pass this law to have it repealed." Three months later the Russian Chechen Friendship Society, a human rights NGO working to expose violations in Chechnya, was closed down under the new law.

Unfortunately, Russia is not the only country seeking to silence independent voices on human rights. From Colombia to Cambodia, Cuba to Uzbekistan, governments have introduced laws to restrict human rights organizations and the work of activists, branding them disloyal or

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subversive, prosecuting those who dare to expose human rights violations, and launching smear campaigns with the help of unscrupulous media in an effort to instil fear and de-legitimize the work of activists.

In an age of technology, the Internet has become the new frontier in the struggle for the right to dissent. With the help of some of the world's biggest IT companies, governments such as those in Belarus, China, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia are monitoring chat rooms, deleting blogs, restricting search engines and blocking websites. People have been imprisoned in China, Egypt, Syria, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam for posting and sharing information online.

Everyone has the right to seek and receive information and to express their peaceful beliefs without fear or interference. Amnesty International, with the support of the UK newspaper *The Observer* (which published Amnesty International's first appeal in 1961), launched a campaign in 2006 to show that human rights activists will not be silenced, online or offline, by governments or big business.

FREEDOM FOR WOMEN

The pernicious relationship between discrimination and dissent is playing out most vividly in the arena of gender. Women activists have been arrested for demanding gender equality in Iran, murdered for promoting education of girls in Afghanistan, and subjected to sexual violence and vilification around the world. Women working on issues of sexual orientation and reproductive rights have been especially targeted, marginalized and attacked.

Women human rights defenders are doubly endangered: as activists and as women – for their work as well as for their identity. They are attacked by both state and society, not only because they expose human rights abuses, but also because they challenge patriarchal power structures and social and cultural conventions that subjugate women, condone discrimination and facilitate gender violence.

Women's human rights have suffered in recent years from the twin trends of backlash and backtrack. The backlash on human rights in the context of counter-terrorism has affected women as well as men. And in an environment of fear and religious fundamentalism, governments have backtracked on their promise to promote gender equality.

Violence against women – in all societies around the world – remains one of the gravest and most common human rights abuses today.

It thrives because of impunity, apathy and inequality. One of the most blatant examples of impunity is the conflict in Darfur, where incidents of rape rose in 2006 as armed conflict increased and spread to neighbouring areas of Chad. One of the most insidious examples of apathy is Guatemala, where more than 2,200 women and girls have been murdered since 2001, but very few cases have been investigated and even fewer prosecuted. There are many examples of the impact of inequality, but possibly one of the saddest is the high levels of maternal and infant mortality – for example in Peru – due to discrimination in health services.

Billions of dollars are being spent to fight the "war on terror" – but where is the political will or the resources to fight sexual terror against women? There was universal outrage against racial apartheid in South Africa – where is the outrage against gender apartheid in some countries today?

Whether the perpetrator is a soldier or a community leader, whether the violence is officially sanctioned by the authorities or condoned by culture and custom, the state cannot shirk its responsibility to protect women.

The state has the obligation to safeguard a woman's freedom of choice, not restrict it. To take an example, the veil and headscarf of Muslim women have become a bone of contention between different cultures, the visible symbol of oppression according to one side, and an essential attribute of religious freedom according to the other. It is wrong for women in Saudi Arabia or Iran to be compelled to put on the veil. It is equally wrong for women or girls in Turkey or France to be forbidden by law to wear the headscarf. And it is foolish of western leaders to claim that a piece of clothing is a major barrier to social harmony.

In the exercise of her right to freedom of expression and religion, a woman should be free to choose what she wants to wear. Governments and religious leaders have a duty to create a safe environment in which every woman can make that choice without the threat of violence or coercion.

The universality of human rights means that they apply equally to women as well as to men. This universality of rights – universality both in understanding and in application – is the most powerful tool against gender violence, intolerance, racism, xenophobia and terrorism.

FEAR OF TERRORISM

It is in the sphere of terrorism and counter-terrorism that fear's most harmful manifestations flourish. Whether in Mumbai or Manhattan, people have the right to be secure and governments have the duty to provide that security. However, ill-conceived counter-terrorism strategies have done little to reduce the threat of violence or to ensure justice for victims of attacks, and much to damage human rights and the rule of law.

Thwarted in 2004 by the courts from pursuing its policy of detaining people indefinitely without charge or trial, the UK government has resorted increasingly to deportation, or to "control orders" that allow the Home Secretary effectively to place people under house arrest without criminal prosecution. Suspects are thus condemned without ever being convicted. The essence of the rule of law is subverted while its form is preserved.

Japan introduced a law in 2006 to fast-track deportation of anyone deemed by the Minister of Justice to be a "possible terrorist". People's fate will no longer be determined on the basis of what they have done but on the omniscient ability of governments to predict what they might do!

Unfettered discretionary executive power is being pursued relentlessly by the US administration, which treats the world as one big battlefield for its "war on terror": kidnapping, arresting, detaining or torturing suspects either directly or with the help of countries as far apart as Pakistan and Gambia, Afghanistan and Jordan. In September 2006, President Bush finally admitted what Amnesty International has long known – that the CIA had been running secret detention centres in circumstances that amount to international crimes.

Nothing so aptly portrays the globalization of human rights violations as the US government's programme of "extraordinary renditions". Investigations by the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and a Public Enquiry in Canada, have provided compelling evidence confirming Amnesty

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International's earlier findings of the complicity, collusion or acquiescence of a number of European and other governments – whether democratic like Canada or autocratic like Pakistan. Over the past few years, hundreds of people have been unlawfully transferred by the USA and its allies to countries such as Syria, Jordan and Egypt. In this shadowy system they risk enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment. Some have ended up in Guantánamo, US-run prisons in Afghanistan or CIA "black sites".

Lawyers cannot petition the authorities, seek judicial review or demand fair trial for those held in secret detention for the simple reason that no one knows where and by whom they are being held. International monitoring is impossible for the same reasons.

The US administration's double speak has been breathtakingly shameless. It has condemned Syria as part of the "axis of evil", yet it has transferred a Canadian national, Maher Arar, to the Syrian security forces to be interrogated, knowing full well that he risked being tortured. Pakistan is another country that the US administration has courted and counted as an ally in its "war on terror" – notwithstanding concerns about its human rights record.

Thankfully, there appears to be a growing realization in many countries that security at all costs is a dangerous and damaging strategy. European institutions are becoming more rigorous in their demand for accountability and courts less willing to give in to governments' claims. The Public Enquiry in Canada called for an apology and compensation by the US authorities for Maher Arar and for investigation into other similar cases. Reports by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament are leading to calls for greater scrutiny of security services. Arrest warrants have been issued in Italy and Germany against CIA agents.

A clear momentum has been created in favour of transparency, accountability and an end to impunity.

But the USA has yet to surrender. President Bush persuaded a Congress in pre-election fever to adopt the Military Commissions Act, negating the impact of the 2006 Supreme Court judgement in *Hamdan v Rumsfeld*, and making lawful that which world opinion found immoral. *The New York Times* described it as "a tyrannical law that will be ranked with the low points in American democracy".

The US administration remains deaf to the worldwide calls for closing down Guantánamo. It is unrepentant about the global web of abuse it has spun in the name of counter-terrorism. It is oblivious to the distress of thousands of detainees and their families, the damage to the rule of international law and human rights, and the destruction of its own moral authority, which has plummeted to an all-time low around the world – while the levels of insecurity remain as high as ever.

US Supreme Court Justice Brennan wrote in 1987: "After each perceived security crisis ended, the United States has remorsefully realized that the abrogation of civil liberties was unnecessary. But it has proven unable to prevent itself from repeating the error when the next crisis came along."

A new US Congress raises hopes that things may yet take a different turn, and that Democrats and Republicans will come to see a bipartisan

interest in restoring respect for human rights at home and abroad, demanding accountability, setting up a commission of inquiry and either repealing or changing the Military Commissions Act substantially in line with international law.

FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE

When global values of human rights are swept aside with impunity, parochial interests raise their head, often driven by sectarian, ethnic and religious groups, sometimes using violence. Although their practices are often contrary to human rights, in a number of countries they are gaining support with ordinary people because they are seen to be addressing the injustices that governments and the international community are ignoring.

Meanwhile governments are failing to provide the leadership to bring these groups to account for their abuses, and instead appear to be feeding the very factors that foster them.

In Afghanistan, the government and the international community have squandered the opportunity to build an effective, functioning state based on human rights and the rule of law. Rampant insecurity, impunity and corrupt and ineffective government institutions, combined with high unemployment and poverty, have sapped public confidence, while thousands of civilian deaths resulting from US-led military operations have fuelled resentment. The Taliban has capitalized on the political, economic and security vacuum to gain control over large parts of the south and east of the country.

A misguided military adventure in Iraq has taken a heavy toll on human rights and humanitarian law, leaving the population embittered, armed groups empowered and the world a much less secure place. The insurgency has morphed into a brutal and bloody sectarian conflict. The government has shown little commitment to protect the human rights of all Iraqis. The Iraqi police forces, heavily infiltrated by sectarian militia, are feeding violations rather than restraining them. The Iraqi justice system is woefully inadequate, as former President Saddam Hussain's flawed trial and grotesque execution confirmed.

If there is to be any hope of a shift in the apocalyptic prognosis for Iraq, the Iraqi government and those who support it militarily must set some clear human rights benchmarks — to disarm the militia, reform the police, review the justice system, stop sectarian discrimination and ensure the equal rights of women.

In the Palestinian Occupied Territories the cumulative impact of measures by the Israeli authorities, including increasingly severe restrictions on freedom of movement, expansion of settlements and the building of the Wall inside the West Bank, has strangled the local economy. Ordinary Palestinians are caught between interfactional fighting of Hamas and Fatah, and the reckless shelling of the Israeli army. With no justice and no end to occupation in sight, a predominantly young Palestinian population is being radicalized. No truce will survive and no political process will succeed in the Middle East if impunity is not addressed, and human rights and security of people are not prioritized.

In Lebanon, sectarian divisions have further deepened in the aftermath of the war between Israel and Hizbullah. The lack of accountability for current

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and past abuses – including during this recent war, and political assassinations and enforced disappearances during the civil war (1975-1990) – is a source of grievance that is being exploited by all sides. The government is under pressure to concede more space to Hizbullah. There is a real risk that the country could plunge into sectarian violence once again.

One commentator predicts a nightmare scenario of failing states from the Hindu Kush to the Horn of Africa, with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Somalia as bookends, and Iraq, the Occupied Territories and Lebanon at the core of this band of instability. Others speak of the revival of a Cold War mindset of “them and us” in which powerful states seek to fight their enemies through proxy wars in someone else’s backyard. The prognosis for human rights is dire.

A FUTURE FREE OF FEAR

One can get sucked into the fear syndrome or one can take a radically different approach: an approach based on sustainability rather than security.

The term sustainability may be more familiar to development economists and environmentalists, but it is crucial too for human rights activists. A sustainable strategy promotes hope, human rights and democracy, while a security strategy addresses fears and dangers. Just as energy security is best provided through sustainable development, human security is best pursued through institutions that promote respect for human rights.

Sustainability requires rejecting the Cold War tradition of each super power sponsoring its own pool of dictatorships and abusive regimes. It means promoting principled leadership and enlightened policies.

Sustainability requires strengthening the rule of law and human rights – nationally and internationally. Elections have drawn a lot of international attention, from Bolivia to Bangladesh, Chile to Liberia. But as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iraq have shown, creating the conditions in which people can cast their ballots is not enough. A bigger challenge is to promote good governance, including an effective legal and judicial structure, the rule of law based on human rights, a free press and a vibrant civil society.

A properly functioning system of rule of law at the national level is the ultimate safeguard for human rights. But such a system of law, if it is to be truly just, must embrace women and the poor. The majority of poor people today live outside the protection of the law. Including them in a meaningful way requires giving effect to economic and social rights in public policy and programmes. In too many countries women continue to be denied equality before the law. Equal access of women to all human rights is not only a precondition for sustaining human rights, but also for economic prosperity and social stability.

Sustainability requires revitalizing UN human rights reform. Humiliated and sidelined by its most powerful members and ignored by governments such as Sudan and Iran, the credibility of the UN Security Council has suffered badly. Yet when the UN fails, the authority of its powerful member states is also eroded. It is in the USA’s own interest to discard the “pick and choose” approach to the UN and recognize the value of multilateralism as a crucial means of promoting greater stability and security through human rights.

The UN Human Rights Council appears to be displaying some worrying signs of factionalism reminiscent of its predecessor institution. But it is not

too late to change. Member countries can play a constructive role – and some, including India and Mexico, are indeed doing so – to make the Council more willing to tackle human rights crises and less open to political selectivity and manipulation.

The new UN Secretary General too must assert himself to show leadership as a champion of human rights. The UN's responsibility for human rights is a unique one that no other entity can usurp. All organs and officials of the UN must live up to it.

Sustainability in human rights terms means nurturing hope. From the many examples in 2006, we can draw lessons for the future.

The ending of the decade-long conflict in Nepal, with its attendant human rights abuses, was a clear example of what can be achieved through collective effort. The UN and interested governments, working with national political leaders and human rights activists in the country and abroad, responded to the powerful call from the people of Nepal.

International justice is critical for sustaining respect for human rights, and in 2006 Nigeria finally handed over former Liberian President Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone to be tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The International Criminal Court (ICC) began its first prosecution against a warlord from the Democratic Republic of the Congo for recruiting child soldiers. The Lord's Resistance Army, a Ugandan rebel group, is next on the ICC's list, as are perpetrators of the atrocities in Darfur. In pressing for accountability of armed groups as well as government actors, the ICC is setting an important precedent at a time when armed groups are flexing their muscles with brutal consequences for human rights.

A massive campaign by civil society organizations moved the UN General Assembly in 2006 to adopt a resolution to start work on an Arms Trade Treaty. Proliferation of arms is a major threat to human rights and the willingness of governments to bring it under control is an important step towards achieving "freedom from fear".

These positive developments – and many more – have happened because of the courage and commitment of civil society. Indeed, the single most significant sign of hope for transforming the human rights landscape is the human rights movement itself – millions of defenders, activists and ordinary people, including members of Amnesty International, who are demanding change.

Marches, petitions, virals, blogs, t-shirts and armbands may not seem much by themselves, but by bringing people together they unleash an energy for change that should not be underestimated. Darfur has become a household word for international solidarity thanks to the efforts of civil society. The killings unfortunately have not stopped, but civil society will not allow world leaders to forget Darfur as long as its people are unsafe. Gender justice has a long journey still to make, but the campaign by Iranian human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi for equality of women in Iran is lighting a flame that will not die down until the battle has been won. The campaign for the abolition of the death penalty goes from strength to strength thanks to civil society.

People power will change the face of human rights in the 21st century. Hope is very much alive.

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