

Editorial

Human Rights: Universality and Cultural Peculiarity

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Human rights issues have been acquired wide global attention in recent decades, particularly after the Second World War that witnessed the worst crimes against humanity. This has been followed by the issuance of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many other instruments that aim to reinforce the universal human values and the human rights principles.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the international attention to human rights issues has increased and become one of the most prominent manifestations of the cultural, media and political dimensions of globalization. Being distinguished from the commonly known conception of the International Humanitarian Law, the International Human Rights Law has evolved and derived its legitimacy from international charters, dozens of conventions and treaties and international resolutions. Moreover, many international organizations have developed their structures and systems, and broadened their scope of action and competencies to include the follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of those conventions and resolutions and thus, almost become a supervisory authority over national governments.

In the meantime, the expansion of the concept of the universality of human rights has often failed to take into account the national and local context of most human rights issues and the components of the concept itself as derived from its definition. The recognized rights of human beings are relative to the cultural peculiarity of each nation. It is also influenced by subcultures, local cultures and beliefs stemmed from religions, custom, traditions as well as cultural and social heritage. This has created a gap between the universality of human rights and the attempt to apply totally these principles by enforcing one pattern on all societies



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and at all times on the one hand, and the cultural and social peculiarities that shape the social structure of each nation on the other.

This gap is one of the crucial problems of global misunderstanding of human rights and the cause of the clash between the vision and the practice in human rights domain. It is a problem that must be solved and alleviated at two levels; First, the development of the inherited cultural concepts, relevant to human rights, in local cultures and in the mindset of individuals and the collective mind of the whole society as well in order to be less confrontational and closer to the global trend, with taking into consideration the regional and international commitments made by States.

In the meantime, local and international human rights organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental, are required to bearing in mind the principle of "relativity" while addressing human rights issues in different societies, giving attention to local communities and their social and cultural developments, rather than seeking to apply extremely difficult "standardization" to all nations. Also, they have to strive to establish intercultural norms on human rights rested upon shared values, such as justice, equality and non- discrimination on the basis of color, race, religion or social group. Besides, they shall work on combating torture and trafficking in human beings, caring for the most vulnerable groups such as children, women and persons with special needs and shall attach importance to international cooperation to spread the culture and raise the awareness of human rights.

The recognition of the cultural dimensions of the concept of human rights is one of the key pillars necessarily required to understand and tackle human rights issues in an academic and practical approach that leads to the improvement of respect for human rights and dignity in all societies and nations.