December 10, 2008

Scientists and Human Rights
Leonard Rubenstein and Mona Younis
Science Editorial
November 28, 2008

"On 10 December 1948, the world’s governments made history when they adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and agreed to ensure its 'universal and effective recognition and observance.' Over the course of six decades, this declaration has generated both tremendous hope and a substantial body of law obliging governments to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights inherent to all human beings. Though reaffirmed at every turn, one lesson of the past 60 years is that governments' commitment to human rights is only as strong as the demands of their citizens. As respected members of society, scientists are vital to securing governments' adherence to human rights." Read more.

How can we uphold the right to science?
Jessica Wyndham
www.SciDev.net
"Today (10 December), the world marks 60 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a global framework for human rights, which includes the right to 'share in scientific advancement and its benefits'. But this right - no less vital to the human condition and no less achievable than other human rights - has been neglected. We must resurrect the right to science - not simply as an exercise in fairness, but because realising it has the potential to do so much good."

Read more.

The Right to Share in Scientific Advancement
Center for American Progress, Podcast
Conversation with Mona Younis
December 10, 2008

"AAAS Science and Human Rights Program Director Mona Younis talks with Center for American Progress Senior Fellow Rick Weiss about how scientists have protected the rights of their colleagues, helped bring Balkan war criminals to justice, and safeguarded vulnerable populations in Darfur. With the program's new initiatives, she aims to spur a pro-bono movement within the research community to support human rights work, just as exists within legal circles."

Listen to podcast.

Marking the 60 Years of the UDHR Around the World: Information Kit
UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

"The year long commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was intended to be as inclusive as possible, highlighting the role of people everywhere as the custodians and beneficiaries of the UDHR." Find out about the events that have been going on around the world, and will continue throughout December, to mark this historic anniversary. Read more.

Science and Human Rights Coalition
Launch: January 14-16, 2009

New rights advocacy has at its core three main trends: the embrace of human rights-based approaches by influential development NGOs, the adoption of active economic and social rights agendas by major international human rights NGOs, and the surge of work on economic and social policy through a human rights lens by specialized human rights NGOs and social movement campaigns."

Scientists in Contemporary Wars
Bengt Gustafsson (link)

This article explores the challenges to the "universality principle of science" that are faced by scientists in contemporary wars. The universality principle, as described by Gustafsson, encompasses the freedom of scientists to movement, association, expression and communities, as well as equitable access to data and research materials, independent of such factors as ethnic origin, religion, or citizenship. Gustafsson identifies breaches of this principle arising from "blurred lines between war and politics, soldier and civilian, peace and conflict, battlefield and safety."

"If I look at the mass I will never act": Psychic Numbing and Genocide
Paul Slovic (link)

"Most people are caring and will exert great effort to rescue individual victims whose needy plight comes to their attention. These same good people,
If you represent or are a member of a scientific association, professional society, or science academy, we invite you to join us for the launch of the Coalition on January 14-16, 2009, at AAAS Headquarters in Washington, DC.

Opening the Launch, on the evening of January 14th, will be three distinguished speakers, including Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and former President of Ireland, and Sidney Verba, Chair of the Committee on Human Rights of the National Academies, and Research Professor of Government at Harvard University.

The following day-and-a-half will be an opportunity to learn about the mission and structure of the Coalition, its areas of activity, and how scientific associations and individual scientists can become a part of this important new initiative. Launch participants will hear about the varied contributions that science and scientists can make to human rights, and will have the opportunity to equip their scientific associations with information and tools needed for robust engagement in human rights. View the Launch Agenda to find out more.

Get your organization involved!

CASPA

Eager to see your scientific association, society, or academy become involved in the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition? Keen to share with your colleagues and organization information about this initiative? Available here is a one-page description of the Coalition that you can use as the basis for listserv announcements, newsletter articles, and meeting presentations.

Introducing our Members:

Capital Area Social Psychological Association

The Capital Area Social Psychological Association (CASPA) is an organization of professionals interested in broadly defined social psychology. Founded in 1978, CASPA addresses topics of basic research ranging from prejudice and aggression to conformity and attribution, as well as applied issues of program evaluation, terrorism and conflict resolution, among others. CASPA members include academics, government employees, consultants and students, and are primarily concentrated in the Washington DC area, including also West Virginia and Delaware. Further information about CASPA activities and other news are available through the Capital Area listserv.

Letter to President Obama on Human Rights

However, often become numbly indifferent to the plight of individuals who are "one of many" in a much greater problem. Slovic addresses this issue through the lens of psychological research and with specific reference to genocide. "It is time to examine this failure," he says, "in light of the psychological deficiencies described here and design legal and institutional mechanisms that will enforce proper responses to genocide and other forms of mass murder."
In an open letter to US President-elect Barack Obama, Julie Mertus called on the President-elect to "act quickly and decisively . to get human rights back on track." In her letter, Mertus outlines four steps the President-elect should take, including to, "do something that unequivocally demonstrates that the United States will no longer act as if it is above international law" and "begin signing some long overdue international human rights treaties." In conclusion, Mertus says, "[r]ebuilding the reputation of the United States and reestablishing its role as a global leader on human rights will take time. But these four steps will give [the new] administration a good start." Read the entire letter.

*Julie Mertus represents the International Studies Association in the Coalition and is co-chair of the Coalition's Information Resources Working Group.

For more information about the Coalition and how you or your organization can become involved, please please visit our website. To receive the latest information about the Coalition, please sign-up for our Coalition Listserv.
From the Science Community

Universal Declaration of Human Rights Reaches Space
European Space Agency
November 16, 2008

"The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was carried into space early this morning with the successful launch of Space Shuttle Endeavour from Kennedy Space Center in Florida. The launch of the Declaration on board Endeavour is part of a year long calendar of celebrations to mark 60 years since the document was first adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, France. Protected in space-proof packaging, the Declaration is scheduled to reach the International Space Station when Endeavour docks with the orbital outpost on 16 November. It will be stored on a permanent basis inside the [European Space Agency's] Columbus space laboratory." Read more.

From the Human Rights Community

African NGO Forum Passes Resolution on the Right to Access Needed Medicine
Sean Flynn
November 10, 2008

"A resolution calling on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to recognize human rights to access needed medicines was passed at a meeting of African Human Rights organizations in Abuja, Nigeria, on November 10. The resolution adopted by the Forum calls on the African Commission to recognize 'access to needed medicines as a fundamental component of the right to health and clarify . the state obligations in this regard.' It specifically calls on the Commission to recognize duties to respect, protect and fulfill rights to access to medicines, including by taking 'full advantage of all flexibilities in the WTO Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property that promote access to affordable medicines.' Read the resolution.

Turning Slums Around:
The case for water and sanitation

"Rapid urbanization in the developing world is causing a slum..."
crisis that threatens to spiral out of control unless governments take action to address water and sanitation. This stark warning was given in a paper released by WaterAid at the UN World Urban Forum which took place in Nanjing, China held from November 3-6, 2008. The paper, called *Turning slums around: The case for water and sanitation*, shows that chronic water and sanitation shortages in slums are being exacerbated by swelling populations and health, education and economic problems risk becoming unmanageable. "Read report."