

**AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition
Washington DC, July 23, 2009**

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I am deeply moved by this lovely ceremony and the honor shown me. To all the arrangements people involved in this event, I sincerely say, thank you. Also, I want to stipulate that many people should feel honored here, the Science and Human Rights Program of the AAAS and its Director, Mona Younis, the organizers and participants in this ceremony, and the ever increasing number of scientists and technically trained women and men who offer their expertise in the service of human rights. To the newly formed AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition, and the cooperating roster of scientists, I say congratulations and excelsior, the watchword for mountain trekkers, that is, onward and upwards!

Insomuch as my name appears on the marquis here, I'll take the opportunity briefly to identify three themes influencing my career and coinciding with the concerns of the Coalition: first, the efficacy of human rights activism broadly defined, second, the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to human rights problem-solving; and finally, the need for human rights education for all, including students of science, medicine, engineering and technology.

I took my first activist's step in 1960 in Tallahassee when I sat at a Woolworth's lunch counter with other white Florida State University students side by side with black Florida A & M students and we politely asked for coffee. We were told we were in violation of municipal racial segregation laws and escorted by police out of the building accused of trespass. My life has never been the same since. As a graduate student at the University of Virginia, I and other students later succeeded in desegregating the Charlottesville movie theaters. These experiences "fixed my professional compass," and for the succeeding 35 years I have done nothing but teach civil rights, civil liberties and international human rights in the context of political science.

In my view, the work of individuals and groups committed to human rights activism involves politics in the best classical sense of the word "political." Aristotle and Aquinas tell us politics involves people pursuing constructive efforts on behalf of the common good. I learned in Tallahassee and Charlottesville that politics in those terms and involving non-violent activism works. If our basic constitutional document says: "No State shall deny to any person the equal protection of the law," and if we see that command is unenforced and therefore mere wishful thinking, then get busy, organize, mobilize, hit the streets and turn wishful thinking into reality. If the right to health articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains wishful thinking, then get involved, mindful of the maxim of anthropologist Margaret Mead who famously said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Another lesson I learned at racially segregated lunch counters and cinema ticket offices is that the vindication of the rights for which activists struggle should importantly respect rule of law and welcome alliances with conscientious lawyers. But more, other professionals are at least as useful. Hence, my second theme: the need for multi-disciplinary approaches to human rights analysis and promotion. Recently historian John Dittmer published a wonderful book telling the story of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, originating in the early 1960's and traveling to the Deep South tending to the health needs of activists injured, for example, in demonstrations in Selma, Alabama and elsewhere. Dittmer's book, *The Good Doctors*, makes clear that in every human rights struggle, there are two narratives at work: that of the victims and that of elites who like the "Good Doctors," can respond to their privileged status by "giving back" to society, including by heeding the ethics of their respective professions which both demand freedom and acknowledge social responsibility.

Multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches are useful in all areas of human rights. Evidence of this view can be taken from the worldwide acclaim enjoyed by *Human Rights Quarterly*, in 2009 publishing volume 31. Under the editorship of Bert Lockwood, HRQ maintains an editorial policy open to all disciplines and their contributions and approaches to internationally defined human rights. Articles have appeared drawing from many fields including geography, anthropology, psychology, etc. Comparably, since the 1980's diverse professional groups have successfully surfaced bringing their skills to bear: Physicians for Human Rights report on the health consequences of human rights violations, the data analysis and human rights projects of the American Statistical Association, the academic freedom work of the American Physical Society, and beyond our country, to name only three, the Argentine Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights, the Philippine Medical Action Group, and Action Professional Association for the People, a local group with which I worked in Ethiopia to develop a human rights training manual, now in 18 different languages. I predict that many such groups will stand to benefit by the new impetus for capacity building that will emanate from the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition.

I've tried to share my enthusiasm for new professional groups linking to human rights, prompting Eric Stover once to joke: "My God Richard, you won't be satisfied til you hear about "hair dressers for human rights." Why not?

More seriously, my concern with multi disciplinary involvement in human rights was challenged in 1996 when the Council on Science and Technology at Princeton University invited me to initiate an experimental course on "Science and Human Rights" In the memorable words of one of the Council members, "Professor Claude, your job is to humanize the nerds." Without precedent, chart or compass, I had doubts about the interest that might be shown by engineering, pre-med, computer science, and physics majors. But my fears were dispelled by the enthusiasm of these students for a participatory seminar exploring human rights within the framework of scientific freedom and responsibility. To bring the course to life we relied on case studies drawn from NGO reports, coupled with applicable international norms and ample discussion. Moreover, we brought in outside speakers, a forensic anthropologist, a statistician, a

computer science technician, a physician working with torture survivors. Each detailed the reasons for their work linked to human rights and the methodologies involved in their applications. The case studies we used are spelled out in the “Science and Human Rights Syllabus” carried on Amnesty International’s website of college human rights syllabi. In that regard, I’m pleased to learn that the topic of human rights education for students of science will occupy one of the new Coalition’s committees. I’d particularly like to draw their attention to a poignant recollection.

Soon after World War II when the dreadful truth about the Nazi death camps was exposed, one of the survivors, Haim Ginott, wrote a widely published letter to educators and did so in memorable terms. He said: “Dear Teacher, I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students to become human.”

Finally, I’d like to note a kind of marker of how far we’ve come since 1950 when Haim Ginott wrote his letter to teachers. Advances in science and technology: certainly so. Advances in human rights: far too few. The differential pace between achievements in implementing human rights and advancements in science and technology demands our attention. Certainly, we still face human rights violations of every variety, including genocides, torture as public policy, and extra-judicial killings, but we now live in a technologically wired global village brought to us through innovative applications of science and technology. All the more reason to listen to the relevant words of Nobel Laureate, Andre Sakharov. The Soviet physicist made a public statement about 20 years ago that addresses our many scientific advances but our lagging regard for human rights. Sakharov’s words could readily serve as a guide for the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition today. He said: “It is now both morally and technologically true that we can no longer ignore the way people are treated in their human rights from one country to another.”

In conclusion, I congratulate the Coalition for taking real moral and technological steps, as Sakharov said, “no longer to ignore the way people are treated in their human rights from one country to another.”

Yours is a serious initiative involving science in the service of human rights. You have my best wishes in this endeavor and my sincere congratulations for the inauguration of your project. Thank you.