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Human rights groups 'bombarde'd' with cyberattacks

The Hill (12.11.2014) <http://thehill.com/policy/cybersecurity/223820-study-human-rights-groups-bombarde'd-with-cyber-attacks> - Human rights groups across the globe "are being bombarde'd" with cyberattacks from the same state-sponsored hackers that aggressively go after government agencies and critical infrastructure.

The targeted groups range from Chinese social justice workers to Tibetan monks to Syrian activists, according to a new report from Internet rights and security researcher the Citizen Lab.

With meager budgets and minimal defenses, these organizations make for easy targets.

The study "sheds light on an often overlooked digital risk environment," said the researchers, based at the University of Toronto. Such attacks, they said, threaten to "extend the reach of the state ... beyond borders and into safe havens."

As one Tibetan group put it, connectivity is "this funny thing where it's a lifeline, and then ... maybe your ticket to jail."

Governments and industry are heavily engaged in discussions about protecting themselves and critical infrastructure.

The U.S. government has been working with major industry groups to implement a voluntary cybersecurity framework. Congress is considering cybersecurity information sharing legislation that would enable critical infrastructure companies to exchange cyber threat information with intelligence agencies.

But smaller organizations, particularly nonprofit groups, are often left out of the conversation.

Over four years, researchers tracked the cyber threats at 10 of these small, nonprofit groups.

They discovered constant, structured Chinese espionage efforts normally thought to target other governments or major industry targets.

"The years of documentation around these operations show that there are well-resourced and persistent threat actors originating from China," the study concluded, cautioning that many of the civil society groups they worked with had missions devoted to human rights in China.

The researchers also noticed "troubling evidence" that governments, including the United States, were using "lawful intercept" surveillance tools sold by legitimate companies to monitor human rights groups, journalists and civil society organizations.

"The market for these tools is largely unregulated, which has helped the governmental customer base grow, and likely led to substantial profits for developers," the study said.

In addition to the United States, they spotted similar surveillance efforts in the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

"Attacks like these are best understood as a form of espionage," the study said. "Remediation of the problem will require major efforts among several stakeholders, from the foundations that fund civil society, to the private sector, to governments."

Islamic scholars speak out against ISIS

Islamic Scholars (27.09.2014) - <http://lettertobaghdadi.com/14/english-v14.pdf> - The following is the Executive Summary of an Open Letter addressed last month to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and proponents of the self-declared 'Islamic State.' The letter, issued in Arabic and in English, is a critique of ISIS' ideology and actions from the perspective of Islamic law and Qur'anic exegesis. It is signed by an international group of 126 scholars and teachers of Islam. The integral text and list of signatories can be found at <http://lettertobaghdadi.com/14/english-v14.pdf>

1- It is forbidden in Islam to issue *fatwas* without all the necessary learning requirements. Even then *fatwas* must follow Islamic legal theory as defined in the Classical texts. It is also forbidden to cite a portion of a verse from the Qur'an—or part of a verse—to derive a ruling without looking at everything that the Qur'an and *Hadith* teach related to that matter. In other words, there are strict subjective and objective prerequisites for *fatwas*, and one cannot 'cherry-pick' Qur'anic verses for legal arguments without considering the entire Qur'an and *Hadith*.

2- It is forbidden in Islam to issue legal rulings about anything without mastery of the Arabic language.

3- It is forbidden in Islam to oversimplify *Shari'ah* matters and ignore established Islamic sciences.

4- It is permissible in Islam [for scholars] to differ on any matter, except those fundamentals of religion that all Muslims must know.

5- It is forbidden in Islam to ignore the reality of contemporary times when deriving legal rulings.

6- It is forbidden in Islam to kill the innocent.

7- It is forbidden in Islam to kill emissaries, ambassadors, and diplomats; hence it is forbidden to kill journalists and aid workers.

- 8-** Jihad in Islam is defensive war. It is not permissible without the right cause, the right purpose and without the right rules of conduct.
 - 9-** It is forbidden in Islam to declare people non-Muslim unless he (or she) openly declares disbelief.
 - 10-** It is forbidden in Islam to harm or mistreat—in any way—Christians or any 'People of the Scripture'.
 - 11-** It is obligatory to consider Yazidis as People of the Scripture.
 - 12-** The re-introduction of slavery is forbidden in Islam. It was abolished by universal consensus.
 - 13-** It is forbidden in Islam to force people to convert.
 - 14-** It is forbidden in Islam to deny women their rights.
 - 15-** It is forbidden in Islam to deny children their rights.
 - 16-** It is forbidden in Islam to enact legal punishments (*hudud*) without following the correct procedures that ensure justice and mercy.
 - 17-** It is forbidden in Islam to torture people.
 - 18-** It is forbidden in Islam to disfigure the dead.
 - 19-** It is forbidden in Islam to attribute evil acts to God □.
 - 20-** It is forbidden in Islam to destroy the graves and shrines of Prophets and Companions.
 - 21-** Armed insurrection is forbidden in Islam for any reason other than clear disbelief by the ruler and not allowing people to pray.
 - 22-** It is forbidden in Islam to declare a caliphate without consensus from all Muslims.
 - 23-** Loyalty to one's nation is permissible in Islam.
 - 24-** After the death of the Prophet, Islam does not require anyone to emigrate anywhere.
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The false promise of an International Business and Human Rights Treaty

By Aaron Rhodes

The Huffington Post (10.07.2014) / http://www.huffingtonpost.com/aaron-rhodes/the-false-promise-of-an-international-business-and-human-rights-treaty_b_5575236.html - Child labor is a scourge that tragically robs children of their childhood, their health, and their future. It is a global problem, and one that requires international cooperation to pressure governments to institute economic reforms and impose and enforce sound labor standards. In many cases, national laws protecting children need to be strengthened. Transnational or other corporations that exploit children need to be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, and also punished by consumers.

Unfortunately, some of the states with the world's worst child labor records are promoting promulgation of a new UN business and human rights treaty that, while unlikely to have any impact on victims, will obscure their own corruption and irresponsibility in a fog of anti-free enterprise rhetoric. Given the tendency of abusive states to foster meaningless global human rights legislation and institutions, it can be assumed their support is part of a strategy of obfuscation.

On 26 June, the United National Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to "establish an open-ended intergovernmental working group with the mandate to elaborate an international legally binding instrument on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with respect to human rights." The aim of the treaty would be to "clarify the obligations of transnational corporations and other business enterprises with

respect to human rights," and to provide remedies in such cases where domestic jurisdiction cannot do so.

The measure was co-sponsored by Ecuador, a country where "children, in particular indigenous children and Afro-descendants, are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including hazardous forms of agriculture and dangerous street work," according to the US Department of Labor. Child labor is prohibited by the Ecuadorian constitution; if that is not strong enough to protect vulnerable children, will a UN treaty with Geneva-based monitors be more effective?

Supporters of a new treaty include India and Pakistan, both of which scored "zero" on the Child Labor Index, thus having records that are among the world's worst regarding "the prevalence, gravity and impunity of child labor under the age of 15... which directly or indirectly limits or damages a child's mental, physical, social or psychological development." Supporters Congo and Ethiopia are among the world's 12 worst abusers, while China is ranked 13th. Children in Indonesia and Vietnam are at "extreme risk," while "high risk" Russia and Venezuela were also on board.

Of the 20 members of the Human Rights Council supporting new global "human rights" regulation of transnational businesses, only four respect human rights principles enough to be ranked as free countries by Freedom House, an independent nongovernmental organization. On the other hand, all 14 of the states opposing the resolution are free, and only one, Romania, has a serious problem with child labor. Other problems that are the focus of treaty advocates, like pollution, toxic dumping, discrimination and harm to indigenous lands, have also been addressed more effectively in democratic states.

John G. Ruggie, who produced the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and was UN special representative on the issue, warned that "business and human rights is not so discrete an issue area as to lend itself to a single set of detailed treaty obligations." He said it was "hard to imagine [such a treaty] providing a basis for meaningful legal action." He recommended avoiding "largely symbolic gestures, of little practical use to real people in real places." "From the vantage point of victims," he said, "an all-encompassing business and human rights treaty... is a profound deception."

Nonetheless, more than 500 nongovernmental organizations, promoting a false contradiction between free enterprise and human rights, lobbied for passage of the resolution, claiming opposition meant being subservient to "corporate actors" and their "public relations strategies." The Friends of the Earth Europe accused the European Union of "standing up for corporate interests instead of human rights." The NGO propaganda evidently scared numerous states into abstaining from the Human Rights Council vote, allowing the measure to pass. Human Rights Watch, a leading US-based NGO, said the proposal was "too narrow," faulting it for not also dealing with national and other businesses "that should also be required to respect human rights."

As Ruggie said, an international treaty on business and human rights won't have much effect on the practices of transnational corporations. But it will give states that fail to protect their citizens an opportunity to hide their failures behind ideological slogans. And by diluting attention to fundamental rights, it will also further weaken the capacity of the international human rights system to hold governments to norms by which citizens can be empowered to solve complex problems like child labor through democratic processes.

Aaron Rhodes is a co-founder of the Freedom Rights Project and president of the Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe. He was Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights between 1993-2007.

Killing of environmental activists rises globally

900 environmental activists killed in decade, only 10 perpetrators convicted, report says

By Denis D. Gray

Taiwan News (14.04.2014) - As head of his village, Prajob Naowa-opas battled to save his community in central Thailand from the illegal dumping of toxic waste by filing petitions and leading villagers to block trucks carrying the stuff -- until a gunman in broad daylight fired four shots into him.

A year later, his three alleged killers, including a senior government official, are on trial for murder. The dumping has been halted and villagers are erecting a statue to their slain hero.

But the prosecution of Prajob's murder is a rare exception. A survey released Tuesday -- the first comprehensive one of its kind - says that only 10 killers of 908 environmental activists slain around the world over the past decade have been convicted.

The report by the London-based Global Witness, a group that seeks to shed light on the links between environmental exploitation and human rights abuses, says murders of those protecting land rights and the environment have soared dramatically. It noted that its toll of victims in 35 countries is probably far higher since field investigations in a number of African and Asian nations are difficult or impossible.

"Many of those facing threats are ordinary people opposing land grabs, mining operations and the industrial timber trade, often forced from their homes and severely threatened by environmental devastation," the report said. Others have been killed over hydro-electric dams, pollution and wildlife conservation.

The rising deaths, along with non-lethal violence, are attributed to intensifying competition for shrinking resources in a global economy and abetted by authorities and security forces in some countries connected to powerful individuals, companies and others behind the killings.

Three times as many people died in 2012 than the 10 years previously, with the death rate rising in the past four years to an average of two activists a week, according to the non-governmental group. Deaths in 2013 are likely to be higher than the 95 documented to date.

The victims have ranged from 70-year-old farmer Jesus Sebastian Ortiz, one of several people in the Mexican town of Cheran killed in 2012 while opposing illegal logging, to the machine-gunning by Philippine armed forces of indigenous anti-mining activist Juvy Capion and her two sons the same year.

Brig. Gen. Domingo Tutaan Jr., who heads the Philippine military's human rights office, told the Associated Press that a military investigation showed the three died in crossfire as troops clashed with suspected outlaws. "We don't tolerate or condone human rights violations and we hope Global Witness can work with us to pinpoint any soldier or officer involved in those killings," Tutaan said.

Brazil, the report says, is the world's most dangerous place for activists with 448 deaths between 2002 and 2013, followed by 109 in Honduras and Peru with 58. In Asia, the Philippines is the deadliest with 67, followed by Thailand at 16.

"We believe this is the most comprehensive global database on killings of environment and land defenders in existence," said Oliver Courtney, senior campaigner at Global Witness. "It paints a deeply alarming picture, but it's very likely this is just the tip of the iceberg, because information is very hard to find and verify. Far too little attention is being paid to this problem at the global level."

Reports of killings, some of them extensive, from countries like Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, and Myanmar, where civil society groups are weak and the regimes authoritarian, are not included in the Global Witness count.

By contrast, non-governmental organizations in Brazil carefully monitor incidents, many of them occurring in the Amazon as powerful businessmen and companies move deeper into indigenous homelands to turn forests into soya, sugar cane and agro-fuel plantations or cattle ranches. Clashes between agribusiness and the Guarani and Kuranji people in the Amazon's Mato Grosso do Sul province accounted for half of Brazil's killings during 2012, the report said. Human rights groups and news reports say killings are often carried out by gunmen hired by agricultural companies.

In Thailand, Sunai Phasuk of the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch echoed the report's assertion that an "endemic culture of impunity" was prevalent, and that governments and their aid donors must address this.

Prosecution of Prajob's suspected killers, Sunai said, was a "welcome rarity" in a country where investigations have been characterized by "half-hearted, inconsistent, and inefficient police work, and an unwillingness to tackle questions of collusion between political influences and interests and these killings of activists."

"The convicted tend to have lowest levels of responsibility, such as the getaway car driver. The level of impunity is glaring," he said.

After Prajob's murder, villagers lived in fear but in the end decided to sue the illegal dumpers and landfill owners, said the victim's brother, Jon Noawa-opas.

"Prajob's death has led us to fight for justice in this town," he said. "We can be disheartened and we were, but we also know that we have to do the right thing for our community."

—

AP reporters Thanyarat Dokson in Bangkok and Jim Gomez in Manila contributed to this report.

International Women's day: Why March 8?

UNESCO (08.03.2014) - Established by the United Nations in 1977, "International Women's Day" owes its origins to the protests of women, particularly in Europe, who demanded, at the beginning of the 20th century, the right to vote, improved working

conditions and gender equality. 19 March, the last Sunday of February, 15 April and 23 February are among the key dates for International Women's Day.

1910: in Copenhagen (Denmark), hundreds of participants gather at the Second International Conference of Socialist Women (the first having been held in 1907) and decide to organize an annual day for women to bolster their efforts to achieve voting rights.

- 1911: a day for women is celebrated in a number of European countries and in the United States. But this celebration occurs on 19 March, in commemoration of the revolution of 1848 and of the "Commune de Paris".
- 1913: Russian women celebrate their first International Women's Day on the last Sunday of February, by organizing clandestine gatherings.
- 1915: As the First World War rages, a huge gathering of women is held in The Hague (Netherlands) on 15 April. Participants include over 1 300 women from over 12 countries.
- 1917: Women labourers take to the streets and declare a general strike announcing the Russian Revolution. The date was 23 February.
- After World War II, 8 March begins to be celebrated in a number of countries, before being recognized by the UN as International Women's Day in 1977.
- 19 March, the last Sunday of February, 15 April, 23 February are among the key dates for International Women's Day. But where, then, did the 8th of March come from? Ask Julius Cesar and Gregory XIII! Before the Revolution, Russia had not yet adopted the Gregorian calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 to mitigate the errors of the Julian calendar, which owes its name to the Roman emperor who had chosen it 46 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. The Gregorian calendar is used today in the large majority of countries. In 1917, 23 February in Russia thus corresponded to 8 March in the other European countries. It's as simple as that!

History of International Women's day

UN Women Watch

Introduction

International Women's Day is celebrated in many countries around the world. It is a day when women are recognized for their achievements without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. It is an occasion for looking back on past struggles and accomplishments, and more importantly, for looking ahead to the untapped potential and opportunities that await future generations of women.

In 1975, during International Women's Year, the United Nations began celebrating International Women's Day on 8 March. Two years later, in December 1977, the General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming a United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace to be observed on any day of the year by Member States, in accordance with their historical and national traditions. In adopting its resolution, the General Assembly recognized the role of women in peace efforts and development and urged an end to discrimination and an increase of support for women's full and equal participation.

History

International Women's Day first emerged from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe.

1909: The first National Woman's Day was observed in the United States on 28 February. The Socialist Party of America designated this day in honour of the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York, where women protested against working conditions.

1910: The Socialist International, meeting in Copenhagen, established a Women's Day, international in character, to honour the movement for women's rights and to build support for achieving universal suffrage for women. The proposal was greeted with unanimous approval by the conference of over 100 women from 17 countries, which included the first three women elected to the Finnish Parliament. No fixed date was selected for the observance.

1911: As a result of the Copenhagen initiative, International Women's Day was marked for the first time (19 March) in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, where more than one million women and men attended rallies. In addition to the right to vote and to hold public office, they demanded women's rights to work, to vocational training and to an end to discrimination on the job.

1913-1914: International Women's Day also became a mechanism for protesting World War I. As part of the peace movement, Russian women observed their first International Women's Day on the last Sunday in February. Elsewhere in Europe, on or around 8 March of the following year, women held rallies either to protest the war or to express solidarity with other activists.

1917: Against the backdrop of the war, women in Russia again chose to protest and strike for 'Bread and Peace' on the last Sunday in February (which fell on 8 March on the Gregorian calendar). Four days later, the Czar abdicated and the provisional Government granted women the right to vote.

Since those early years, International Women's Day has assumed a new global dimension for women in developed and developing countries alike. The growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened by four global United Nations women's conferences, has helped make the commemoration a rallying point to build support for women's rights and participation in the political and economic arenas. Increasingly, International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities.

The United Nations and gender equality

The Charter of the United Nations, signed in 1945, was the first international agreement to affirm the principle of equality between women and men. Since then, the UN has helped create a historic legacy of internationally-agreed strategies, standards, programmes and goals to advance the status of women worldwide.

Over the years, the UN and its technical agencies have promoted the participation of women as equal partners with men in achieving sustainable development, peace, security, and full respect for human rights. The empowerment of women continues to be a central feature of the UN's efforts to address social, economic and political challenges across the globe.

Confused by these feminists? So am I

The National (27.12.2013) - The last 12 months have made me feel both increasingly disillusioned and more excited by the growing discussions about feminism in global discourse.

The volume has been turned up about women's rights, their position in society and their and treatment. Every day there is coverage of issues that affect women disproportionately, whether it is the horrific refugee crisis in Syria, female foeticide in India, or pay differences in the workplace.

For those outside the west – especially for some Muslims – feminism was seen historically as a means to establish western hegemony by undermining traditional values. That women in these societies suffer and are not given the rights that Islam has given them was conveniently overlooked. Yet a huge number of social movements, many Islamically inspired, work hard to improve the lot of Muslim women. Some call themselves Muslim feminists, some Islamic feminists. Some call it justice. I see it as the necessary rise of many feminisms. And this year we have seen the increasing possibility that feminisms can and must exist in many forms.

Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl who was shot by the Taliban, challenged the notion of what a Muslim feminist should look like – simply by the fact of her existence, and her assertion that her values as a Muslim are what inspire and drive her. But her criticism of America's use of drones in her country signalled a shift that feminist movements would do well to heed: that feminism shouldn't be the handmaiden of the imperialist enterprise.

Nor should feminism be a pied piper for the kind of capitalist exploitation men already suffer. Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In* was about women stepping up in the corporate space. It was lauded as part of feminism's resurgence. But it made me depressed: it's bad enough that men are sucked up and chewed out by a system that sees them as nothing more than economic units, now feminism is encouraging women to do the same. There's nothing wrong with making money, but not at the expense of being human beings, and avoiding the exploitation of others.

It is these kind of feminist movements that uphold the social structures that continue gender and social oppression and inhibit radical social transformation.

One story that never seemed to end in 2013 was Miley Cyrus and her hideous twerking, to the lyrics of a song seemingly about rape. Cyrus calls herself a "big" feminist for telling women not to be afraid of anything. Beyoncé has also begrudgingly admitted she's a feminist.

Wo-hoo! Feminists are now upholding the exact system that perpetuates sexualised womanhood on us. And hurrah for 2013 feminism that means we must be either making money or looking sexy, preferably both at the same time.

Fourth wave feminism gave us "choice" as its defining characteristic. Today's most feminist of activities is women's free choice in determining how to live our lives. But then how do we deal with confusions like those of Sandberg, Cyrus and Beyoncé which perpetuate systems of oppression, but which the women themselves say are the actions of free choice?

If a free choice by a woman is unfeminist in its effect, is it still a feminist act? This question, and the assumptions it carries with it, is one that feminists in 2014 will need seriously to address.

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Human rights 20 Years after Vienna

By Aaron Rhodes and Jacob Mchangama

Huff Post (08.08.2013) - The World Conference on Human Rights took place just over 20 years ago, on 14-23 June 1993. The resulting "Vienna Declaration and Program of Action" has given form and content to the subsequent development of international human rights. In February, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay [hailed](#) the Declaration as "the most significant overarching human rights document produced in the last quarter century. It crystalized the underlying principles that human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated."

Ms. Pillay made reference to the context of the Conference, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. She said that by equating social and economic rights with civil and political rights, "The Conference succeeded in breaching a second wall that had divided States over the previous decades."

With these references, she alluded to the highly political nature of the Vienna Declaration, which was crafted to reflect a no longer bi-polar world. The Conference occurred during one of the most fluid and chaotic moments in recent history. The world community was being whipsawed between good and bad news, and confronted with problems for which there was no playbook. On the heels of momentous changes that engendered both euphoria and disorientation, bloody ethnic nationalist conflicts broke out that astonished the international community with their violence and called forth an image of a world unraveling into chaos after having been held together by the East-West military stalemate. At the same time, Western nations felt flush, anticipating a "peace dividend" from the end of military confrontation with the Soviet Union. The world was seeking a "New World Order," a term coined by George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev.

The notion of a New World Order whetted expectations of the role the UN could play in forging peace and respect for human rights, as well as dealing with starvation, poverty, racial and ethnic discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia, brutality against woman and minorities, and political oppression. It would do so under the banner of indivisibility and the associated doctrine of the equality of all human rights. International human rights were re-tooled as an ambitious, inclusive compromise to reconcile old antagonisms and solve new problems. A centralized UN mechanism would take responsibility for "coordinating" and promoting actions on behalf of an expanded human rights agenda and monitoring compliance with international standards and law.

Twenty years on, it is appropriate to examine the results of decisions taken in this over-heated context. Ending a vivid debate on these issues, world leaders and human rights activists put aside long-standing and reasoned reservations about the doctrine of the indivisibility and equality of human rights, which holds that fundamental freedoms cannot be enjoyed without governments guaranteeing social and economic rights, and that the two sets of rights should be adjudicated in a like manner. Indivisibility had been promoted by communist regimes in order to justify restricting political freedoms, and by

poor Third World states that sought debt relief and transfers from the developed world with the claim that such assistance was necessary if their citizens were to enjoy freedom.

At a "High Level Expert Conference" in Vienna on 27-28 June to commemorate the World Conference, speaker after speaker, UN officials and human rights leaders from civil society, paid homage to the "paradigmatic shift" that it had brought about, mainly by establishing the indivisibility of human rights as an undisputed principle. They spoke of an expansive, "post-2015" human rights agenda, including a "fully integrated human rights approach" to development, climate change, and the regulation of transnational corporations.

Indivisibility, however, does not hold up to logical or empirical scrutiny as a legal doctrine. The rapidly rising living standards of the growing Chinese middle class are hardly based on any meaningful "rights based" approach. And China's development certainly does not demonstrate any "indivisibility" as the new prosperity enjoyed by hundreds of millions of Chinese is not matched by even the most basic liberties.

Many of the issues addressed under the umbrella of indivisibility such as poverty, climate change and disease are certainly of fundamental global importance and require international cooperation. But the matrix of human rights is ill equipped to deal with these issues in any meaningful sense. In fact, the increasing focus on indivisibility works to shield illiberal states that want economic development without challenges to their own authority, and rely on an inflated definition of human rights to deflect criticism of their repressive measures. This unfortunate syndrome is vividly on display when such states are examined under the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Typically, they pack their presentations with claims about how their social assistance programs demonstrate fidelity to human rights principles; their authoritarian allies in turn praise these policies. The discussion of egregious violations of fundamental liberties like executions without fair trials, torture, and the denial of civil and political rights, is relegated to an increasingly restricted place in the UPR dialogues.

Thanks to the doctrine of indivisibility, an impression is thus left that a state like Iran, which [stones women to death](#) for alleged marital infidelity and [executes gay people](#), has a laudable human rights record. Indivisibility has hollowed out the concept of human rights, leaving a moral void in which there is no basis for making a distinction between freedom from torture and rent subsidies.

The World Conference rightly focused on a number of groups whose members' human rights were vulnerable, including women, "national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities," indigenous people, migrant workers, children, and the disabled. But rather than insisting that the individual rights of members of these groups be protected under existing conventions, the Conference ushered in an era of "group rights." A form of "human rights tribalism" has followed, fracturing the concept of universality the World Conference had affirmed.

This weakening attachment to universality has in turn led to a proliferation of new treaties that duplicate existing protections and saddle states with excessive reporting requirements and in some cases contradictory obligations. International human rights law has become a maze accessible only to a technocratic elite. Lawyers groups, nongovernmental organizations and UN officials are now pushing for a new human rights treaty to protect the rights of the elderly, a treaty considered duplicative by many who think those rights can be protected by closer compliance with obligations imposed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. But the UN has identified an "Open-ended Working Group" to "identify gaps" and "consider the feasibility of further instruments," a bureaucratic juggernaut that will be politically dangerous to oppose.

The diplomats meeting in Vienna not only embraced an expansive concept of human rights vulnerable to political exploitation, but also [vowed to "mainstream" human rights](#). Thanks to decisions taken in Vienna, the body of human rights continues to spread into more and more spheres of international relations, with the only certain outcome being that in the long run, the importance of any human right will be very low indeed. In reflecting about the legacy of the World Conference, this process deserves urgent attention.

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40 days after Boston bombing: we must stop radical jihad

We must stop trying to make excuses for the Tsarnaev brothers or jihad. It is wrong. Let's support peaceful Muslims around world

The Guardian (25.05.2013) - In many Muslim societies, the 40th day after a death is a time to gather and grieve again with loved ones. So, in honor of this the 40th day after the atrocities in [Boston](#), I find myself thinking again about the [264 injured](#) people, some of whom are learning to live without their legs, and about the dead victims: 23-year-old Chinese graduate student Lingzi Lu, who had just passed her exams, friendly 29-year-old waitress Krystle Campbell, and eight year-old Martin Richard who famously carried a sign that said "No more hurting people. Peace."

Bearing such losses in mind, I would ask anyone who wants to support the rights of people of Muslim heritage in the [United States](#) in the wake of the Boston bombings, please do not so by explaining that jihadist terrorism is simply a response to US foreign policy, or a consequence of the alleged difficulties faced by Muslim youth in integrating into American culture, or the result of Russian bombing of Chechnya.

Many of us have criticisms of US foreign policy and that of other countries; integrating may indeed be challenging for those from immigrant backgrounds in many contexts; and Chechens did suffer through the intolerable flattening of their country by the Russian military between 1992 and 2009. (As far as I know the United States never bombed the province.) However, most Muslims, immigrants and Chechens have not become terrorists as a result. These things are no excuse for – or even explanation of – the choice to deliberately murder children and young people at a sporting event. Such a grave international crime has nothing to do with legitimate grievances and everything to do with extremist ideology and movements that indoctrinate and instrumentalize young people. We must defeat those movements which have killed so many civilians, especially in Muslim majority countries like Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq and Pakistan.

I have just wrapped up three years of interviewing hundreds of people of Muslim heritage working against fundamentalism and terrorism around the world, and I learned many lessons from them that are helpful today. For example, Cherifa Kheddar, president of Algeria's Association of Victims of Islamist Terrorism, or Djazairouna, who wrote right after 15 April to say how terrible the Boston bombings were. She told me that

"We cannot defeat terrorism by an anti-terrorist battle without doing the anti-fundamentalist battle."

In other words, it is not just the violence of radical jihadis, but the underlying ideology of Islamism that we must confront. That ideology discriminates between Muslims and non-Muslims (as evidenced by Tamerlan Tsarnaev's reported indignation that his Imam mentioned Martin Luther King, a non-Muslim, during a sermon), and between "good" and "bad" Muslims. It justifies egregious violence against women and civilians, or at least creates an environment conducive to them.

Of course, being an Islamist or a jihadist is not same thing as being a devout Muslim, and it is unhelpful when the US media simply describes radicalization as becoming "more religious". This process is rather the adoption of a dangerous political stance that deploys religion in the service of an extreme agenda. The best way then to take a pro-human rights stance in the face of recent events is to support those people of Muslim heritage who are risking their lives to denounce and defy these movements. Many have raised their voices around the world in places like Afghanistan, but have rarely been heard in the west.

Discrimination against Muslims in the wake of an atrocity like the Boston bombings is wrong and unhelpful, but so too is a politically correct response, which fosters justification and denial. A young Iranian-American scholar reported that at a recent conference at UC Berkeley on Islamophobia, she was bullied by older US academics for daring to raise the issue of Muslim fundamentalism, along with anti-racism, and, in the same week as the Boston bombings, was told that there was no such thing as what she called "the Muslim right". We must face the reality of extremism.

Many people in Muslim contexts have spoken out against terror even while facing it themselves. I think of Diep Saeeda, a peace activist I met who organized rallies against Taliban violence in Pakistan, or against the blasphemy laws despite the threat that suicide bombers would take down the protestors. Or the Women's Action Forum in Pakistan that regularly denounces terrorism in print. After a March 2013 attack on Shia residents of Karachi, they wrote:

"[o]nce again we share unspeakable horror at the carnage ... Once again we express our condemnation and outrage. Once again we wonder how many more times we will do this before there is resolve to deal with religious militancy."

I think of the Libyans who took to the streets of Benghazi in 2012 after the murder of US ambassador Chris Stevens. Or of Somali American activist Abdirizak Bihi who campaigned against Al Shabaab recruitment in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis, after his own teenage nephew's recruitment and death at the hands of the militants. We have to support these people and listen to their voices.

In light of the national origin of the alleged Boston bombers, I have been thinking a lot about a wonderful Chechen journalist I interviewed in Moscow in December 2010. A devout Muslim, Said Bitsoev, then-deputy editor of Novye Izvestia – an independent newspaper – was terribly concerned about what such movements were doing to his home province. "There [a]re a lot of radical people who are really bad for Chechnya. They want to put the country back in the dark ages."

Before the Chechen wars, most followed a spiritual Sufi [Islam](#), in contrast to the harsh dogma of the extremists. Said himself loathed the radicals, their new restrictions on women, and new forms of violence. He especially hated the thousands of foreign jihadis who came to Chechnya during the second war. "They brought a lot of fear. I was not able to sleep without a gun under my pillow." These foreign fighters left behind a new breed of Chechen "radical-thinking Islamists" in Bitsoev's view. "The worst thing," Said tells me, is that they were "hunting for those Muslims who were representatives of tolerant Islam, and killed these people". He gives the example of Umar Idrissov, 80, a mufti from

Urus-Martan, southwest of Grozny, who was assassinated in 2000 by the Wahhabi group "Wolves of Islam". In fact, across the Caucasus liberal Muslim clergy have been regularly targeted in recent years by extremists.

Said Bitsoev was all too aware that Chechens like those murdered clerics, or like him, are relatively inconspicuous internationally. "Radicals are interesting for the public because they are loud. We normal people are boring," he said. We must support the daily struggles of people like Said, who are too often invisible, against those who twist the religion of their birth into a totalitarian terror manifesto.

ASEAN Human Rights Declaration doesn't meet int'l norms

Voice of America (21.11.2012) - The United States is warning that the Association of SouthEast Asian Nations' recently adopted human rights declaration does not meet international standards and could be misused by repressive governments in the region. Southeast Asian leaders on Sunday adopted the non-binding declaration with the aim of guaranteeing protections for the approximately 600 million people living in the 10-country regional bloc. ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan called the agreement a "major, major development," saying countries in the region have now committed themselves "to the highest standards."

But the U.S. State Department said Tuesday it was "deeply concerned" the declaration could "weaken and erode" long-standing principles enshrined in the United Nations's Universal Declaration on Human Rights. State spokesman Victoria Nuland decries what she calls the declaration's use of "'cultural relativism' to suggest that rights in the UDHR do not apply everywhere."

At issue for many is Article Seven, which suggests that national or regional exceptions to the "realization of human rights" may be necessary on the basis of "political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds." Rights groups say the clause provides a loophole to authoritarian governments in the region, such as Vietnam or Cambodia, to get around the agreement.

Others are concerned that several basic rights and freedoms are missing from the declaration. A statement by a network of more than 50 human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, say freedom of association and freedom from forced disappearances are among the most glaring omissions.

The group's statement also laments that the process in drafting the declaration was "dictated by its member states with little meaningful consultation with the vast array of civil society and grassroots organizations" in the region. Civil society groups say, although an ASEAN committee was formed to create initial drafts, these were never released publicly, forcing many people to rely on leaked drafts or rumors.

That sentiment was echoed by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay in a statement on Monday. But Pillay and others still hold out hope that the ASEAN declaration could eventually conform to international norms. In her statement, Pillay pointed to the evolution of other regional human rights systems, saying she was "confident this will be the same for ASEAN."

Human rights council elections: Pander time

By Jacob Mchangama and Aaron Rhodes

Huffington Post (15.11.2012) - On Monday, 12 November 2012, [18 new members were elected](#) to the United Nations Human Rights Council, which the UN says is the forum "all victims of human rights abuses should be able to look to... as a springboard for action." But the election process was emblematic of the betrayal of core human rights principles in the face of challenges from authoritarian states, and the disintegration of the idea of human rights itself in the main institution charged with defending it.

The newly elected members include Pakistan, Venezuela and others with serious human rights deficits. A majority of the Council -- 24 of 47 members -- is now composed of states that are unfree or only partially free according to rankings by the nongovernmental organization [Freedom House](#). None of the members from Africa are free, while three of five Asian members are only partially free. A majority of the Council are states from the "Global South."

Members of the "Western" group in the Council -- the only ones facing a competitive election -- pandered for support from the General Assembly in the run-up to the election, which saw the United States, Germany and Ireland elected by secret ballot.

In a last-minute campaign to secure its place on the Council, U.S. diplomats cited American support for human rights defenders, and success in advocating for a special rapporteur on human rights in Iran. They defended drone killings as "regrettable but not illegal," and emphasized U.S. activism on the rights of gays and lesbians, cited by UN experts as a primary basis for U.S. re-election.

Other Western candidates, in bids for support, in effect promised to avoid the subject of fundamental human rights if elected. In an effort to assuage anxieties about possible criticism for human rights violations, Germany promised a "non-confrontational" approach, and to be a "bridge-builder." German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, in a special campaign swing, [assured](#) members of the General Assembly that "developed countries do not have a monopoly on safeguarding human rights," a transparent ploy to ingratiate Germany with poor countries by suggesting that rich ones have no right to criticize others. In the event, every regional group elected unfree members to the Council except the Western Group, and as candidates in that group, aside from the U.S., sought to win by promises to appease, the future of the Council as a human rights forum is now darker even than before.

The German government's pledge to avoid confrontation on core human rights problems like torture and censorship was not enough to satisfy the director of the German Institute of Human Rights, Beate Rudolf, who [found](#) it "very vague." She expected the German government to focus on the rights of senior citizens as well as on the "extra-territorial application of fundamental rights" as regards military missions and transnational corporations, and the right to adequate housing, water and sanitation, which she called "fundamental rights."

Rudolf expects the Human Rights Council to act as an "early warning system" for the UN General Assembly, which makes sense given the tragic denial of human rights and freedoms afflicting citizens in an increasing number of states. But if Germany sticks to soft, consensual issues, as she and her Foreign Minister propose, Germany won't contribute to raising any alarms about individual human rights despite the policy of

"concern" about "grave human rights violations" and victims posted on the Ministry website.

In fact, Germany's approach toward the Human Rights Council is consistent with those of other candidates. Sweden recently [congratulated](#) Sudan on its election to the UN Economic and Social Council, despite the fact that its president, Omar al-Bashir, has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity; neither the U.S. nor the EU spoke out about the matter, and Sudan was overwhelmingly [elected](#) to ECOSOC with the support of at least 10 EU members, according to the monitoring group UN Watch. In its own appeal for election to the Human Rights Council, Ireland's representatives spoke of its "style" in international fora -- another unsubtle integrity dump.

Germany and Ireland secured the votes to join the Council, and it is painfully clear that Western states are allowing themselves to be held hostage to dictatorships promoting a watered-down human rights doctrine. Non-free countries have been successful in focusing the work of the Council on issues such as foreign debt, cultural rights and climate change. While these issues are important, they have little to do with human rights and do nothing to hold governments accountable for such crimes as extrajudicial killings, torture or the denial of the right to free speech or association. When liberal democracies legitimize the human rights cred of these defunctive issues, the Human Rights Council will give victims even less of a voice than they have previously had.

To a limited extent, civil society groups can fill the gap, although those engaged in the UN human rights system also increasingly focus not on basic freedom rights but on "social justice" -- to the satisfaction of power-hungry governments (Amnesty International head Salil Shetty recently [claimed](#) that "The ultimate torture is poverty"). But dictatorships have taken virtual control of a committee in New York that awards consultative status to nongovernmental organizations, and are intent on keeping out critical groups.

The problem with the Human Rights Council is not simply one of power, corruption and political geography. It is a problem of shoddy discourse and weak legal reasoning as concerns human rights, which has led to the concept being infiltrated and swamped by dangerous equivocation fuelled by cynical dictatorships and a human rights movement that has lost its way by disowning the idea of freedom as central to human rights. If liberal democracies and civil society would speak clearly for human rights as freedom rather than pandering to freedom's enemies, they could begin to build an effective international human rights system.

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Muslim lobbyist represents U.S. at European Human Rights conference

In the non-Muslim world, "human rights" refers to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which affirms that all people – men and

women -- are guaranteed individual rights. By contrast, the Muslim world defines "human rights" according to the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, which holds that men and women are not equal and that it is the duty of men and women to follow the will of Allah, "in accordance with Sharia law."

Gatestone Institute (18.10.2012) - Freedom of speech in Europe and North America is increasingly under threat because of a growing confusion among Western leaders over how to define "human rights." The problem is being compounded by politically correct Western governments, which seek to enforce multicultural compliance with Islamic Sharia law as a way to appease Muslim lobby groups.

These and other political and societal "drifts" were catapulted to center stage by a well-organized and highly articulate group of free-speech activists who attended the [Human Dimension Implementation Meetings](#) [HDIM], a major international conference on human rights -- this year held in Warsaw, Poland from September 24 to October 5 -- and sponsored annually by the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) [OSCE].

In recent years, the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings and the OSCE have been the focus of an intense lobbying campaign by the [Organization of Islamic Cooperation](#), a bloc of 57 Muslim countries that are aggressively pressuring Western countries to make it an international crime to criticize Islam.

In August 1990, the Muslim member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation officially adopted the [Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam](#), an alternative document to the 1948 United Nations' document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Cairo Declaration states that people have "freedom and right to a dignified life in accordance with Islamic Sharia law.

The Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa [BPE], in a [written submission](#) to the Human Dimensions Implementation Meetings' Working Session on Fundamental Freedoms, pointed out that today the term "human rights" has two incompatible meanings. In the non-Muslim world, "human rights" refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms that all people -- men and women -- are guaranteed individual rights.

By contrast, in the Muslim world, "human rights" are defined according to the Cairo Declaration, which holds that men and women are not equal and that it is the duty of men and women to follow the will of Allah. Dignity is granted only to those who submit to Allah's will. The Cairo Declaration divides all human beings into two separate legal persons within its defined categories, namely men and women, believers and non-believers. Any rights or freedoms are binding commandments from Allah as delivered through Mohammed, the Muslim prophet.

The BPE asked the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to clarify which definition of human rights is being referred to during discussions at the Conference. The statement says: "When BPE discusses the plight of young girls and women with respect to forced marriages, violence, and/or FGM [female genital mutilation], BPE always refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whereas the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation refer exclusively to the Cairo Declaration, which has ramifications on the status of the girl or woman. OSCE participating states that are also member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation thus refer to a different set of human rights at the HDIM. It follows that within the Human Dimension of the OSCE there are two diametrically opposed sets of human rights."

The International Civil Liberties Alliance, in a [written statement](#) to the Human Dimensions Implementation Meetings' Working Session on Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief, said: "Since the Organization of Islamic Cooperation created the Declaration of

Human Rights in Islam, commonly known as the Cairo Declaration, we have witnessed a distortion of the concepts of human rights and religious freedom. This declaration has created a new and secondary standard in human rights based on Sharia Law, which is entirely incompatible with OSCE's human rights standards, inspired as they were by the declaration of 1948."

The International Civil Liberties Alliance statement continues: "Sharia law is a system of religious and political regulations destructive of all the principles promoted through the OSCE, i.e. democracy, human rights, freedom of religion and belief, etc. Sharia Law has been defined by the European Court of Human Rights on February 2003, as 'incompatible with democratic principles...'"

The International Civil Liberties Alliance concludes: "Therefore, OSCE's commitments and works done by its various departments are devoid of sense if all the partners, state-members, NGOs or other contributors are not using the same definition of Human Rights. A definition is required that clearly rejects any interpretation originating in the Cairo Declaration."

In a report entitled, "[The Battle Has Begun](#)," Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff, a Viennese advocate for free speech, summarized her impressions of the Human Dimension's 2012 conference: "This is one of the important observations we made: The tide has shifted. The freedom lovers are no longer on the defensive; the opposite is true. The OIC side was isolated; the Counterjihad received many supportive thumbs-up gestures. We made new allies."

She also wrote, however: "Lastly, I was more than surprised to see a member of MPAC [Muslim Public Affairs Council, a Los Angeles-based lobbying group] take the floor on behalf of the US delegation. Since when has MPAC represented the U.S. government? And with diplomatic status! This is wrong and an outrage. We ask our friends in the U.S. House of Representatives to weigh in."

She was referring to [Salam al-Marayati](#), a radical Muslim whom the Obama Administration named as its official representative to the OSCE's premier conference on human rights. Al-Marayati is the controversial founder of the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

According to the [Investigative Project on Terrorism](#), MPAC is closely allied with the Muslim Brotherhood and has been a staunch defender of Islamic terrorist groups. Among other initiatives, MPAC has asked the US government to remove Hamas and Hezbollah from the list of US-designated terrorist groups. Al-Marayati, a vociferous critic of Israel, has also blamed Israel for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. ([See here for the full 81-page analysis of MPAC.](#))

The [State Department defended its selection of al-Marayati](#), praising him as "valued and highly credible." It added: "He was invited to participate in this year's HDIM as a reflection of the wide diversity of backgrounds of the American people."

In [another conference submission](#), the Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa also drew attention to the plight of Muslim immigrants in Europe who want to leave Islam and convert to another faith. Islamic Sharia law calls for the death penalty for those who voluntarily "apostatize" from Islam.

The text states: "One case in point is a Bangladeshi man and his wife who is currently imprisoned in the United Kingdom after claiming asylum and being detained after officially renouncing Islam. Their asylum application was denied and they are now

awaiting deportation to Bangladesh, where they will be killed according to Islamic Law for apostatizing."

OSCE member states were also urged to join the [Brussels Process](#), an initiative launched by the International Civil Liberties Alliance in July 2012, in the European Parliament. The Brussels Process aims to "assist governments and civil society in protecting civil liberties and freedoms, and more specifically to defend the freedom of belief against attempts to implement Sharia regulations."

In a [separate statement](#), the International Civil Liberties Alliance also expressed "concern over the repetitive use of imprecise, confusing and ambiguous concepts and words in OSCE forums and working materials," namely the term "Islamophobia," even though this expression has no precise meaning nor internationally accepted definition. The OSCE was asked to provide a precise definition of the term.

The BPE called on the OSCE to "protect apostates, supporting their right to change their belief without the threat of death."

A more complete collection of posts about the OSCE meeting can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

The OSCE, the world's largest security-oriented inter-governmental organization, is based in Vienna. Its 56 member states are located in Europe, the former Soviet Union and North America, and cover most of the northern hemisphere. The OSCE, created during the Cold War era as an East-West forum, has, among its mandates, issues such as arms control and the promotion of human rights, freedom of the press and fair elections.

The Human Dimension Implementation Meetings, Europe's largest annual human rights and democracy conference, is a platform for OSCE member countries, civil society groups and international organizations. The Human Dimension Implementation Meetings is significant because of the high status the OSCE extends to civil society groups, which are on equal footing with participating nation states. In practice, this means they have the right to speak in the plenary, a status not granted by other international organizations.

Among the hundreds of conference participants this year's Human Dimension Meetings was a group of [seven freedom-of-speech activists](#) from Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany and the United States. They represented civil society groups [Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa](#), the [International Civil Liberties Alliance](#), the [Stresemann Foundation](#) and [ACT! for America](#). Their primary objective was to draw attention to (and confront) the growing Islamization of the West.

Many OSCE member countries, which lack First Amendment protections for freedom of speech like those in the United States, have already enacted hate-speech laws that effectively serve as proxies for the all-encompassing blasphemy legislation the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is seeking to impose on the West as a whole.

Consider Austria, where an appellate court recently upheld the politically correct conviction of [Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff](#), for "denigrating religious beliefs" after she gave a series of seminars about the dangers of radical Islam. The ruling showed that while Judaism and Christianity can be disparaged with impunity in postmodern multicultural Austria, speaking the truth about Islam is subject to swift and hefty legal penalties.

Sabaditsch-Wolff represented the civil liberties group Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa at this year's Human Dimensions Implementation Meeting. On the second day of the conference, the BPE provided conference participants with a history lesson about the

greatest achievement of the OSCE (previously known as the CSCE), which occurred at the height of the Cold War during the [Helsinki Process](#), when the Soviet Union was cajoled into accepting the term "human rights" for the first time.

The inclusion of the humanitarian dimension (respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief) in the East-West dialogue was a major victory for the West and paved the way for the demise of the Communist bloc.

The BPE reminded the OSCE that during the Cold War there was never any doubt to what the term "human rights" referred, namely the 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), signed and ratified by almost all member countries of the United Nations.

Saudi Arabia, however, refused to sign the Universal Declaration, arguing that it [violated Islamic Sharia law](#). In 1981, the Iranian representative to the United Nations said the Universal Declaration represented "a secular understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition," which could not be implemented by Muslims without violating Sharia law.

Morsi's relativization of human rights would end Arab Spring

Co-authored by Jacob Mchangama and Aaron Rhodes

Huffington Post (10.10.2012) - In his maiden speech before the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 26, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi struck out against the freedom of expression as a universal principle. Freedom of expression cannot include the criticism or ridicule of Islam; it must be "responsible." Morsi's position would make the freedom of speech subject to any number of subjective tests, and typifies the approach of authoritarian rulers who equate criticism of state religions with threats to the stability of the state. The speech was warmly received.

Many in liberal democracies fear their fundamental human right to freedom of expression may be threatened by calls from the largest bloc of states in the United Nations -- the Organization of Islamic Cooperation -- to criminalize criticism of religion, and particularly given weak responses to such calls by Western leaders, their fears are justified. While pressure on freedom of expression is increasing even in the West this freedom is still mostly secure in Western states. That is because such freedom exists and will allow citizens to take steps to protect infringements on their human rights.

But those who have the most to lose should the international community back further away from freedom of speech and religion are Muslims and religious minorities in Muslim-majority societies like Egypt, Pakistan and Iran. The weakening of international human rights guarantees protecting these freedoms would deprive them of clear standards and the small leverage on their governments such standards afford. Freedom of expression is the primary means by which, through peaceful dialogue in civil society, Muslims in such states can work together toward reducing the international threat of Islamist extremism. Freedom of expression is one of the antidotes to the devastating domestic consequences of increasing radicalism, including inhumane punishments by unfair courts, the relegation of women and girls to inferior and vulnerable positions in society, discrimination against dissenters and minorities, and wide-ranging forms of repression in many areas of public and private life.

International standards protecting the freedom of expression and religion are commonly ignored and willfully abused by many governments. In Iran, clerics proclaiming the compatibility of Islam and secular government have been imprisoned and ill-treated. In Pakistan, the Ahmadiyya Muslim minority is legally precluded from calling themselves Muslims and its members are liable to criminal sanctions if they express their faith in public. When this clear instance of religious discrimination was challenged before the Supreme Court of Pakistan, a majority of its justices held that the discrimination was lawful since the government would be unable to guarantee Ahmadiyyas' "life, liberty and property." If, the Court held, a "permission is given to a procession or assembly, on the streets or a public place, it is like permitting civil war." Rather than protect a religious minority from an often hostile and sometimes violent majority, the Supreme Court abused human rights provisions to provide extremist radicals with a terrorist's veto.

This sad state of affairs is not unique to Muslim majority states. A law under consideration by the Russian Duma would outlaw "insults to religions." Its sponsors have spoken of threats to the stability of the state represented by attacks on Russian Orthodox symbols. The proposed law transparently aims to protect the Church from competition for its market share of believers, which, if diminished, would have political consequences for the current regime.

In this respect, Russia is following the sultanate political model under which many millions of Muslims live. Their leaders, speaking for them, claim their subjects accept and support harsh and comprehensive religiously based restrictions and the strict diet of ideological propaganda and conspiracy theories they are incessantly fed by state-controlled media.

The Arab Spring has shown a different story. Defying efforts to muzzle their expressions, and dying on the streets by the hundreds, Muslims have shown the world, and themselves, that they have diverse religious and political orientations.

But it is an unfinished story, and one that may end in tragedy if the international community fails to uphold liberal principles, principles citizens of liberal democracies too often are afraid to defend when intertwined with conflicting religious or cultural sensibilities.

Those who seek to monopolize authority in their own societies are likely not deeply outraged by cheap videos now given international renown before the United Nations General Assembly. What they fear is freedom in their own back yards that would lead to public questions about their pretensions to domination. The effort to institutionalize restrictions on speech and specifically on criticism of Islam on the international level is at its heart an effort to shut down dialogue and political participation in Muslim states, and once again smother individual rights under myths of religious unity.

In Egypt, the new draft constitution aims to entrench what researcher Amr Abdulrahman calls "a particular version of Islam." As under Mubarak, the state would retain its "guardianship of conscience" by restrictions on freedom of belief. The freedom of Egyptians to speak, organize, and to establish an open political space appropriate to encompass their diverse views is hanging in the balance.

President Mohamed Morsi has stated clearly that he expects Western societies to change in order to accommodate to his particular version of Islam's inability to deal with speech protected by international treaties and national constitutions.

That would mean an end to international pressure to give Egyptians the freedom of expression and the hope of a secure society where their differences would result in dialogue rather than violence. Not only the people of Egypt, but also those of Libya,

Pakistan, Yemen, Tunisia and other Muslim states need, more than anything, confidence that their openly expressed views will not be met with censorship, state violence or terror.

Those freedoms would not necessarily threaten Morsi's government as long as he honored them. Perhaps while in New York, Morsi will visit neighborhoods where Muslims live peacefully side by side with Orthodox Jews, Catholics and atheists. Perhaps he might understand that in such a society, his government could enjoy support from all citizens whose freedom of expression and religion is protected.

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