

# HUMAN RIGHTS

## Chronological quotes

"The formidable aspect of [Secretary-General Dag] Hammarskjöld's character, with its conscious superiority, did not markedly favor his work at the United Nations. .... Hammarskjöld displayed an autocrat's imperviousness to defects of his own policies; an autocrat's incapacity for delegating authority; and an autocrat's indifference, also, to conditions of individual or collective injustice that did not directly touch his imagination. The United Nations, which might -- and, in pursuance of its own proclamations, ought to -- have led the postwar world in the defense of human rights, made no advance in that field during his tenure, when countless thousands of unavailing appeals gathered dust in U. N. archives."

Hazzard, Shirley, on Hammarskjöld's leadership in the **1950s**, in "Breaking Faith, Part I", The New Yorker, September 25, 1989, pp. 63-99, [ 81].

"As [Kurt] Waldheim began his decade [as Secretary-General] at the U.N., he had asserted to the General Assembly that the 'unwritten moral responsibility which every Secretary-General bears does not allow him to turn a blind eye when innocent civilian lives are placed in jeopardy on a large scale.' By 1974, however, Amnesty International had presented innumerable cases, in diverse lands, of official torture and unlawful imprisonment to U.N. humanitarian organs with little response."

Shirley Hazzard, "Breaking Faith: II", The New Yorker, **October 2, 1989**, pp. 74-96, [75].

"To continue with the charade [of official development assistance] seems to me to be absurd. Garnered and justified in the name of the destitute and the vulnerable, aid's main function in the past half-century has been to create and then entrench a powerful new class of rich and privileged people. In that notorious club of parasites and hangers-on made up of the United Nations, the World Bank and the bilateral agencies, it is aid -- and nothing else -- that has provided hundreds of thousands of 'jobs for the boys' and that has permitted record-breaking standards to be set in self-serving behavior, arrogance, paternalism, moral cowardice and mendacity. At the same time, in the developing countries, aid has perpetuated the rule of incompetent and venal men whose leadership would otherwise be utterly non-viable; it has allowed governments characterized by historic ignorance, avarice and irresponsibility to thrive; and, last but not least, it has condoned -- and in some cases facilitated -- the most consistent and grievous violations of human rights that have occurred anywhere in the world since the dark ages.

... the time has come for the lords of poverty to depart."

Graham Hancock, Lords of poverty: The freewheeling lifestyles, power, prestige, and corruption of the multi-billion dollar aid business, Macmillan,

"The most fundamental debate concerns the role of the United Nations in the protection of human rights and the development of international law. This is where the proclaimed purposes of the UN touch the lives of individuals most closely; and in no area is its performance more inadequate. This debate directly addresses the basic premise on which the UN was founded – that there are inalienable individual rights that have universal validity and which governments are bound to respect. ...

... the [UN] Charter itself is ambiguous. There is a contradiction between the principle, which is the foundation of international human rights law, that the 'international community' has a legitimate interest in the way in which governments treat their subjects, and Article 2.7 of the UN Charter, which prohibits interference in the internal affairs of states. The UN's human rights machinery ... lacks credible enforcement procedures ... The gap between what governments say and what they do, and the impunity with which regimes have curtailed or suppressed ... basic rights ... have done more than anything else to bring the UN into public disrepute. ... Private citizens [human rights] groups ... have captured the public imagination as the UN never has."

Rosemary Righter, Utopia lost: The United Nations and world order, Twentieth Century Fund, New York, 1995, p. 18.

"[New UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary] Robinson told delegates in the General Assembly's Third Committee .... her duty was to ensure UN leadership on human rights .... She intended to 'be a strong moral voice for the defense of victims of oppression' .... And 'in so doing, also respond to my obligation of anticipating potential serious violations of human rights or reacting to such violations.' ....

.... In reaching for those goals [she] will have to .... improve the quality of UN documentation on human rights. With a few outstanding exceptions -- most recently the Graca Machel report on children as victims of war -- UN documents on human rights have traditionally been of low quality. Submissions from Special Rapporteurs, in particular, are often poorly written, badly organized and erratically referenced; few of them would survive [proper] editorial scrutiny. The [Rapporteurs] also seem to suffer from a lawyerly reticence about putting the depravities they condemn into any meaningful economic and social context. .... Although the stories they tell warrant a Shakespearean howling in the desert air, they are set down like bus schedules. ...."

"Much room for improvement in quality of reports on human rights", International Documents Review (NY), November 17, 1997, p. 3.

"There is something of the apostle in Mary Robinson, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights. .... She has brought that faith to her present task -- convening the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance .... scheduled for the end of August in Durban, South Africa..

She hopes for 'a breakthrough' in Durban that ushers in a new era in human relations .... a 'catharsis' ....

Many of her U.N. colleagues share neither her enthusiasm nor her faith. Instead, .... they see [the conference] as an invitation to litigation and demands for compensation, and a venue of potential embarrassment. So the preliminary sessions ..... have bogged down in disagreements. ....

No single conference could satisfy all the various demands -- certainly not a U.N. conference. ....

.... most ethnic leaders who saw the conference as an avenue of redress are likely to be disappointed. And as for ushering in a new way of thinking, the cold reality is that midlevel diplomats are not those to whom we generally look for innovation."

Ellis Close, "Shining a light on our 'dark corners': The UN world conference on race is in disarray ....", Newsweek, **July 16, 2001**.

"[At the United Nations Commission on Human Rights session that ended this week,] ... Rory Mongoven of Human Rights Watch ... said that the Commission ... had become 'hostage to a group of human rights abusers who defended themselves and others from scrutiny,' referring to voting alliances that blocked efforts to condemn countries like Zimbabwe.

The high commissioner for human rights, Mary Robinson, said ... that it was a 'very worrying' session, and ... that 'bloc' voting was weakening the commission's role.

The commission's rotating roster of 53 member nations, which includes Algeria, China, Cuba, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Syria -- all countries with questionable rights records -- should reconsider their approach, she said. Increasingly, voting alliances are emerging to prevent the commission from singling out individual countries for criticism.

... a recurring question at this year's session [was] whether combating terrorism can excuse curbs on human rights.

... a resolution, proposed by Mexico, that antiterrorist measures conform with international humanitarian law [was not accepted.]

... [a coalition of human rights advocacy groups] criticized the move, [stating that ... 'The commission's silence on this critical issue sends a dangerous signal in the fight against terrorism -- anything goes.'"

Elizabeth Olson, "U.N. fears 'bloc' voters are abetting rights abuses," New York Times, **April 28, 2002**.

" ... This story is not about a metaphor. Not people living like slaves, working hard for lousy pay. Not people 200 years ago. It's about 27 million people worldwide who are bought and sold, held captive, brutalized, exploited for profit. ...

Roughly two-thirds of the world's captive laborers -- 15 to 20 million -- are debt slaves in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. ...

'Is it a crime to sell women? They sell footballers, don't they?' Milorad Milakovic, after his brothels in Prijedor were raided, complained that the now liberated women had cost a lot of money to buy ... and he wanted compensation. ...

'The slaves in Lake Placid were invisible ... People were playing golf at the retirement community, and right behind them was a slave camp.'

Countries where slavery is legal: 0.

Countries where more than a hundred human beings are known to have been trafficked last year [a list follows, with a total of some 115 countries, many highly-developed.]

Estimated contributions by slaves to the global economy: \$13 billion ...

One U.S. shelter has rescued 10,000 child prostitutes. ..."

Andrew Cockburn, "21st century slaves," National Geographic (USA), **September 2003**, pp. 2-24.

"The deadly bombings of commuter trains in Madrid is igniting debate at the top United Nations human rights group over how far governments can go in the name of combating terrorism.

The 53-nation UN Human Rights Commission ... is facing heavy opposition from Spain, the United States and their allies over moves by Mexico to appoint a UN expert to look into whether antiterrorism measures breach international human rights standards. ...

'Time and time again the commission has behaved in a highly-fractious, self-interested, expedient manner, turning a blind eye to human rights violations and allowing perpetrators to operate with impunity,' said Irene Khan, secretary-general of Amnesty International. ...

... there is some opposition to the entire principle of censuring abusive countries. Some commission members say the United Nations should offer advice, training and other assistance to countries with poor human rights records, rather than condemning them directly. ...

[The acting UN High Commissioner for Human Rights strongly rejected that approach, stating that] ... 'It is a matter of principle: a commission on human rights which is no longer ready to condemn gross violations of human rights will no longer be a commission on human rights.' "

"UN group to weigh security vs. rights," Associated Press, International Herald Tribune, **March 15, 2004**.

"The world cannot continue to tolerate the slaughter of innocent civilians in the state of Darfur, western Sudan, or the duplicitous acts of the Sudanese government that let the perpetrators turn their backs on justice and saunter away. Arab militias, called the Janjaweed, are [terrorizing] ... groups of African origin ...

... according to the UN ..., the Sudanese government has supported indiscriminate killings of civilians, gang rapes, looting of private property and humanitarian aid, burning of villages, abductions, forced migration and general intimidations. [A US official calls Darfur] 'one of the worst humanitarian crises in Africa.'

Despite growing pressure for intervention, Khartoum is mounting a campaign of intimidation against the UN Human Rights Commission. More troubling, Khartoum also is engaged in efforts to conceal evidence that might implicate its officials and allies in the militias for gross human rights violations. ...

Anything less [than firm action] puts a lie to the repeated call for 'never again' to tolerate the targeted persecution of an entire people. ...

America and the international community need to act quickly to bring to justice the perpetrators of these heinous acts and to end the climate of impunity for future human rights violators."

Tom Lantos, "Ethnic cleansing in Darfur: Time to get tough with Sudan," International Herald Tribune, **May 6, 2004**.

"The UN Commission on Human Rights] ... has become an annual six-week exercise in desperate attempts to shield malefactors from criticism. ...

... [Some abusive governments] ... act in a bloc to prevent scrutiny of their own human rights records and those of their abusive peers. The justification: that old chestnut, defending state sovereignty. ...

Members of the high-level reform panel [in December 2004] ... propos[ed] that all 191 UN member countries should be invited to sit on the commission ... an unworkable proposal. ...

[Kofi Annan, the late High Commissioner, Sergio Vieira de Mello] and some human rights groups have [urged that] ... commission membership should be awarded only to countries that have shown a genuine commitment to human rights.

One worthy proposal ... is having the commission in session permanently ...

[This] would allow the international community to focus on more than a handful of countries -- and to take stronger measures to address abuse.

The commission has fallen into such an abysmal state because governments ostensibly concerned about human rights have let it happen. They must now take up the cause of reforming the commission properly, or it will sink into even greater disrepute."

Loubna Freih, "Overhaul the UN's human rights body", International Herald Tribune, **January 18, 2005**.

[Note: The author is the Geneva-based UN representative of Human Rights Watch.]

"The UN commission of inquiry that has compiled devastating documentation of crimes against humanity in the Darfur region of Sudan nevertheless brought shame on the United Nations by submitting a report last week that absolves the National Islamic Front in Sudan of the crime of genocide.

The commission did find that the murdered civilians of Darfur -- probably more than 200,000 already -- and the 2.4 million refugees facing death from disease and malnutrition have suffered from violations of international humanitarian law. The commission even identified the government in Khartoum and its Arab militia allies known as Janjaweed as the parties responsible.

... Moreover, the commission said these crimes were perpetrated 'on a widespread and systematic basis.' Yet in what seems a politically-motivated contortion of language and logic ... the commission decided that Khartoum's crimes satisfied only two of three elements needed for ... [a finding of a policy of genocide.]

... In denying the existence of the Darfur genocide in a way that suits the amoral interests of governments represented in the United Nations, [the UN commission of inquiry] has failed to end a much greater wrong -- the genocidal annihilation of Darfur's African tribal groups."

"UN denial on Darfur", International Herald Tribune, **February 8, 2005**.

"The United Nations Human Rights Commission, the UN's principal forum for promoting human rights, opens its annual six-week session today amid unprecedented criticism of its competence and credibility.

For years human rights groups have complained of growing politicisation and double standards that have stifled debate and allowed countries responsible for egregious abuses to escape condemnation. ...

... The authoritative high-level panel on UN reform ... last December said the reputation of the UN itself was threatened by the commission's 'legitimacy deficit' and 'eroding credibility and professionalism.'

Kenneth Roth, head of New York-based Human Rights Watch, reckons that about half the 53 members are there 'not to promote human rights but to undermine them.' ...

If there is general agreement that the commission is broken, there is less accord on how to fix it. ...

... [Mr. Roth] and others argue that countries with the worst human rights records should not be allowed to serve on the commission.

In addition, he says, countries seeking membership should promise to promote human rights, for instance by ratifying the main human rights treaties and issuing a standing invitation for visits by UN human rights envoys. Only 50 countries have done this so far."

Frances Williams, "Double standards on human rights 'undermining UN'", Financial Times (UK), **March 14, 2005**.

"Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations proposed sweeping reforms Sunday, recommending [*inter alia*] ... the restructuring of the discredited Human Rights Commission to keep rights violators from becoming members ...

Annan said that the ... Commission ... had been undermined by allowing participation by countries whose purpose was 'not to strengthen human rights but to protect themselves against criticism or to criticize others.' As a result, 'a credibility deficit has developed, which casts a shadow on the reputation of the United Nations system as a whole.'

He recommended replacing the 53-member Human Rights Commission with a smaller Human Rights Council, whose members would not be chosen by regional groups as is now the case but by a two-thirds vote of the 191-nation General Assembly. 'Those elected,' he said, 'should undertake to abide by the highest human rights standards.'

Warren Hoge, "UN chief seeks huge reforms of world body", International Herald Tribune, **March 21, 2005**.

"The six-week charade known as the UN Human Rights Commission's annual session has begun. So, too, has the wheeling and dealing by the world's worst human rights offenders to avoid any rebuke. Notorious violators like Cuba, China, Egypt, Eritrea, Nepal, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Zimbabwe sit on the commission this year. This virtual hall of fame of abusers hangs together to fend off any complaints. In the process, they have destroyed the UN commission's moral authority to render any judgment on human rights. Last year, the panel welcomed Sudan as a member even after Secretary General Kofi Annan had likened government-sponsored atrocities in Sudan's Darfur region to 'ethnic cleansing.' The UN Human Rights Commission must be cleansed of violators, and a strong human rights record should be required for membership."

"Bogus UN Human Rights Commission", the *Miami Herald*, in the International Herald Tribune, **March 23, 2005**.

"[At the UN Human Rights Commission's annual session in Geneva] it has been business as usual. This year, as in almost all years, ... [none of the 50 or 60] dictatorships besides Sudan will be in the dock. ... They seek [commission] membership precisely to deflect attention from themselves.

Many developing countries ... see the commission as a sort of postcolonial Western tool of domination, judging the "Southern" countries but not the Northern ones. The Europeans seem to lean to a middle position ... being more likely to play ball with the various [protective] geographic groups ...

The Europeans understand perfectly well the invasion of dictatorships ... but have faith in the necessity of such international organizations to do good, and they want to be patient ... The Americans are convinced that in the real world of self-protective and cynical dictatorships, the UN often tends toward a kind of tyranny of the majority, and the American goal is to fight back.

There will be a lot of resistance to ... [a revised council], not least from the dictatorships that would be excluded, but also from small democracies who fear that the commission would become a big-countries club. ..."

Richard Bernstein, "Are the foxes guarding human rights at UN?", International Herald Tribune, **March 23, 2005**.

"Recent proposals by Kofi Annan ... [would certainly help strengthen] the UN system for defending human rights, [officials and NGO's say.]

But they face an uphill fight to gain consensus among governments, including regular abusers of rights, more concerned to protect their own self-interest ...

The proposed new [human rights] council would be smaller ... and members would be elected by a two-thirds majority of the UN general assembly. ...

But it is left to UN member states to decide what, if any, membership conditions to impose. ... How can the criteria be framed in a way that is accepted as fair and objective? ...

Peter Splinter of Amnesty International speaks for many in arguing that countries might do better to focus on double standards rather than wrangle interminably over membership selection.

One way ... [would be to base council] discussions on reports by the UN human rights office, experts and investigators, rather than selective country-sponsored resolutions.

Still, here too, powerful countries will be reluctant to open a new avenue of international criticism they have previously escaped.

The next six months will test whether support for a stronger UN human rights role can be made to work in practice."

Frances Williams, "UN faces struggle over new human rights council,"

Financial Times (UK), **March 30, 2005.**

Note: This subsection, and the other five "UN performance problems" subsections that precede "Anecdotes and Observations", are very much still in the "start-up" stage, due to the priority need to establish all the parts of this archive. Material from the sources cited in the "useful sources" for each of them, and other material, will be added as soon as possible.

## **Useful Sources**

*(Note: informally assembled by IO Watch, roughly ranked from "most useful" on down, and subject to change as new sources are added)*

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