An Examination of Minority Groups and Human Rights Issues in Europe and Africa

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The question of human rights in the next millennium and 50 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights *is a serious issue in both national and international politics. This essay examines briefly the issues of minorities and human rights in Europe and Africa. It addresses some theories, and issues of individual and group rights, in attempts to explain and highlight some of the complexities of the subject matter as they apply to the implementation of human rights instruments. This disquisition also draws its analysis from the 1948 UN* Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *the* European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, *the* African [Banjul] Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, *inter alia. Finally, it concludes with general observations on minority human rights issues in Europe and Africa, and alludes to some steps taken for ameliorating human rights violations.*

INTRODUCTION

In 1998, concerns for human rights became a major topic of discussion at national and international conferences. Some of these meetings were held to observe the 50th anniversary of the signing of the famous 1948 UN *Universal Declaration of*

status-quo social order remains attractive and salient. Indeed, it is the perception of what Ted Robert Gurr termed "relative deprivation,"[1] especially in segmented or divided societies that has not only sharpened, but also made the cry for human rights reach its crescendo on the eve of the 21st century and after 50 years of the signing of the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Historically, this whole matter of human rights is a complicated and perplexing one. Take for example:

> Classical Greeks considered themselves inherently superior to barbarians (non-Greeks), who were not entitled to the same treatment as Greeks. The American notion of manifest destiny or the British colonial ideology of the white man's burden justified barbarous treatment of non-white peoples on the grounds of the superior virtue or moral development of Americans and Englishmen. Nazi Germany provides an even more extreme version of the denial of rights to "inferior races" on grounds of moral and political superiority... (Donnelly 1998, 22).

Such political and socio-cultural attitudes toward human beings is endemic in many societies—untouchables in India, pygmies or Twas in Rwanda, blacks in apartheid South Africa, religious minorities in Egypt and elsewhere.

Relativist scholars argue that moral values and indeed human rights issues should be based on the historicity and specificity of a given milieu. Therefore one's views, comprehension, and analysis of human rights should be visualized within this context. For example, they contend that Western democracies tend to stress civil and political rights and the right to private property, whereas the communists accentuate economic and so-

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[1] By relative deprivation is meant the perceived discrepancy between one's abilities and the rewards one may realistically expect. If those rewards are limited to a very few, it could create social and political problems.

cial rights. Developing nations, on the other hand, are more concerned with self-determination and economic development. These interpretations of human rights could be conflictual on the basis of these different schools of thought and empirical basis. That notwithstanding, the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights recognizes and acknowledges the relativity of human rights. Universalist scholars contend that human rights values are universal and are not subject to cultural manipulation and specificity. There are no historical differences and therefore rights apply everywhere—i.e., universally. These contending views have made the issue of human rights problematical because of the various interpretations concerning their validity and relevance in different societies.

At best, though, these suppositions are fundamentally descriptive. They explain what is theoretically sound, but not always practical because of conflicting interests. In short, when it comes to the nuts and bolts of international relations, the state's national interest supersedes ideologies and human rights proclamations. Witness, for instance, the US granting most favorite trading nation status to China despite the latter's dismal and problematic human rights record.

In sum, the foregoing analysis is intended to provide the superstructure for the conceptual, theoretical, and even conflictive analysis of the perplexing issue of human rights. Indeed, because of its interpretative antinomies (sometimes based on national security/interest), human rights cannot be fully explained especially because of the unique political, social, and cultural norms of the various societies which make up our contemporary global village. Be that as it may, it is within this framework that I raise, in brief, the human rights issues of selected minority groups in Europe and Africa.

HUMAN RIGHTS: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Whereas the thrust of this paper flows from the tenets of the UN Charter itself, the following analysis derives from two

significant documents, *inter alia*. These are the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities* (United Nations 1948 and 1993). Indeed, the preamble of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* explained succinctly that the realization of equality and inalienable rights of human beings within the global community is quintessential for the furthering of freedom, justice, and peace. It is within this context that attempts should be made to get rid of tyrannical regimes (for example, Milosevic, and the Kosovo imbroglio, in Yugoslavia) to advance justice and human rights. It is the respect of human dignity and freedom as practiced within the rule of law that is likely to create the enabling environment for peace required for human survival. To this end, Article 3 states that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person."

Drawing upon the UN charter, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and other similar documents, the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities* was "codified." It is obvious in many national polities that the mere declaration of human rights and the signing of such protocols do not *ipso facto* result in the adherence, for instance, to the spirit of the preamble. Put another way, even though China, France, Egypt, Mexico, the Russian Federation, Nigeria, *et cetera* were signatories to the document, the actual practice of these nations has not always been congruent with their manifestos or support for human rights. The lack of respect for human rights is more the case given the systemic inadequacy and anarchic character of the global system—a situation exacerbated by states' natural claims to sovereignty. However, significant to this disquisition is whether European nations should be troubled by the human rights infractions of minority groups in Africa and *vice versa* given the geo-social

distance between these peoples. Human rights activists argue that they should because of their professed belief in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. In a way, the entire discussion and analysis in the following pages rest on this thesis.

The question of minority groups human rights in both national and international politics has become a major issue of intellectual and political discourse within at least the past fifty years. In Africa, the independence of former colonies championed by the UN, within the context of its various resolutions on the granting of independence to colonial peoples, and on the rights to national self-determination, are instructive (United Nations 1996a).

In Europe, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the implosion of the Soviet Union sharpened the human rights problems of minority groups and brought the issue to the fore. These phenomena will be discussed later. The major concern here relates to the document on which the entire foundation of this essay rests: *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities*. In fact, on this issue the UN General Assembly stated

> Desiring to promote the realization of the principles contained in the Charter, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, ...the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Beliefs*...as well as other relevant international instruments that have been adopted at the universal or regional level and those concluded between individual states members' of the United Nations...encourage the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to na-

tional or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities [because they] contribute to the political and social stability of states in which they live (United Nations 1993).

Moreover, Article 1 of this document says that "states shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of their identity." Substantive sections in this nine articles proclamation placed emphasis on the role of the state and its policies in addressing the full participation of minority groups in the economy and national development. The question, though, is to what extent have countries lived up to the tenets of this declaration and, if not, why?

HUMAN RIGHTS IN EUROPE: THE ISSUE OF MINORITIES

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe raised the issue of minorities in that area to new heights. Before the collapse, Marxist or communist ideology de-emphasized ethnic or minorities' claims to uniqueness and identity. Indeed, Marxists stress the oneness of humankind. In any case, it was clear that the primordial characteristics of ethnic minority groups could not be wished away. The new democratic freedom meant that the previously silenced voices could now agitate for their rights and freedoms within the new political dispensation. Competing ethnic claims in the Republic of Georgia and the former Yugoslavia are two cases in point. In Western Europe, minority rights issues have also come to the fore in Germany, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Britain, to cite a few examples. In fact, the question of minority rights was sufficiently serious that the Council of Europe was compelled to tackle the issue within the context of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Gilbert 1996, 160). However, the debate on— and the concern for—the protection of minorities in Europe has

nd the concern for—the protection of minorities in Europe has continually dogged and engaged political actors and human rights practitioners in Europe.

In the discussions on minorities in Europe, there have been problems defining and classifying minorities. Even the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic Minorities* and the *Council of Europe Framework Convention* themselves have no clear definition. A scholar, therefore, must base his or her analysis on extrapolations and interpretations of the concept. Any wonder, then, that

> it has been correctly observed that international law supposes the existence of minorities both in general and of specific types. However, when the existence of human beings and states are "axiomatic" in international law, the existence of human groups is problematic. Conceptually, international law struggles with the definitions of actors beyond the "state;" indeed, the problem of defining actors has always troubled political theory in general and international relations in particular.... [While] the catalogue and content of individual human rights has become relatively clear, the specificity of protection for groups, particularly minorities, has remained largely uncertain. Paramount among this uncertainty has been the very definition of "the" or "a minority" to whom any rights may accrue (Gilbert 1996, 161-162; Haunnum, 1991, 143-145).

In view of the above, there have been contending definitions of minorities. The definition of Francesco Capotorti may be adequate. He affirmed that a minority is "[a] group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members—being nationals of the state—possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense

of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language" (Gilbert 1996, 164).

In the European context, the issue has been to whom human rights should be granted. In other words, should it be granted to individuals or a group? Indeed, one is perplexed by what should be the major level of analysis. Whereas the 1991 Proposed European Convention for the Protection of Minorities granted rights to the collectivity itself, the general or traditional view was that minority rights are generally granted to individual members of the minority group, contends Gilbert (1996, 121). The former attitude flowed from the political climate between 1919 and 1939, and the latter after WWII.

One of the arguments that has been propounded was whether non-citizens should be protected within the context of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Heinrich Klebs argues that "national" in the Framework Convention is limited to all minorities resident within the national territory of a state who are citizens thereof (1995, 101-108). Therefore, protection of rights should not be limited to traditional or historical minorities. In fact, Article 6.1 of the Framework Convention says "The parties shall encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and cooperation among all persons living on their territory or religious identity, in particular in the fields of education, culture and the media" (Framework).[2]

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) had in the Helsinki Agreement of 1975 and the Madrid Concluding Document of 1980 dealt with the issue of national minorities. In the Vienna Concluding Document of 1986, a

[2]Article 5.1 of the Framework lists the characteristics of a national minority as "their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage."

promise was made to create conditions for the free exercise of minority rights and the full equality of minorities with others.

The problematic dimension of the Framework Convention like those of international law is enforceability, in spite of the good work of the European Court of Justice, European Human Rights Commission, and the European Court of Human Rights. The question of enforceability is especially troublesome since the provisions granting rights and freedom are left to member-state domestic legislation and governmental practice. Put another way, the enforcement of rights are subject to states' interpretations and the extent to which they consider the right significant. In light of this factor, Gilbert concludes that the entire Convention mechanism which was intended to be more powerful than mere declaration is not producing the desired result for which the Framework was designed. The failure stems from the fact that its efficacy rested on the contracting states' obligations or lack thereof to enforce the rights. Is the situation any better in Africa? This will be the subject of the following analysis.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The African [Banjul] Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted on June 27, 1981 and entered into force on October 21, 1986, represents the superstructure of African convention on Human Rights (Organization of African Unity 1982a). The Charter is somewhat analogous to the Council of Europe Framework Convention. The African Charter covenant states that:

This convention of the Organization of African Unity, which stipulates that Freedom, equality, justice and dignity are essential objectives for the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the African people' ...and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Taking into consideration the virtues of

their historical tradition and the values of African civilization which should inspire and characterize their reflection on the concept of human and peoples' rights.... Convinced that it is henceforth essential to pay a particular attention to the right to development and that civil and political rights cannot be dissociated from economic, social and cultural rights [as] a guarantee for the enjoyment of civil and political rights; ...undertaking to dismantle all forms of discrimination, particularly those based on race, ethnic group, color, sex, language, religion or political opinion; ...firmly convinced of their duty to promote and protect human and peoples' rights and freedoms taking into account the importance traditionally attached to these rights and freedoms in Africa (Organization of African Unity 1982).

This synopsis of the preamble was immediately followed by a plea to member states to adhere to the spirit of the charter in Articles 1 and 2. In particular, Article 1 states that: "The Member states of the Organization of African Unity parties to the present Charter shall recognize the rights, duties and freedoms enshrined in this Charter and shall undertake to adopt legislative or other measures to give effect to them." This convention was not only meant for the protection of individual but also group rights, as stated in Article 12, Section 5 of the African Charter. But the efficacy of the clause in Section 5 depends on its interpretation, and how members are determined to uphold or adhere to the rights it contains.

As in the Council of Europe Framework Convention, human rights issues in the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* stress the individuality of rights more than groups (ethnic minority) or collective rights. Indeed, it is the lack of respect for individual's human rights, despite this Charter, that prompted ethnic minority groups to converge for the purpose of

asserting their rights. Collective action was considered a more effective way of bringing pressure to bear on the state regarding violations of rights. For example, it was the inability of the Nigerian state to respect the individual rights of some of its minority groups that prompted the formation of the *Ethnic Minority Rights of Africa* to do battle with the state. The concern of the group was economic and political marginalization which it pursued within the framework of the African Charter and Part 1, Article 1 of the *International Convention on Civil and Political Rights*. This Article states "all peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of the right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (United Nations 1976).

In a broader context human rights questions, in spite of the concern raised by some scholars and members of the informed public, are wrapped up in an enigma. In fact, it is a paradox which Shadrack B. 0. Gutto, in his in-depth analysis of *Human and Peoples' Rights in Africa*, attempted to elucidate (1991, 5-22). Human rights infringements in Africa are so rampant that they have reached a point at which there must be critical examination of its impact on ordinary Africans—the masses that these rights were intended to protect.

The intellectual conversation on this topic at the international level is challenging, especially from certain African political apologists, nurtured by the euro-centric view that human rights issues are, essentially, European. To that end, they contend that African countries should emulate the European experience by imbibing the European culture of human rights. This was so because the respect for human rights was imperative for the pollination and fertilization of democracy in Third World polities. Some political analysts argue that since human rights demands in Africa tend to assail the privileges of the ruling elites, its impact on colonial and specifically imperialist strategies is to undermine

their influence and power base in Africa. This view, contended Guffo, is not supported within the historical context of Africa (1991, 5-22). Nevertheless, though, there exist certain fundamental and immutable dimensions that impact on human rights questions in Africa. These are social class structures and relations; the inherited colonial culture; the depth of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in virtually all African countries; the local and external forces, including social and economic models; authoritarian political systems; gender relations; wars and environmental conditions, *inter alia* (Gutto 1991, 6). These factors are aggravated in the daily lives of a majority of Africans by the following:

> Police raids and repression, denial of the right to access to fair judicial processes in the adjudication of private and public legal disputes, the denial of the freedom of association and organization, the curtailment of the right to free participation in the choice of leaders through secret ballot, high infant mortality rates due to lack of food and proper medical care and housing, injuries sustained from women-beaters, inadequate income from hard labor (Gotto 1991, 6).

These conditions are real in Africa despite the fact that African states were signatories to two vital international covenants on human rights, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (United Nations 1996) and the *International Convention on Civil and Political Rights* which entered into force in 1976. Whereas a review of the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* suggests that the covenant within the framework of human rights is on paper more inclusive than most other instruments (Nongola-Ntalaja 1994, 9), the actual imple-

mentation of its tenets leaves much to be desired.[3] indeed, from Nigeria to Kenya and from the Sudan to Zimbabwe, the above analysis put into limelight the fundamental problems of comprehending the antinomies in the continent's practice (or lack thereof) of human rights.

MINORITIES IN EUROPE AND AFRICA: SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Increasingly, the issue of human rights violations in Europe and Africa have come into sharp focus due to the media and general exposure of such events by non-governmental organizations. But the basic difference between these regions today, it could be argued, is that human rights violations in Europe are less systemic than in Africa. That is to say, in Europe, violations of human rights are infrequently sanctioned by the state and government, but in much of Africa the government tends to be the major perpetrator.

For example, in Germany, the Turkish immigrants (like Vietnamese, Angolans, and Romanian gypsies) had a tough time in the early 1990s even though they are protected by German laws. In 1992 and 1993, eight Turkish women and girls were firebombed in Moellin and Solingen respectively by neo-Nazis (Gurr 1994, 65; Wiegandt 1996, 833) who were expressing their resentment toward foreigners. The fire bombings took place, in part, because the Turkish minority immigrants were alleged to be taking jobs at the expense of the Germans and, also, were living

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[3] The African Charter spells out a third category of rights, *viz*, the rights of peoples. "These newer rights include freedom from discrimination, oppression, and exploitation, and the right to self-determination, to national and international peace and security and to a satisfactory environment for economic and social development." Indeed, this definition goes beyond the traditional definition of human rights as civil liberties. This is so because in its broader context it includes civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and peoples' rights including women's and children's rights as well as the rights of the elderly and the disabled.

well in Germany at a time when the economy was depressed following the German unification. These were events that alarmed the German public and caused an uproar among human rights activists in Europe. Xenophobic antagonisms and minority human rights violations are not peculiar to Germany alone; they are also problems in other parts of Europe. In the thirteen most prosperous European countries, there are about 15 million foreigners. France has about 3.6 million and the United Kingdom about 1.6 million, for example (Gurr 1994, 72). These countries have witnessed sharp discrimination on foreign immigrants especially from right wing political parties.

In France, one of the major minority groups that suffers from various aspects of human rights violations is the Muslims from North Africa. Some of the basic concerns in that republic are the "Islamization" of France and the group's "resistance" to fully assimilate into the French culture. In Britain, the target includes Black Caribbeans (Jamaicans, Trinidadians, etc), Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. It was reported that there were over 7,500 assaults against those who belong to these groups in 1992 and 1993, in which about a dozen people died (Robinson, 1993, A1, A1S; Goffe, 1997, 50-58; Jackson, 1997).[4]

The attacks on these minority groups in Western European democracies bring to the fore the question relating to whether these governments can really protect the basic and human rights of these groups. Or, is the issue of human rights protection only germane to the majority population? What is befuddling in Germany, France and Britain, for instance, is that the minority groups who face discriminatory practices and other

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[4] Jackson (1997) contends that "between February 1975 and June 1996, the European Court of Human Rights found the UK to have violated the European Convention on Human Rights no fewer than 41 times—far and away the highest number of any ratifying country." He wondered how a state so proud of its democratic heritage, values, and institutions could run afoul of international law so frequently.

human rights infractions are citizens of their respective countries and by extrapolation entitled to full protection under the law. One British subject summed up the dilemma faced by some blacks in Britain thus: "Children of African—and Caribbean—born Blacks are part of Britain but remain perpetual outsiders" (Goffe 1996, 54). The same may be said of Turkish children in Germany and Tunisian children in France. In fact, human rights issues are intensified by the increasing number of refugee and asylum seekers in Europe and the pressure on the political entrepreneurs to raise the walls against minorities and to expel some in times of economic hardship (Gurr 1994, 73-74). Jean Marie Le Pen, of the National Front Party of France, is a good case in point.

In Africa, the human rights infractions of minority groups is phenomenal because of the area's politico-economic instability. Yet, paradoxically, the respect for human rights is a *sine qua non* for the promotion of democracy, political stability, and economic revitalization in the area. Indeed, because of the seriousness of human rights problems in Africa, the journal, *Africa Today*, sets aside a section in its publications entitled, *Africa Rights Monitor*, in which this fundamental question is addressed.

The following human rights violations of minorities in Africa have been reported: ethnic cleansing of the Tutsis by the Hutus in Rwanda; the suppression of Moslem fundamentalists in Algeria; persecution of religious minorities in Egypt; and the ruthless assault on the Ogoni ethnic minorities in Nigeria are some examples of human rights infringements in the continent. It was the problematic human rights record of Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, that probably prompted the Roman Catholic Pontiff, Pope John Paul, during his March 1998 visit to Nigeria to assert emphatically:

> The dignity of every human being, his inalienable
> rights, the inviolability of life, freedom and justice,

the sense of solidity and the rejection of discrimination—these must be the building blocks of a new and better Nigeria.... There exist, in fact, basic human rights of which no individual can ever be legitimately deprived, for they are rooted in the very nature of the human person and reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a universal moral law (Ejime 1998, 1).

But how might human rights problems be ameliorated? This is the subject of my concluding analysis.

CONCLUSION

Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe have summed up the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* thus:

> The right to life, liberty, and security of person; the right to freedom of thought, speech, and communication of information and ideas; freedom of assembly and religion; the right to government through free elections; the right to free movement within the state and free exit from it, the right to asylum in another state; the right to nationality; freedom from arbitrary arrest and interference with the privacy of home and family; and the prohibition of slavery and torture; ...the right to work, to protection against unemployment, and to join trade unions; the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being; the right to education; and the right to rest and leisure (Couloumbis and Wolfe 1990, 291).

These rights are essential for the furtherance of harmony and stability in any polity. The key question, though, is how to attain these laudable declarations in a world in which there exist numerous competing and conflicting interests? Moreover, the

concept of human rights subsumes so many dimensions under its rubric, some of which conflict with many national cultures.

The major thrust of the following discussion relates to the instrumentalities for addressing human rights questions or how to encourage the existing organizations to pursue their work of promoting these rights with greater vigor in Europe and Africa.

In Europe, the ability of inter-governmental and non-governmental human rights organizations to tackle human rights problems is much more efficacious than in Africa. It goes without saying that Africa has a lot to learn from Europe on this score. For example, the Human Rights Watch/Helsinki and its report on the xenophobic violence in Germany did a lot to sensitize the German government and public. The organization was able to induce the German government or Bundestag to enact legislation that protected the rights of minorities in the Republic.

Although the Council of Europe Framework Convention is legally binding on states, it does not have a supranational enforcement structure and arrangement. In spite of that, however, Article 1 of the Convention states "the protection of national minorities and of the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities forms an integral part of the international protection of human rights, and as such falls within the scope of international cooperation." The propensity of Europeans to adhere to human rights issues more readily than African countries stems from history. So, what one can say of Western European countries in this regard is that through decades of observance of their tradition and culture, bolstered by education and enlightened legislation, there has emerged a political culture that is amenable to human rights problems and to addressing them more efficiently than African countries.

In Africa, at this juncture of its political history, it has been difficult for most regimes to implement the human rights

instruments. This is the case because they are, in the words of Gunnar Myrdal, "soft states," unable to enforce their laws. Moreover, in some cases the government itself is the major problem in the infractions of the human rights of minorities (Wiseberg 1994, 34). Human Rights Watch/Africa and other non-government organizations have been vocal in calling the attention of governments to these issues. Their clamor, however, has nearly always fallen "on deaf ears" of the numerous despotic leaders in the continent. For example, the late Moshood Abiola, the presidential candidate who was believed to have won the 1993 Nigerian presidential election died in detention charged of treason without trial after he declared himself president of the country in 1994. The same fate is true for many human rights activists and advocates, particularly journalists and lawyers who expose human rights infringements. Given this prognosis in Africa, how might African nations and human rights organizations function effectively?

In Africa, the Organization of African Unity established an African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights whose *raison d'etre* was to safeguard the human rights tenets contained in the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*. Although the Commission is made up of 11 elected members for six year terms, critics charge that they are often beholden to national governments and their meetings are bogged down by rules and secrecy and, therefore, are too slow in addressing human rights issues (Wiseberg 1994, 35-37). Also, like the Council of Europe Framework Convention, the African Commission does not have a supranational mechanism.

Even though most national constitutions (for example, Chapter IV of Nigeria's 1979 constitution) address the issue of human rights, these states appear not to enforce human rights infringements with enthusiasm. In Africa and elsewhere, the political actors contend that they are more concerned with "nation-

building" and "development" and do not wish to be distracted by group or individual human rights issues.

It has been suggested, however, that if human rights organizations are to be efficient, they must build their support from the grassroots, especially since the present top down approach is not working (Matua 1994, 30). But above all, the populace must be educated on the virtues of human rights. To this end, the strategy by Nigeria in 1997, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, to introduce the subject for study in secondary schools in Nigeria is encouraging (Ejime 1997, 1). If adequately implemented, it should serve as an important step in attempts at ameliorating the endemic human rights problem in that republic and possibly serve as a model for other African countries facing similar human rights crisis.

In sum, since the Framework Convention and the African Commission are relatively weak in enforcing human rights issues their functions should be augmented by non-governmental organizations. The alacrity with which the Human Rights Watch/Helsinki dealt with the Turkish minority problem in Germany points to the effectiveness of such organization in bringing the world attention to human rights violations.

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