THE HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS CAUCUS
in the World Social Forum

HUMAN RIGHTS ACCOUNTABILITY NOW!

Accountability always has been a key theme in the human rights discourse. Focusing on accountability is perhaps especially important at this moment in history, when the process of establishing a legal framework for human rights largely has been concluded, but political commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights seems, in some ways, to be in decline.

What Does Human Rights Accountability Mean?

Every State has obligations to respect, protect and fulfill all human rights codified in law. The international human rights Covenants establish the means by which a State party is to ensure that it meets these obligations by applying “over-riding principles” of implementation. As established in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, any right and the corresponding State obligations can be realized only to the extent that the State ensures:

1. self-determination (Article 1.1),
2. nondiscrimination (Article 2.2),
3. gender equality (Article 2),
4. rule of law (Article 2.1),
5. progressive realization/nonretrogression (Article 2.1),
6. applying the maximum of available resources (Article 2.1) and
7. international cooperation (Article 2.1).

How to Apply Accountability to Struggles of Habitat, Land and Environment?

It is a human right to enjoy access to adequate housing and equitable land use, to access adequate food (i.e., to feed oneself), and to live in a safe and sound environment. Respect for, protection and fulfillment of these rights are among the essential criteria of human civilization, social development, statecraft and international law. Consequently, these also form criteria for ensuring the accountability of States, their institutions and representatives in meeting their binding obligations corresponding to these human rights.

For the World Social Forum 2008 Global Week of Action launched by the World Social Forum, the Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus has pursued a double strategy:

1. Human rights accountability and faith and cultural diversity
2. Human rights accountability and struggles for social and economic justice
3. Human rights accountability and struggles for gender equity
4. Human rights accountability and struggles over habitat, land and environment
5. Human rights accountability pertaining to migration/mobility and the citizenship gap
6. Human rights accountability and conflict, militarization and the culture of impunity.

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1 One of the six issues of the HDHRC program in the World Social Forum:
Supporting bottom-up human rights initiatives! The HDHRC sponsored a Human Rights and Accountability Contest to encourage innovative activities within the framework of the WSF Global Action Day. The awarded activities are to be launched in January 2008 within the context of the Global Action Day.

Bringing the World Social Forum to Davos! The HDHRC organised a press conference in Davos on 22 January 2008 to promote human rights accountability in the World Economic Forum. The event involved prominent human rights experts and activists, as well as representatives of the local initiative contest winners to Davos, in order to share their knowledge on the human rights accountability gap and alert World Urban Forum participants there challenge political and economic leaders to uphold their human rights responsibilities.

Human Rights and Accountability Contest

Contestants submitted some 60 high-quality proposals, including public events, projects and other initiatives, focused on redressing accountability deficits in realising human rights and exploring innovative ways to improve human rights accountability. The initiating organizations designed their activities to promote effective awareness, dialogue, research, public action or advocacy to hold responsible actors to account for realising a pressing human rights issue or redressing violations committed.

The jury was composed of prominent experts in the field of human rights:

- **Hafsat Abiola**, a Nigerian human rights and democracy activist, founder of Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND);
- **Olivier de Schutter**, professor of human rights law at the University of Louvain and at the College of Europe, visiting professor at Columbia University, and the general secretary of the FIDH;
- **Chico Whitaker**, a leading social activist and one of the founders of the World Social Forum in Brazil.

Based on the jury's selections, HDHRC has awarded the following initiatives with grant funds for the implementation of the WSF Global Week of Action activities:

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Economic and political leaders have gathered in the WEF to take important decisions that too often neglect to consider their impact on human rights. Particularly in times of economic recession, attention is focused on short-term economic priorities, whereas the pursuit of private interests can neglect human dignity and human values. Human rights experts present in Davos, insisting in the interconnectedness of economy and society, alerted WEF participants to the unacceptable human and long-term economic costs of adverse environmental impacts, forced evictions and displacements such as those typically resulting from large-scale infrastrucutre development and extractive industries.

At the WEF in Davos, winners of the Human Rights and Accountability contest presented specific examples of the initiatives to address harmful consequences of economic policies and sustainable alternatives:

**Bustan, confronting human rights abuses against the Bedouin community:**

**Bustan - Israel**

*Bustan* is an Israeli NGO working in the Bedouin and Jewish communities in the Naqab/Negev region of southern Israel since 1999. Through analysis, education, and action, Bustan works for fair resource allocation and environmental and social justice for all residents of the region. The majority of Bedouins in Israel live in "unrecognized" villages, which means that the Israeli government refuses to provide health, electricity, potable water, sewage treatment, education, transportation or other services to citizens in those villages. In addition, most of the indigenous villages are under constant threat of home demolitions carried out by the Israeli government. Bustan's major activities and campaigns include: Children's Power Project, Negev Unplugged Tours; Green Center. Bustan's staff reflect the demographics of the region, including Bedouin, Jewish and international staff. Bustan also maintains a network of hundreds of volunteers from throughout Israel and abroad.


Bustan is responding to house demolitions and forced evictions ordered by the Government of Israel against the Bedouin Arab citizens in the Naqab/Negev region. Only last year, the government demolished 300 houses. The Israeli government is disposessing Bedouin citizens of their lands, livelihoods and homes, and imposing a way of life alien to the community’s aspirations and traditions. Instead of remaining neglected and brutalized, Bedouin people want to stay in their lands and to live according to their own culture, as well as benefit from the recognition and services from the government as their fellow Israeli citizens.

In order to improve their situation, Bustan is promoting the use of new technologies and particularly the Internet among the Bedouin communities. The awarded project plans to train Bedouin's in video and internet skills with a double objective: These skills would enable Bedouin people to show all the world how they suffer discrimination by the lack of services and forced evictions. In these times, when the world is taunted by environmental challenges, they would like to share with other cultures their sustainable way of life, focused in the respect of the environment.
Bustan also brings Jews and Arabs together in order to contribute to peace making in the region. According to Bustan, to make peace real one has to touch the pain and heal. The organization works to bring the two communities together in order to make of them friends instead of strangers.

Radio La Benevolencija: Peace building through innovative methods:

La Benevolencija - Rwanda

La Benevolencija (“Radio La Benevolencija Humanitarian Tools Foundation”) is a Dutch international nongovernmental organization who sees its mission in the empowerment of groups and individuals targeted by hate speech and consequent acts. It broadcasts educational media programs and radio soap operas, in combination with grassroots activities that provide citizens in vulnerable societies with knowledge on how to resist manipulation to violence and how to heal traumas, encouraging them to be active bystanders against incitement and violence. It currently runs large-scale broadcast campaigns in Rwanda, eastern DRC and Burundi as a powerful tool in support of reconciliation and justice processes in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Its activities are founded in a firm methodology and strategy based on comparative academic studies of genocide and group conflicts.


After a first peace-building experience in Sarajevo, Radio Benevolencija was invited by Rwanda to educate people to the vocabulary of media manipulation as well as to heal postconflict traumas. Right after the genocide in 1994, in Rwanda two ethnic groups considered each other as deep enemies.

Radio Benevolencija is a Dutch organization dedicated to empowering minorities subject to discrimination. The organisation would like to initiate such projects in other territories such as Palestine. During the war in Bosnia Radio Benevolencija designed strategies to empower people with education through the media. The organisation was invited to Africa to educate people in the vocabulary of manipulation and give tips of how to heal traumas. The Rwanda project has grown as a prototype. The most interesting phenomenon is the grassroots activity emerging from the project.

Right after the genocide, two groups remained arch enemies. The society was very complicated. All survivors have lost someone. The majority was ashamed, because someone of their family had committed crime. They had lost faith in everybody (the international community, the UN, etc…).

Peace building is very difficult, and such a task cannot be achieved through a small project. This project was created to counter the media program, "Television des milles collines", which used incitement to dehumanize Tutsi people. Radio Benevolencija then created local radio broadcasts. The project presented a soap opera as a love story between characters from each opposing community. The majority of the people in Rwanda listened to this radio program, sometimes gatherings 10,000 listeners. The program was a big success at training people to resist manipulation and incitement.

Now, there are 20 communities around the country that provide related training. It involves people listening to the soap opera and then creating their own. Through the exercise, some people have confessed their crimes and reconciled with victims, and become agents of change.

Such a radio or TV program on a global scale could spread human rights everywhere.

HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS CAUCUS

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Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) protecting uncontacted people in the Amazon:

**CIEL – Argentina**

CIEL is a public-interest environmental law organization founded in 1989, dedicated to using international law, institutions, and processes to protect human rights and the global environment and to promote sustainable development. To achieve these goals CIEL works in partnership with diverse public-interest allies globally by offering legal and policy analysis, counsel, advocacy, education, training and capacity building. Since CIEL’s founding, its lawyers and other staff have used their expertise to protect environmental resources, defend human rights, and promote sustainable development. Today CIEL is guided by concern for the world’s poorest people and a deepening awareness of their importance and contributions to conservation and sustainable development, and we are gravely concerned about the growing connection between threats to the global environment and violations of basic human rights.


The Caucus is supporting CIEL’s work on the protection of the isolated people in the Amazonia region. In December 2007, CIEL, with the Federation of Indigenous Cacataibo Communities (FENACOCA) and the Peruvian NGO Instituto del Bien Comun, petitioned Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) for precautionary measures to protect the lives, health and physical integrity of Cacataibo indigenous peoples living in isolation in the Peruvian Amazon and will do the same in other regions of the Amazon. They are being threatened by oil and gas exploration in their traditionally occupied territories. There is overwhelming historical evidence that shows that forced contact with indigenous peoples in isolation results in serious illnesses and numerous deaths. Yet, despite the high risk of forced contact and life-threatening diseases, the Peruvian government approved oil and gas exploration in the traditional territories of the Cacataibo. The Canadian company, Petrolera Petroleum del Peru S.A.C., recently began using explosives to conduct seismic testing, as part of its exploration.

As business leaders are discussing economic recession in Davos, some companies are investing in natural resource exploitation, such as gold mining in Peru and elsewhere. At the same time, one can imagine a little girl falling ill due to uncontrolled waste from the gold mine. Mining greatly affects local communities. In an important case, the IACHR granted precautionary measures to CONACAMI (National Coordinator of Peruvian Communities Affected by Mining), represented by CIEL, thus linking the human rights to health and life with the environment. Peru has followed some of the recommendations and transported waste away. The case is still pending on the merits.

The human rights and environment linkage is also important in climate change. For example, in another region of the Americas, climate change has disastrous effects for the Inuit people. Thinning ice from warmer temperatures make travelling and hunting on ice dangerous, and thawing permafrost is causing damage to houses, roads, airports and pipelines as well as accelerating erosion. The link between climate change and human rights is more complicated than the mining cases from a legal perspective because the change in climate is caused by many different actors and the problem is cross-boundary/global. The petition CIEL submitted with the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and Earthjustice in the Inuit case has sought to expand the jurisdictional reach of the Inter-American Human Rights System in light of the universal implications of global environmental damage.

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Health and Development Center for Afghan Women (HDCAW): Rights to peace.

**HDCAW - Afghanistan**

Health and Development Center for Afghan Women (HDCAW) is a nongovernmental, nonprofit and nonpartisan organization rendering its services for women in various areas. HDCAW was first established in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1994. After the collapse of the brutal Taliban regime, HDCAW promptly shifted its main office to Kabul so as to keep on implementing its projects for women and children inside Afghanistan. HDCAW was established to alleviate the problems of women and their child in different sectors and help improve their socioeconomic status. HDCAW focuses its projects inside Afghanistan in various close and remote provinces and the capital. It has designed and implemented various projects, such as women rights awareness programs, children rights, teacher training programs, health and literacy training, vocational training programs especially for war affected children and widows and indigent males and females, capacity building and particular publicity campaigns for the former Constitutional Loya Jerga.

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Afghanistan has been engaged in war and militancy since 1978. Over 30 years of conflict has harmed life there in almost every aspect, but the women have suffered the most. During the rule of the Taliban (1996–2001), women were treated worse than in any other time. They were forbidden to work, leave the house without a male escort, not allowed to seek medical help from a male doctor, and forced to cover themselves from head to toe, even covering their eyes. Women, who were doctors and teachers before, suddenly were forced to be beggars and even prostitutes in order to feed their families.

Since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, many would agree that the political and cultural position of Afghan women has improved substantially. The recently adopted Afghan Constitution provides for gender equality in rights and duties before the law. So far, women have been allowed to return back to work, the government no longer forces them to wear the all-covering burqa, and they even have been appointed to prominent positions in the government.

Despite all these changes, the repression of women is still prevalent in rural areas, where many families still restrict their own mothers, daughters, wives and sisters from participation in public life. They are still forced into marriages and denied a basic education. Numerous schools for girls have been burned down, and little girls have even been poisoned to death for daring to go to school.

In most of the rural areas and, in some cases urban centers, women face family violence, but very little of it is publicized. Warlords, the former Mujahidin commanders, are still a serious threat to rights of women and children. Dealing with the warlords is particularly challenging for civil society, as they still wield military power and even hold powerful government positions. They also are supported by the international community as footsoldiers in their war against terrorism.

Seven year-old Samia has a shocking story. She is one of tens of thousands of Afghanistan's girls who fall victim of family violence in the male-dominated society where fundamentalists promote and support misogynistic customs. Two years ago, Samia's father raped the 10-year-old daughter of Mohammad Yassin, in the northern Baghlan Province. When he was arrested, according to the custom, he settled the matter by giving Samia away to marry a son of Mohammad Yassin. In Yassin's house, the Yassin family

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2 Unfortunately, no representative from HDCAW was able to be present in the press conference in Davos due to visa problems. HDCAW set the above information by e-mail.

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treated Samia as a slave and for two long years subjected her to torture and discrimination, such as daily
beatings, locking her in a dark basement, branding her with hot metal pieces, pulling her hair, keeping her
naked, forcing her to stay outside for hours in freezing weather, and many other such bestial punishment.

The good news is that Afghans and others around the world are concerned about these sad facts and have devoted their lives to dealing with them. HDCAW is proud to be among many other organizations that exist to improve the living conditions of women around the world. Ever since HDCAW was established, education of children and adults about human rights has been a priority. Since empowering women without enabling them to become economically independent is nearly impossible, HDCAW also has been finding means to enable women to be economically independent. Experience has shown that, if given proper training and means, women can be productive members of the society and, therefore, self-sufficient.

HDCAW’s current three-month project aims at reducing the incidence of women’s rights violation in targeted areas in Afghanistan. With HDHRC’s award will support the project to enhance rights/legal awareness of approximately 17,000 school girls and boys, teachers and women from other walks of life will be trained as the direct beneficiaries of the program, tens of thousands of people are expected to benefit from it indirectly.

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These four initiatives represent local efforts to spread human rights culture and seek accountability of those responsible to respect protect and fulfill human rights. HDHRC and its constituent organizations are proud to support these projects, in part, with modest funds, but in full solidarity. Their application of the norms of human rights and universal justice affirms also the responsibility we all share to make sure that “another world is possible,” as long as all parties put their human rights accountability in practice.
Press release

Human rights accountability and the environment

Bringing the World Social Forum to Davos: The Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus demands that States and Corporations close human rights accountability gaps

Davos, 22 January 2008: “Today many victims of human rights violations do not know where to claim their rights, or whom to hold accountable for their suffering”, says Ms. Souhayr Belhassen, the President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), describing the human rights reality in many countries. “In Davos, during the World Economic Forum, we must raise our awareness of the growing world wide human rights accountability gaps”.

On the occasion of the World Social Forum Global Day of Action 2008, the Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus (HDHRC), a global coalition of major human rights and development organizations, demanded that states and corporations put an end to global human rights violations. Poor people, in particular, suffer a dramatic increase in violations of their basic human rights. Marginalized people in rural areas are confronted with persistent inability to realize their rights to land, water, seeds and social services. They are often victims of forced eviction, as their land is used for large development infrastructures or for resource extraction. In many countries, the increasing conflicts and militarization are making a culture of impunity a daily reality. We are seeing a rapid surge of internally displaced persons, migrant workers, refugees and all groups confronted with citizenship gaps. Women are affected the most.

As the World Economic Forum 2008 devotes considerable attention to environmental issues, the Caucus highlights the relevance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the current debate over climate change, toxic waste and energy. Environmental damages directly threaten the right to life, to health, to water, to development, to housing, to work, to culture and the rights of indigenous people. Affected populations have the right to be protected from adverse environmental impacts, such as polluted water, soil and air, deforestation, and displacements that result from desertification or floods caused by climate change.

States have the legal obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights written in treaties and in customary law. Although states are accountable to harmonize public policies and national laws with their obligations, they are often ineffective or complicit in human rights violations. Nonstate actors also have human rights responsibilities. An increasing number of private actors are committing human rights violations. These actors include private security firms, armed rebellion and paramilitary groups, as well as transnational corporations. They extract, pollute and destroy scarce environmental resources and operate with poor labor standards. International Organizations too can have negative impacts on human rights. They prescribe economic policies to governments that contravene their human rights commitments, introduce private land markets, encourage privatization of water sources, enforce high health services

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fees and finance large development infrastructures. As non-state actors become more influential, their potential impacts on human rights increase.

“Human rights accountability today must not only pertain to state obligations,” says Michael Windfuhr, Human Rights Director of Bread for the World, a Protestant Church-based development organization in Germany. “Human rights accountability must be shared by all parties, whose actions affect human rights. Such parties include international financial institutions, the United Nations, multilateral agencies, private and public companies, influential foreign governments, local private interests, civil society organizations and individuals.” In fact, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)—which is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year—affirms that “every individual and every organ of society” bears the responsibility “to promote respect for these rights and freedoms by progressive measures, national and international.”

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Anti-WEF: The World Social Forum at Davos
22 January 2008

Nicolas Rosse

Surprise at Davos: The first Forum to open its doors is not the WEF, but the concurrent World Social Forum (WSF), more precisely the « Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus » in WSF.

Another surprise: the meeting attracted just one journalist!!

One recalls the congregations of Porto Alegre, Mumbai and Nairobi that attracted tens of thousands of people, but the movement appears to be deflating: The WSF will not take place this year; however, the next edition is expected in Belem (Brazil) in 2009.

For Davinder Lamba (photo), president of the organization HIC, civil society movements are evolving from sometimes violent opposition and consequently very visible in the media a few years ago into movements that are more-constructive movements and more supported by their constituents. The Kenya admits, however, that the lack of visibility at Davos “is not ideal.”

Ultimately, the participants in this rather private debate conclude that, like mentalities, international law also has evolved to the good. Nathalie Bernasconi Osterwalder, attorney with the organization CIEL, is delighted with the evolution of international law in the protection of people and the environment. Yves Lador, who represents Earthjustice before the UN, notes that the recognition of environmental problems has imposed itself on the world agenda (see their interviews).

Other source covering HDHRC’s WSF Global Day Action:
http://tsr.blogs.com/davos/2008/01/anti-wef-le-for.html#more


http://www.infosud.org/spip/spip.php?article1201