

Galilee Model United Nations Conference 2018



Human Rights

Research Report

Definition:

Freedom of speech or freedom of the press is the right of people to express their opinions publicly without censorship or restraint by the government. This is a right recognized under article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The violation of human rights around the world has led many people to establish organizations or to take action to promote or protect these rights. These are called human-rights defenders or activists. A human-rights defender may be a farmer, union organizer, journalist, lawyer, or anyone who works non-violently for the rights of others.

Background:

The singular importance of protecting the lives and freedoms of human-rights activists is clear. Human-rights defenders are people, groups of people or organizations who promote and protect human rights peacefully. Governments, security forces, business interests, armed groups, religious leaders and sometimes even their own families and communities may try to silence their inconvenient opinions or actions. They may kill, threaten, kidnap or torture them.

Governments have often used ‘national security’ as an excuse to stifle criticism. In recent years, terrorism has helped justify increased repression.

Also a free press reporting on the issues that shape our lives is a key building block of any society. Yet in Azerbaijan, Mexico and Liberia, to name just a few countries, journalists face repression and attacks. During conflict, it can get worse, such as in Syria where journalists reporting on human rights abuses have been arrested, tortured and killed.

The global press freedom declined to its lowest point in 13 years in 2016 amid unprecedented threats to journalists and media outlets in major democracies and new moves by authoritarian states to control the media, including beyond their borders. Among the countries that suffered the largest decline were Poland, Turkey, Burundi, Hungary, Bolivia, Serbia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Only 13 percent of the world's population enjoys a free press—that is, a media environment where coverage of political news is strong. The safety of journalists there is guaranteed, state intrusion in media affairs is minimal, and the press is not subject to onerous legal or economic pressures. Forty-five percent of the population lives in countries where the media environment is Not Free. The world's 10 worst-rated countries and territories were Azerbaijan, Crimea, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Major organizations and treaties involved:

1. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):

As the world experiences conflicts and inequalities based on ethnic, religious and identity differences, there is a need for approaches that promote understanding, respect, participation and inclusion. A key element in this strategy is human rights education. Therefore, this organization focuses on Human rights education, which is a key to overcoming conflict and inequality.

2. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

This is a milestone document in the history of human rights, drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world. According to the UDHR, everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

3. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE):

Works on promoting the full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms where everyone has the right to freedom of expression including the right to communication. This right includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and inform information and ideas without interference by public authority.

4. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

UNESCO is always pushing ahead the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, as well as protecting the interests of the journalists. UNESCO has promoted freedom of expression, press freedom and independence of the media as part of its activities. UNESCO has adopted several resolutions in this regard, such as ‘The promotion of independent and pluralist media’ (1995) and ‘Condemnation of violence against journalists’ (1997).

5. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):

Realizing that individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which they belong, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized. It states that all peoples have the right of self-determination, where they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

6. Declaration on principles of freedom of expression:

Where it ensures respect for and full enjoyment of individual freedoms and fundamental rights of human beings since consolidation and development of democracy depends upon the existence of freedom of expression.

7. The Geneva Convention and other journalist associations (see final link in the useful websites section).

Questions to consider:

- How are human rights activists being treated in my country?
- Does my country have explicit freedom of speech in its constitution or laws?
- Is the press in my country subject to onerous legal or economic pressures?
- What steps is your country taking to protect the human rights activists, the freedom of speech and press?
- What can we do to protect human rights activists and journalists?

4) Helpful links:

- <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_activists
- <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/matt-easton/how-do-human-rights-activ b 788094.html>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_speech_by_country
- <file:///C:/Users/user2/Downloads/37-37-1-PB.pdf>