

Lucy Eleonore Lyons

# Human rights

## A universal declaration

In 1948, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Member nations were urged to mark this event with display, dissemination, and public readings of the text. Exactly 60 years later, a prisoner in Cuba attempted to read the Declaration aloud to fellow prisoners in commemoration of the anniversary of International Human Rights Day (December 10, 2008). After being beaten, thrown into solitary confinement, and tried behind closed-doors, six years were added to his original four-year sentence, which was received for trying to distribute copies of the Declaration in public.<sup>1</sup>

The Declaration is a remarkable document that affirms that everyone has rights, including the right to travel, to live in freedom and safety, to join and to form trade unions, and to be free from torture, slavery, and unjust imprisonment. Because it is not difficult to identify violations that occur in almost every signatory country, these proclamations might seem unrealistic to some. Yet the Declaration has very real consequences and has inspired the formation, tenacity, and progress of individuals, activists, organizations, movements, scholars, and others.

The language of rights has become ubiquitous as demonstrated in every recent revolutionary event taking place in the Middle East. A typical report notes: "Gaddafi's opponents say they want political freedoms, respect for human rights and an end to corruption."<sup>2</sup>

The human rights landscape has also changed due to fast communications reaching ever larger audiences and the phenomenal growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGO). Moreover, among American students and faculty, greater numbers than ever travel abroad and bring home a growing concern for, and interest in, human rights. The goal of this

review is to assist librarians in identifying the most important human rights sites for scholars and practitioners—the latter of which increasingly come from the ranks of students in the growing field of international studies.

This guide is divided into three parts: 1) human rights search engines and gateways, 2) Web sites devoted to information on rights broadly defined, and 3) those devoted to more specific human rights issues. As the resources demonstrate, the concept of human rights does not only include civil and political rights, but also individual, cultural, environmental, legal, social, economic, linguistic, health rights, and more. An enormous range of concerns encompass this subject from freedom from violence to access to land, food, housing, and medical care. The first two sections of this work take you into the wide world of these international concerns; the third section provides a sampling of specific aspects of what we called "human rights."

### Search engines and gateways

- **Human Security Gateway.** Part of the Human Security Report Project of Simon Fraser University, the gateway provides academic articles, journal articles, reports, news, fact sheets, bibliographies, and other sources of information from hundreds of human rights-related think-tanks, centers, institutes, organizations, news agencies, and more. The best way to start your search is to choose human rights from among the 21 subjects in the top-left drop-down menu of the Topics tab. You will then be able to search sources within that topic. Alternatively, you can

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choose from Topic Gateways, search by region, or use the Advanced Search to explore by organization, title, and author, and limit by date, regions, and resource categories. *Access:* <http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/>.



- **HuriSearch.** This is part of a wider initiative called HuriDocs, which is a non-governmental organization servicing human rights organizations in making the most of information technology and documentation. HuriSearch is a topical search engine dedicated to exclusively search human rights Web sites. It currently examines more than 5,000 sites. From the Simple Search, you can explore by keyword and language, and limit by the unique feature of source type, which includes nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and academic and national human rights institutions. Additional options, such as searching by organization, country, or format, are available through the Advanced Search. *Access:* <http://www.hurisearch.org/>.



- **University of Minnesota Human Rights Library.** This is a very well-organized key resource for research, and it is a very extensive collection. The full-text of important treaties and conventions, research guides and pathfinders, refugee and asylum resources, and more are easy to find in the first section. See, too, "Links to over 4,000 Other Sites." Though the number sounds unmanageable, the links are made useful by very impressive and clear categorization. The second section conveniently contains, in one place, a multilingual search engine for many of the main human rights sites. Like many of the Internet resources in this guide, this site serves researchers as well as those who are

interested in finding employment in human rights fields. *Access:* <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/>.

## Organizations broad in scope

- **Amnesty International.** This is Amnesty's 50th anniversary year. Over the decades, Amnesty has broadened its scope from "prisoner of conscience" campaigns to mobilizing against torture and the death penalty, and in support of arms control and the protection of refugees. On the face of the Web site is an eye-catching box of changing images related to three stories that are covered as either a campaign, as research, or in a blog. Four other areas of content lie below: News, Good News, In Focus, and the Activism Center.

An important feature for librarians and scholars is the "Library." It is an archive of reports, audio/visual, and appeals for action, and it contains newsletters and press materials. It has a surprisingly well-designed Advanced Search, which provides limiters such as country, issue or topic, language, and document type, and the ability to search by keyword, report number, and date. See, too, in the right-hand navigation, the latest annual report or "state of the world's human rights," which is more than a document. It includes multimedia, summary reports by region, facts and figures, and more. *Access:* <http://amnesty.org/en>.



- **Human Rights Watch (HRW).** Like Amnesty International, HRW is truly one of the leading rights organizations. And like Amnesty International, the high quality of its work is reflected in its endorsement and use by governments, the media, activists, scholars, and others. Its independence lends credence to its objectivity. The HRW homepage is very clean and clearly organized. It contains links to special reports as well as up-to-date major news items—for example, "Middle East Upris-

ing Live Updates.” Other news is conveniently divided into regions. The tab next to Regions allows one to choose Topics such as Arms, Health, and LGBT Rights. Of special interest are works listed under Publications. Most of these are free online, though there is also an option to purchase print editions (which may be of convenience for libraries). Titles can be searched by topic and country. Also available is the current annual World Report as well as its archives dating back to 1989. *Access:* <http://www.hrw.org/>.

- **United Nations (UN).** The UN is, of course, a core resource on the topic of human rights. The UN is also an enormous and confusing bureaucracy of agencies, committees, and commissions. Thus, although the main Human Rights page has a good section on Thematic Issues, it is not the best place to start. See, instead, the Research Guide listed under Tools. This is an excellent pathfinder to UN work on human rights. It includes links to UN databases and libraries, and helpfully provides keyword terms to use in searches for human rights materials. *Access:* UN human rights homepage: <http://www.un.org/en/rights/> and UN Research Guide page: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/spechr.htm>.

- **United States Department of State.** Every year, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor is obliged to submit to Congress an extensive report on every country’s compliance with sections of human rights treaties and bills. These Country Reports on Human Rights Practices are summaries of recent conditions. It is interesting to note that some of the information included in the reports is attributed to NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch. The site contains an archive reaching back to 1999, providing the researcher with the ability to track changes over time.

In regard to U.S. compliance, the UN requires periodic Treaty Reports. The Web site provides links to these, including the Bush-era responses to questions raised about compliance to the Convention Against Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). Nonetheless, the purpose of this site is to promote U.S. foreign policy. It is

still worthwhile, but as a supplement to sources that contain more historical context, analysis and in-depth reportage. *Access:* <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/>.

## Organizations with special focus

- **AAAS Science and Human Rights Program (SHRP).** This program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is dedicated to encouraging scientists to join human rights efforts by applying rights standards to their work, using scientific tools to further rights goals, and by promoting the right to benefit from scientific progress. Under SHR Coalition, click on Resources to find a list of groups defending the rights of scientists, an annotated bibliography on science and human rights, and (coming soon) the Bibliographic Database on Science and Human Rights. See, too, Publications and the SHR Newsletter, both listed under (a different) Resources link on the homepage. *Access:* <http://shr.aaas.org/>.



- **Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI).** ANHRI aims to be a central depot for current and archival news, publications, blogs, reports, and other materials from all-Arabic human rights organizations. “We hope to give these organizations a megaphone to magnify their voices in country and in the region.” Most of the resources are in Arabic, but some full-text and some summaries appear in English. *Access:* <http://www.anhri.net/en/>.

- **Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.** Although this site states that it is engaged in “Tracking the positive and negative impacts of over 5,100 companies worldwide,” it is so much more than that implies. It offers information that is otherwise hard to find.

International standards of human rights are the starting point for examining companies in more than 180 countries. This site attracts a wide audience from scholars to practitioners, and includes job postings for those interested in related fields. It is a well-organized site, but

you will be greatly helped by beginning with *Getting Started and How to Use The Site*. These explain, for example, the difference between the Library and the Special Portals. The former allows you to search for documents by regions, industry sectors, individual companies, lawsuits, issues, and more. Each of those subject headings is further subdivided. It is very impressive. The Special Portals include Tools and Guides to help businesses integrate human rights into the work place. See, too, under About Us, the list of Academic Partners' sites that you can visit for more resources. In 2011, we can look forward to exploring Business and Children, a new portal under development. *Access:* <http://www.business-humanrights.org/>.



[www.business-humanrights.org](http://www.business-humanrights.org)

- **Child Rights Information Network (CRIN).** CRIN is dedicated to changing how societies and governments view children and to making the enforcement of current human rights more systematically inclusive of children. The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC)—signed by all countries except Somalia and the United States—enumerates these rights. Under Publications, in the drop-down menu of Resources, you will find an option to search numerous types of documents, including journal articles, bibliographies, books, conference and session reports, and working and policy papers. Search by keyword, publication type, topic, country, language, and more. Full-text is generally available through PDF or Web format; when not, each result appears to contain a complete citation. *Access:* <http://www.crin.org/>.

- **Global Witness.** This site has as its main focus the exploitation of natural resources and how that impacts the lives and human rights of ordinary citizens. As the Web site states, it organizes “campaigns against natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses.” It specializes in examining the rise or support of conflict and corruption, and their attendant affect on human rights, within the areas of oil,

gas, mining, banks, diamonds, minerals, and forests. Updated news and investigative reports, opinion, blogs, video, and other various types of articles can be found through an Advanced Search tool that also allows searching by keyword, country, and issues. *Access:* <http://www.globalwitness.org/>.

- **International Labour Organization (ILO).** ILO is a UN-specialized agency “which seeks the promotion of social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights.” It provides definitions of worker rights; for example, the Declaration’s “right of association,” which includes the right to organize or join labor unions and to bargain collectively. Because ILO also provides conventions on internationally recognized labor standards, you will often find it mentioned in the documents and reports of other groups. The most pertinent aspects of the Web site to students and scholars are Topics, Publications, and Statistics and Databases. *Access:* <http://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm>.

- **Minority Rights Group International (MRGI).** This NGO works to assist minority and indigenous groups to establish or maintain rights to their lands, cultures, languages, and religions, and to gain opportunities in education, government, and employment. The Web site contains good foundational information, including definitions and legal statuses. Under Publications, you will find free online access to reports, micro and macro studies, guides, briefings, training manuals, and the annual State of the World’s Minorities. Print editions of these works are available for purchase. *Access:* <http://www.minorityrights.org/>.

## Notes

1. Nik Steinberg and Daniel Wilkinson, “The Heroes of Cuba,” *New York Review of Books*, 57, no. 9 (May, 2010): 20–23.

2. “Libyans bury dead after clashes,” Al Jazeera (online), [english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2011/02/20112187102317748.html](http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2011/02/20112187102317748.html) (accessed February 18, 2011). ¶¶