



## Role of Civil Society in protecting the Human Rights

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**Abstract:** Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible. Universal human rights are often expressed and guaranteed by law, in the forms of treaties, customary international law, general principles and other sources of international law. International human rights law lays down obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups. Every day in every part of the world, civil society contributes to the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights. The NGOs play important role to become a concrete expression of international, national and regional and local level voice to assist and stand up for those who can't speak themselves. They help the victims of human right violation by providing them assistance and advice. They file cases, writ petitions and public interest litigations on behalf of victims and public at large for protection of human rights. The NGOs have fought against the system of bonded labour, fake encounters by police, protection of women children's rights, custodian violence and custodian death, prevention of torture and other inhuman practices.

**Key words:** Universal human rights, civil societies, public interest litigations on, inhuman practices

**Introduction** Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. Every day in every part of the world, civil society contributes to the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights. Whatever they call themselves -- human rights defenders, human rights NGOs, bar associations, student clubs, trade unions, university institutes, bloggers, or charities working with discriminated groups -- civil society actors work for a better future and share the common goals of justice, equality, and human dignity. A dynamic, diverse and

independent civil society, able to operate freely, knowledgeable and skilled with regard to human rights, is a key element in securing sustainable human rights protection in all regions of the world.

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### **Civil societies and NGOs**

The civil societies and NGOs mobilise public opinion on various issues of national and international importance. They pressurize the government on certain issues such as protection of prisoners' rights, torture etc. They approach the judiciary on behalf of poor people who otherwise have no access to justice. At the international level, the status of human rights is watched by many NGOs. Amnesty International is one such organization. This organization is dedicated to publicizing violation of human rights, especially freedom of speech and religion and right to political dissent. It also works for the release of political prisoners and, when necessary, for the relief of their families. For the commendable services in human rights, Amnesty international was awarded the Noble Prize for peace in 1977. Other international NGOs such as Australia Asia Worker Links(AAWL) in Australia, Kenya college and the Legal Resources Centre(LRC) in South Africa, Cool Earth in UK, The Human Rights Foundation(HRF) in America are striving hard for the protection of human rights.

Australia Asia Worker Links(AAWL) is an Australian non-governmental organization active since 1979, established to forge international labour movement links in the Asia-Pacific region. AAWL supports union, human, indigenous and women rights, prompting solidarity between unions and advocating for improvements in corporate

citizenship in the region. The Fred Hallows Foundation is a non-profit, community based, non-government development aid organization that focuses on treating and preventing blindness and other vision problems. It operates in Australia, The pacific, South and South East Asia and Africa.

Khanya College is an independent non-governmental organization based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Established in 1986, the primary aim of Khanya College is to assist various constituencies within working class and poor communities to respond to the challenges posed by the forces of economic and political globalization. The motto of the organization is "Education for Liberalization". The Legal Resources Centre (LRC) is a human rights organization based in Johannesburg, South Africa. It is safeguarding human rights by employing 65 lawyers specializing in public-interest law.

Cool Earth is another UK based international non-governmental organization that protects endangered rainforest to combat global warming, protect ecosystem and provide sustainable jobs for local people. Cool Earth protects and secures rainforest under imminent threat of destruction, working with other NGOs. The Human rights Foundation (HRF) is an non-profit organization whose stated mission is "to ensure that freedom is both preserved and promoted" in the Americans. Its head office is in New York, USA. Its definition of human rights focuses on the essential ideals of freedom of self-determination and freedom from tyranny and the rights of property.



## In India

In India many NGOs like Sulabh Movement, Child relief and You(CRY), Campaign Against Child labour(CACL) etc., are actively involved in protecting human rights and capacity building activities. Sulabh movement is a major social movement in the country for the betterment and welfare of Dalits, in a generic sense, and in particular for the liberation and mainstreaming of scavengers. Child Relief and You (CRY) is a voluntary organization committed to the upliftment of millions of children who have been deprived of their childhood due to various reasons. Campaign Against Child labour(CACL) is a joint initiative of youth for Voluntary Action(YUVA), Pune and Tere des Hommes(Germany) India programme. The Campaign is currently supported by ILO and actively working for progressive eradication of child labour through provision of education, organisation of awareness programmes, promotion of legislative changes and rescuing children in bondage or victims of abuse.

Organisations like Saheli and Chetan are actively involved in the protection of Women's Rights. They provide free legal aid to women to fight for their rights against gender bias and child discrimination. Butterflies are an NGO with a programme for street children. It was started in 1988 and its activities include non-formal education, saving schemes for children, vocational training, holding Bal Sabhas, creating awareness for children's rights and networking with other NGOs and research and documentation. People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) is a prominent civil rights organization formed by veteran socialist and campaign leader Jaya

Prakashnarayana. Its main aim is to bring those concerned about defending civil liberties and human rights from different backgrounds onto a common platform.

Peoples Union for Democratic Rights came into existence in 1976-77 as the Delhi unit of a large national forum, and became PUDR on 1 February, 1981. In the last two and a half decades of existence the organisation has taken up hundreds of instances of violations of democratic rights, covering most parts of the country and involving the rights of many section of the society. PUDR conducts investigations, issue statements, distribute leaflets, organizes public meetings, demonstrations and dharnas, and fights legal cases to highlight the violation of people's rights, and to help towards their redressal.

Bandhu Mukti Morcha(BMM) or bonded labour Liberation Front (BLLF) is a non-governmental organisation in India working to end bonded labour. BBMs efforts are credited with the passing of legislation to abolish child labour in India (The Child labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986).

The following are some examples in which NGO take an action in court for protecting human rights in India:

- Visaka & others vs State of Rajasthan & others
- People's Union For Democratic Rights vs State of Bihar & others (19 December 1986)
- Bandhumukti Morchav Union of India & others (16 December 1983)
- Sahelivs Commissioner of Police
- People's union for Democratic Rights vs Police Commissioner Delhi, headquarters 1989 4 SCC 730.



## Conclusion

Undoubtedly NGOs are playing prominent role in protecting human rights all over the world. But there are certain short comings that are to be overcome. NGOs need to expand their programmes, campaigns, skirts from yearly or bi-yearly to monthly. Frequent programmes increase the awareness of human rights even more than yearly. They also need to get more aid both from foreign and within India which will be useful to carry out their cause. They must have clear goals and priorities, they should define what they are trying to achieve as clearly as possible. They should think strategically and assess how short term goals fit in with long term ones. NGOs must have a clear written work plan for both individuals and staff activities. Plan reminds people of what the goals are, it helps keep things on track and with major projects or campaigns it helps people see where they fit into big picture.

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