

**SOMETHING INSIDE SO STRONG:**  
**A RESOURCE GUIDE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES**

**U.S. Human Rights Network**  
**<http://www.ushrnetwork.org/page1.cfm>**  
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This text explores the utilization of the human rights framework within the United States to address issues of justice and oppression. By providing an overview of the human rights framework, followed by examples of how activists and advocates have used this framework to address justice issues in the U.S., this resource guide offers a valuable tool for activists to consider in addressing all forms of justice issues, including sexual and domestic violence.

The text begins with an overview of the human rights framework (HR Framework). Based on the U.N. Declaration for Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948 in response to the atrocities committed during the Holocaust, the human rights framework conceives of five categories of human rights that belong to all human beings: civil, political, cultural, economic and social. The HR Framework recognizes these categories of human rights as interconnected. One of the most immediate advantages of the HR framework is that it elevates the discussion beyond any of these categories alone. For example, in the U.S. the emphasis on civil rights often trumps and silences any discussion on cultural or economic rights. A HR framework does not allow for one category of rights to take precedence over another meaning that the needs of individuals are better met.

The text goes on to list a few of the major U.N. instruments that are available for defining and expanding human rights. Some of these instruments include:

- The U.N. Convention on the Elimination on all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)
- The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- The Convention Against Torture
- The Convention for the Rights of the Child
- The Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and their Families
- American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man (passed by the Organization of American States)

While most of these documents, treaties, and conventions have been passed by the United States, most have not been ratified by the U.S. severely limiting the ability to use these tools under U.S. law. In addition, the U.S. regularly attaches reservations to those instruments it does ratify, undermining their effectiveness in U.S. Courts. In spite of this, however, by better educating the U.S. public about the availability of these instruments, the U.S. can be held accountable to defend and preserve the Human Rights of U.S. citizens.

The next section looks specifically at various population sectors in the U.S. and how they have experienced violations of their human rights (using the tools listed above). This section is meant to provide concrete examples not only of how U.S. citizens have their human rights violated, but ways that

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advocates have been able to bring pressure to bear on the U.S. and state governments using these instruments. The specific population sectors that are examined include: Immigrants, American Indians, people in prison, people on death row, the poor, and discrimination. Although women are not a specific group listed and sexual/domestic violence is not specifically addressed, the examples provided and the framework itself provides a means by which the movement against sexual and domestic violence can expand its efforts and increase its efficacy.

The next section explores the U.S. Human Rights Movement and the how to use this framework, to expand rights in the U.S. Specifically, the manual examines the following activities: Human Rights Education, Human Rights Organizing, Creating Human Rights Policies, Using Human Rights Law, and Human Rights Scholarship.

### Human Rights Education

This section looks at methods and strategies for educating about human rights. As a beginning, they list seven basic principles about Human rights:

- ✓ Human Rights are interdependent and universal;
- ✓ Human Rights include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;
- ✓ Human Rights are protected through the building of social movements;
- ✓ Human Rights movements must ensure the leadership by those most directly affected;
- ✓ Human Rights advocacy must always respect the diversity within communities; and
- ✓ Human Rights organizations must be financially responsible and accountable.

Some of the strategies suggested for human rights educating include:

- Integrating human rights education as part of organizing strategy in campaigns;
- Integrate information about human rights into other educational or awareness events/workshops;
- Create methods specific to the needs of local communities;
- Hold human rights institutes and trainings for activists and advocates in a variety of justice causes;
- Ensure that people whose human rights have been violated are involved in preparation and implementation of trainings; and
- Work with educators in local schools to integrate the HR framework into their curricula.

### Human Rights Organizing

This section outlines ways that advocates can use the HR framework to organize local communities to address justice issues. The key point in this section is to reframe the issues being addressed as a human rights issue under the HR framework. Some specific strategies suggested include:

- Ensure the development of community leaders who represent those affected by violations;
- Incorporate a participatory approach to organizing;
- Build the capacity of community leaders;
- Facilitate dialogue across organizing communities and issues using the HR framework to bring together diverse constituencies; and
- Develop multi-faceted campaigns including strategies for education, media, litigation and direct action.

## Human Rights Documentation

This section discusses the importance and process of documenting human rights violations. Documenting human rights violations is an important tool for educating and organizing, as well as political and legal advocacy. Suggested strategies include:

- Train community members and activists in human rights documentation standards, methods and techniques;
- Engage community leadership and members in documentation; and
- Develop participatory methods of research and documentation.

## Creating Human Rights Policies

Working to create or impact on policy from a Human Rights framework is not only an important arena for work, but is also a challenge for advocates. The challenge faced is twofold: taking positions on unpopular policies which affect vulnerable communities; while arguing for the relevance of human rights with officials who are often unfamiliar with or opposed to the framework. In spite of this, impacting policies is in some ways that heart of the work of advocates. Some strategies include:

- Convene community leaders to analyze a state or city policy and create remedies;
- Develop HR policy campaigns to build on the successes of local communities adopting race and gender conventions; and
- Press Senators for U.S. ratification of international HR treaties.

## Legal Advocacy

Lawyers play an important role in advocating from a HR framework. Not only can they assist in policy analysis and development, but can also support the legal responsibilities of local, state, and the federal governments in response to human rights. Lawyers can also use their skills to assist in organizing, educating, and documenting human rights violations and successes. Finally, lawyers can use international human right law to help interpret U.S. law. Strategies include:

- Create human rights training programs for lawyers;
- Begin dialoguing with judges who are interested in human rights;
- Work with state bar associations to create a body of knowledge locally on the HR Framework;
- Develop a long-term strategy and choose cases to help build precedents in applying international human rights law in the U.S.;
- Explore key legal issues and potential causes of action from a HR framework;
- Build coalitions and networks with community groups and other grassroots organizations doing human rights work; and
- Pressure the U.S. government to remove the reservations to the treaties passed, and encourage meaningful ratification of the treaties.

## Human Rights Scholarship

It is important to continue developing and expanding the theoretical and activist scholarship on human rights work. Some of the key issues in this arena include strengthening the relationship between academia and the movements; the marginalization of human rights scholarship with academic circles, and

the resistance to cross disciplinary work that human rights scholarship often encounters. In spite of these challenges, continuing to develop the knowledge and writing down the knowledge that is developed is crucial to continuing to expand the efforts and movement to expand human rights. Some strategies include:

- Pressure academic institutions to accept non-academic human rights scholars and activists;
- Change models of pedagogy to make organizing part of academic training;
- Organize multi-disciplinary meetings focusing on specific cases studies of human right work and encourage a bridging of the “theory/practice” divide; and
- Host academic conferences focused on applying human rights in the U.S.

*Something Inside so Strong* provides an accessible but relatively comprehensive overview of the Human Rights Framework and the applications for U.S. advocacy and justice work.