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6025. Globalization and its Impact on Human Dignity and Human Rights

*What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them
Yet you have made them a little lower than God [or divine beings, or angels],
and crowned them with glory and honor.*

—Psalm 8:4-5 NRSV

Human rights are what make us human. They are the principles by which we create the sacred home for human dignity. Human rights are what reason requires and conscience commands.

—Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General

Our Globalized World

In an age of globalization, the struggle for human rights has become more complex and challenging. While protections for human rights are increasingly passed by governments and international bodies like the United Nations, grave threats to and gross violations of human rights are also on the rise.

The world's financial capital is ever more integrated, and wealth is ever more centralized in the hands of financial elites and institutions. Realizing social and economic rights, especially eradicating hunger and unemployment, is becoming increasingly difficult. Bringing conflicts to a just and durable resolution is more daunting with the increased capacity of individuals, governments and their military forces, and other groups, including paramilitary, to organize and unleash violence. These groups have access to more sophisticated communications technology and more deadly instruments of war than ever before.

Ending violence and wars, and checking impunity and disregard for international human rights and humanitarian laws, will require more than political will and moral courage. Concrete programs and mechanisms are needed to realize the totality of human rights—civil, political, social, economic, and cultural.

Our Christian tradition shows us an alternative to globalization. It is a "counter-globalization" that empowers God's people to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly" (Micah 6:8b) with God. What must be globalized is a culture of peace that institutes peace with justice in ways that are visible and tangible in the lives of peoples and communities. We are challenged to globalize an ethos that respects and protects human life with human rights so that all "may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b) as God intends.

Biblical and Theological Grounding

The psalmist exclaims: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them Yet you have made them a little lower than God" [or divine beings, or angels], and crowned them with glory and honor." (Psalm 8:4-5). Every human being bears the likeness of our



just, gracious, and loving God: “God created human beings, in the image of God they were created; male and female were created” (Genesis 1:27, adapted).

Human dignity is the foundation of all human rights. It is inherent and inborn. Human dignity is the image of God in each human being. Human dignity is the sum total of all human rights. We protect human dignity with human rights. Human rights are the building blocks of human dignity. They are indivisible and interdependent. It is God’s gift of love for everyone. Human rights, being the expression of the wholeness and fullness of human dignity, are indivisible and interdependent.

Human rights—expressed in affirmations and declarations, treaties and conventions, laws and statutes—are products of struggles to affirm and fulfill the wholeness and fullness of life. As peoples and governments increase the catalogue of rights that are recognized and protected, protections not only increase, but so do our approximation of and striving for human dignity. To be engaged in the human rights struggle is to accept God’s gift of love in Jesus Christ who has come to affirm all God’s people as they are—as individuals and people in community together.

But human rights do not affect humanity alone. The integrity of God’s creation is possible only with the affirmation of both the dignity of all persons and the integrity of the whole ecological order. Human rights cannot be enjoyed in an environment of pillage and decay.

Human dignity is the common bond that affirms the individuality of each human being while celebrating the plurality and variety of communities to which each belongs, including the diverse economic, political, religious, ideological, racial, class, gender, and ethnic identities each represents.

The United Methodist Church and Human Rights

The United Methodist Church’s Social Principles provide foundational understanding of rights and freedoms. These principles affirm both the sovereignty of God over all of creation and the duties and responsibilities of each person for the natural and nurturing world, and the social, economic, political, and world communities. At their spring 1998 meeting, and on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Council of Bishops called on “United Methodists across the connection worldwide [to] join in . . . safeguarding the worth and dignity of peoples and the integrity and sacredness of all of God’s creation.”

“As Christians,” the bishops said, “loving our God and loving our neighbor together advance the imperatives of human rights. Human rights enable us to express in concrete ways our love for one another by assuring that each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened.”

Human rights are safeguards of peoples and communities against violations of their rights and infringements on their freedoms. To this end, the General Conference called on “all governments to accept their obligation to uphold human rights by refraining from repression, torture, and violence against any person” and “to ratify and implement international conventions, covenants, and protocols addressing human rights in the context of justice and peace” (§ 164, Social Principles).

Arenas for Human Rights Work

An emerging feature of the new global context is the rise and increasing participation of peoples’ and citizens’ organizations in leading the establishment of just, participatory, and sustainable communities. This new context must be celebrated; it is one venue of counter-globalization. The so-called “civil society,” especially through nongovernmental organizations, is increasingly present in forums where grassroots advocacy and global governance are at stake. Through the presence of

nongovernmental organizations in all levels of governance—local, national, regional, global—globalization is challenged in multiple ways, from the local and the global. Human rights monitors, themselves a threatened group of defenders, have increased in the ranks of civil society. As a new millennium is ushered in, we lift the following arenas for human rights work to all United Methodists worldwide, and to the attention of all general agencies, particularly the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church.

A. Children's Rights and Well-Being: Receiving the Reign of God as a Little Child

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14).

The Social Principles strongly support children and children's rights. It says: “Once considered the property of their parents, children are now acknowledged to be full human beings in their own right, but beings to whom adults and society in general have special obligations. All children have the right to quality education. . . . Moreover, children have the rights to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and emotional well-being as do adults, and these rights we affirm as theirs regardless of actions or inaction of their parents or guardians. In particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse” (§ 162C).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child expresses this same concern for the child. The convention extends the basic concept of protection to the level of human rights. The Convention affirms that the rights described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are rights that belong also to children.

Children's rights are human rights. United Methodists worldwide must continue to urge their governments to implement the convention, and for the United States to ratify it.

The proliferation of and easy access to small arms have a devastating effect on our children. Children must never have access to or opportunity to use guns. Both the children killed and those wounded by small arms are victims of a culture of violence which denies human rights, snuffs out precious human life, and debases human dignity.

The United Methodist Church is called to join the international campaign to prevent the proliferation and unlawful use of small arms. The campaign raises our awareness of the need for emergency measures to save the lives of children, in our schools, in inner cities, and in many parts of the world, particularly those countries and communities that are highly militarized and governed by national security laws.

Children in situations of conflict and war test our commitment to the future. There is something wrong in our sense of the moral when children are put in harm's way. No boy or girl must be sent to the front lines of war, battles, and conflict. The field of play must not be replaced with the field of combat. War games are not child games. Playgrounds are for children; battlegrounds are not.

The United Methodist Church must oppose the recruitment and use of child soldiers. We must support the call of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (Resolution 1999/80) to raise the current minimum age limit set by Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the recruitment into the armed forces or participation of any person in armed conflicts from 15 to 18. The General Conference of the International Labor Organization (ILO), through Convention 182 (1999), prohibits forced or compulsory recruitment of children under the age of 18 for use in armed conflict. ILO also recommends (Recommendation 190) that governments prohibit the use, procur-

ing or offering of a child for activities which involve the unlawful carrying or use of firearms or other weapons.

B. Migrant Workers: Entertaining Angels Unawares

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:1-2).

A complex of factors—civil conflicts, human rights abuse, extreme poverty, and misguided development schemes—have produced in many countries around the world an unprecedented number of migrant workers and people looking for jobs beyond their national borders.

While globalization heralded the swift movement of capital across national borders, the movement of laborers seeking work in richer countries of the world has been slow and increasingly restricted. Transnational corporations have moved to poor countries where labor is much cheaper and workers’ organizing is either weak, suppressed, or altogether banned.

The underlying causes of migration are twofold: first, economic competition which forces industrial economies to hire cheap labor in order to remain competitive in the global market, and second, to resolve structural imbalances in the local labor force on the part of the labor-sending countries.

Migrant workers continue to be discriminated against and abused, especially those who are undocumented in their host countries. Women migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation especially when they work in gender-specific jobs that consign them to various forms of sexual, domestic, and menial work. Studies show that the majority of migrants are uprooted because of the lack of jobs at home, or because jobs pay extremely low wages. While globalization has spawned more capital and spurred greater production, workers’ wages have been kept low and below a livable wage even in those countries whose governments have a prescribed minimum wage.

Migrants’ rights are human rights. It is tragic when migrants, whose rights have already been violated in their home countries, find their human rights also violated in their foreign host countries. Invoking host country laws rarely works in their favor. United Methodists should urge their governments to ratify and implement the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. This Convention will be an instrument to protect, secure, and ensure the human rights of migrant workers and their families.

C. Indigenous Peoples: Toward Self-Determination

“But they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:4).

Globalization threatens the human rights of indigenous peoples, including their aspirations for self-determination. Exploration and colonization have led to rapid appropriation of indigenous peoples’ lands and natural resources, and the destruction of their sciences, ideas, arts, and cultures.

Indigenous peoples struggle against the industries encroaching on their sacred lands. They are fighting for sovereignty over their ancestral lands in the face of systematic campaigns of extermination. They face population transfers, forced relocation, and assimilation, often because of the aggressive development interests of big business.

Indigenous peoples demand respect of their right to their culture, spirituality, language, tradition, forms of organization, ways of knowing and doing, and their intellectual properties. Indeed, it will

be hard for indigenous peoples all over the world to exercise their fundamental human rights as distinct nations, societies, and peoples without the ability to control the knowledge they have inherited from their ancestors.

The 1992 General Conference urged The United Methodist Church to “place itself at the vanguard of the efforts to undo and correct the injustices and the misunderstandings of the last 500 years” of colonialism. It raised the church’s awareness of “the shameful stealing of the Native’s land and other goods and the cruel destruction of their culture, arts, religion, the environment, and other living things on which their lives depended.”

Religious intolerance is one form of human rights violation perpetrated on indigenous peoples around the world. The experience of forced relocation by the Dineh (Navajo) of Black Mesa in Arizona is an example of religious intolerance. The Dineh consider their ancestral lands as sacred. For them, to be uprooted is to be exterminated as a people. Big mining companies have been responsible in the destruction of livelihood, sacred sites, and ancestral homelands of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples’ rights are human rights. United Methodists are urged to support the ongoing drafting and the eventual adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. United Methodists must also support the establishment of a Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Populations, both within the aegis of the United Nations. We must also continue support for the work and the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance.

D. Impunity: The Case for an International Criminal Court

“You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:15).

A culture of peace must be globalized today. The prevailing culture of repression, oppression, and exploitation has no place in this culture of peace. Only the pursuit of a just peace, which includes the search for truth and justice for victims, will bring about forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing in many rural villages, towns, cities, nations, and regions of the world that are scarred by conflict and war.

The establishment of an International Criminal Court (ICC), as provided for in a treaty adopted in Rome in June 1998 by the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, provides an important step in ending impunity. This court will hear cases against war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity, and crimes of aggression. Faith-based and religious groups, working together with the Coalition for an International Criminal Court (CICC), identified several moral and ethical imperatives and included these in a draft preamble they offered the Rome Conference to consider. The draft stated: “Desirous that the quest for justice includes retributive justice whose purpose is the prosecution and punishment of offenders while insuring the rights of the accused to fair trials, restorative justice whose purpose is that of reparation, restitution and rehabilitation for the victims, and redemptive justice which must be seen as the enablement of communities to deal with the truths of the past in ways which will allow and enable social reconstruction and reconciliation, and the ending of cycles of violence; “Recognizing that adjudication of crimes of international concerns that have transcended national boundaries are often beyond the scope of national criminal justice systems, and that crimes whose immediate victims have occurred within national contexts are often beyond the competence or ability of national judicial systems; Noting the basic principles of justice for victims of crime and the abuse of power approved by the United Nations General Assembly; therefore, establish the International Criminal Court . . .”

As Pope John Paul II stated, “A positive sign of the growing will of the States to acknowledge their responsibility in the protection of the victims of [crimes against humanity], and their commitment to prevent them, is the recent initiative of the Diplomatic Conference of the United Nations that distinctly adopted the Statute for an International Criminal Court that will assess the guilt and punish those responsible of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.”

United Methodists all over the world must urge all governments, especially the United States of America, to sign and ratify the treaty to establish the court. The work of the CICC and the Washington Working Group on the International Criminal Court (which focuses on getting the US to ratify the treaty) must be supported. In their support, United Methodists must preserve and strengthen the unprecedented provisions of the Rome Statute calling for an end to impunity for crimes committed against women and children. Also, the ancestral and sacred sites of indigenous peoples must be included in the Court’s definition of protected sites.

E. Religious Liberty: The Case Against Intolerance

Religious liberty forms part of the pantheon of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion: this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance” (Art. 18). Religious liberty, according to The United Methodist Church, includes the belief that “it is the right of a person to be allowed to follow the call of conscience when it becomes impossible to live by both the dictates of the State and the decisions of faith” (Religious Liberty, 1996 Book of Resolutions, p. 571).

Religious liberty continues to be denied and violated in many parts of the world. Concerns about religious persecution have been raised by almost every religious group especially in places where one particular religion or belief is in a minority position. Religious intolerance, of both the established as well as “nontraditional” religions, is growing both in new and established democracies. The rise in religious extremism, of all sorts, and from all of the established and nontraditional religions, have been convenient pretexts for the curtailment of the exercise of religious liberty by many governments around the world.

The United Methodist Church must continue to foster further cooperation among spiritual, religious, and ecumenical bodies for the protection of religious freedom and belief. It must enter into healthy dialogues with peoples of differing faiths and ideologies, including Native and indigenous peoples, in the search for shared spiritual, social, and ethical principles that engender peace and justice.

The United Methodist Church is already committed to uphold the minimum standards of the right of belief that are contained in the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 25, 1981. This declaration enunciates that “freedom of religion and belief should also contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship between peoples and to the elimination of ideologies or practices of colonialism and racial discrimination.”

United Methodists must urge their governments and encourage civil society to enter into dialogues about racism and discrimination and resolve to address especially those concerns that have religious bases. The United Methodist Church must also support and participate in the World Conference on Racism and Discrimination in 2001 organized by the United Nations.

F. Peace and Peace-building: The Case for a Culture of Peace

“[God] shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Micah 4:3).

In this era of globalization, the icons of war are more prominent and the arsenal of killing machines is more lethal than ever before. Our images of peace and the implements that make for a just peace most often are stymied by these icons and arsenals.

The resolution of conflicts and the establishment of a just and durable peace proceed from a just and liberating practice of governance on all levels of life—local and global. Just governance thrives not on wars and rumors of wars, but in the advancement of a world order that protects human rights, develops sustainable communities, cultivates a culture of peace, empowers people and their associations, and promotes a just and participatory democracy. It is imperative for human rights to be the foundational principle for a just and durable peace. The United Methodist Church must participate in building communities that prioritize the eradication of poverty and the elimination of hunger; the ending of wars and the resolution of conflicts; and the overcoming of ignorance, curing of diseases, and healing of enmities. The United Nations remains the single most important international institution to achieve these ends. The United Methodist Church must continue to support the United Nations. Our participation in its many activities allows us to participate in making it a responsible and effective global force in peacemaking and human rights.

The United Methodist Church must also support The Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century. This agenda, produced by a historic conference in The Hague in May of 1999, and encompassing fifty areas of concern with:

1. root causes of war and the culture of peace;
2. international humanitarian and human rights law and institutions;
3. the prevention, resolution, and transformation of violent conflict; and
4. disarmament and human security.

The United Methodist Church must also support the Pillars of Peace for the 21st Century, written as a policy statement in support of the United Nations for the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. The seven pillars state that peace rooted in justice requires:

1. increased political collaboration and accountability among governments within the United Nations system, among regional bodies, governments, local authorities, people’s organizations, and global economic structures to seek the common good and equality for all;
2. increased moral, ethical, and legal accountability at all levels from governments, financial institutions, multilateral organizations, transnational corporations, and all other economic actors to seek a just, participatory, and sustainable economic order for the welfare and well-being of all people and all creation;
3. a comprehensive international legal system, capable of change as conditions require, in order to prevent and resolve conflicts, to protect rights, to hold accountable those who disturb peace and violate international law, and to provide fair and effective review and enforcement mechanisms;

4. the participation of vulnerable and marginalized groups, seeking to promote justice and peace, in those mechanisms capable of redressing the causes and consequences of injustice and oppression;
5. the nurturing of a culture of peace in homes, communities, religious institutions, and nations across the world, including the use of nonviolent means of resolving conflict, appropriate systems of common security, and the end of the unrestrained production, sale, and use of weapons world-wide;
6. respect for the inherent dignity of all persons and the recognition, protection, and implementation of the principles of the International Bill of Human Rights so that communities and individuals may claim and enjoy their universal, indivisible, and inalienable rights; and
7. a commitment to the long-term sustainability of the means of life, and profound reorientation of economic systems and individual lifestyles to support ecological justice for human communities in harmony with the whole of creation.

The United Methodist Church must also continue its support for the campaign to ban land mines by urging all governments to ratify and implement the landmine ban treaty which prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of antipersonnel land mines. This treaty also calls on parties to increase mine clearance and victim assistance efforts around the world.

United Methodists must also urge their governments to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Counterglobalization happens when we ban land mines, abolish nuclear weapons, and prevent wars from happening.

G. Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights: That the Hungry May Be Filled

“When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind” (Luke 14:13).

The Lord our God commanded us “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly.” Justice, kindness, and humility underscore society’s obligations to its people. But even with the indivisibility of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, global hunger and poverty challenge our priorities. It is a challenge that confronts and addresses our concern for lifting the poor and marginalized among us. In this era of globalization, poverty is defined as the inability of a human being to take advantage of global and market opportunities that are supposed to be booming and soaring. This globalization process deifies the market even as it commodifies the earth and its resources, if not even people themselves who become pawns to economic production. One’s worth and dignity in this globalization process is measured by one’s ability to contribute to the gains of the market.

But gain or loss, in this era of globalization, it is the poor, the marginalized, and the vulnerable who suffer from price increases, reductions in government support for needed social and environmental programs, business disruptions, higher unemployment levels, and increased human rights violations.

The sudden devaluation and large outflow of capital from countries such as recent ones in Mexico, Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea resulted in severe economic downturns, political instability, widespread social turmoil, job loss, and human suffering. The proposal by Professor James Tobin, Nobel laureate in economics, to levy taxes on cross-border speculative financial and currency exchange transactions deserves our support. The so-called “Tobin Tax” aims to:

1. shrink the volume of the currency market;

2. help to restore national control of currency; and
3. generate sizable revenue that would provide resources urgently needed to wipe out extreme poverty.

The indivisibility of human rights underscores the understanding that freedom is hollow without food, that justice without jobs is like a clanging cymbal, and that liberty is a sham when people do not have land to inhabit and farm. The right to food and the right to employment are fundamental economic human rights. Societies become peaceful when the demands of justice are met. Justice becomes not only a dream but a reality when implements of war give way to implements of peace. Food and jobs, also, are implements of peace. Would that indeed, at the end of the day, no child, no woman, and no one, goes to bed with an empty stomach.

United Methodists must continue to urge their governments to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and for these governments to make these rights a reality.

We also urge United Methodists worldwide to call on their governments to implement the Millennium Development Compact. Adopted as part of the UN Millennium Declaration in 2000 at the largest-ever gathering at the United Nations of Heads of State, these government leaders pledged together to eradicate poverty, promote human dignity and equality, and achieve peace, democracy, and environmental sustainability.

The compact declared eight goals (known as the Millennium Development Goals) with specific targets to which governments have pledged to implement by the year 2015. These goals include: 1) eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, 2) achieving universal primary education, 3) promoting gender equality and empowering women, 4) reducing child mortality, 5) improving maternal health, 6) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, 7) ensuring environmental sustainability, and 8) developing a global partnership for development.

In this era of globalization—where profit and profit making at the expense of the needs and welfare of the poor and the vulnerable, and where unbridled pursuit of wealth and power have trampled upon and denied human rights of peoples—peace rooted in God’s justice brings about the true globalization that will heal the wounds and scars of wars and conflict peoples and nations have engaged with each other. Peace rooted in God’s justice will help bring about forgiveness and wholeness for all God’s people and the whole of creation. God’s reign on earth, as it is in heaven, is, in the end, the true globalization we must long and work for.

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Resolution #309, 2004 Book of Resolutions

Resolution #289, 2000 Book of Resolutions

See Social Principles, ¶ 165.