

AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition

Helping Your Scientific Society Promote Human Rights

(March 2011)

Contents:	Page
Introduction	1
Science & Human Rights: Making the Connection	2
How to Get Started	4
Scientific Associations' Current Involvement in Human Rights	5
About the Coalition	7
Resources	8
Human Rights: A Basic Overview	12

Introduction

Scientific associations are dedicated to the service of their members and the public. We believe that engagement in human rights activities will provide scientific associations an opportunity to meet their responsibilities to both groups. Indeed, many scientific associations already have incorporated human rights into their work. We also believe that scientific associations have valuable experience to share in setting up and sustaining human rights programs. For these reasons, we have developed this booklet for scientific associations. The purpose of the booklet is to build the commitment and capacity of scientific associations to engage meaningfully in human rights advocacy, including the application of their discipline's tools and techniques to the realization of human rights.

The booklet first provides basic information about the relationship of human rights to the scientific enterprise, including a comprehensive set of reasons for scientists to be involved in human rights. Then some recommendations for first steps that scientific associations may take are provided, followed by some specific examples of the range of human rights-related activities in which scientific associations are currently engaged. The next section provides information about the Science and Human Rights Coalition (SHRC). A resources section provides information that will be useful to scientific associations with their many audiences, including leadership, members, and students. Lastly, booklet provides a basic overview on human rights.

This booklet was initiated by the Service to the Scientific Community Working Group of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition. We want to acknowledge the contribution of Mona Younis and Jessica Wyndham, AAAS Science and Human Rights Program staff, who produced the first draft, Lee Herring, former working group Co-Chair, and the members of the Working Group, the co-chairs of the other Coalition Working Groups, our co-workers at the American Psychological Association (APA) and American Sociological Association (ASA), and the Coalition steering committee who provided us with comments on the draft. Alyson Reed, Linguistic Society of America, provided crucial editing and rewriting to respond to feedback.

Clinton Anderson (APA) and Margaret Vitullo (ASA), Co-Chairs
AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition
Service to the Scientific Community Working Group

Science & Human Rights: Making the Connection

The relationship between human rights¹ and the scientific enterprise is one of long standing.

First, scientists require the same rights to health and education, freedom from arbitrary detention and exile, the right to equality before the law, and all the other inalienable rights essential to human life that all people do.

Second, in order for scientific inquiry to flourish, there must be basic freedoms and rights in place for the scientists pursuing their research.

Third, in order for human rights to flourish, the benefits of scientific inquiry must be made available to all the world's peoples. This right is articulated in Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Upholding this right, at a minimum, means:

- Making scientific benefits (e.g., medicines, communication technologies and renewable energy) accessible to all sectors of society;
- Identifying funding and research priorities that reflect societies' needs;
- Ensuring quality science education at all levels;
- Removing barriers to scientific freedom; and
- Encouraging international cooperation and the free flow of knowledge.

Having received little attention by either the human rights or scientific communities, much work still needs to be done to conceptualize and give practical meaning to the right to enjoy the benefits of science. What is clear, however, is that this right has the potential to make a significant contribution to science policy and practice.

Fourth, while the primary responsibility for the realization of human rights falls on governments, individuals as well as private corporations and non-governmental actors, including scientists and scientific associations, have general responsibilities toward their community at large and, at a minimum, must respect the human rights of others.

However, going beyond these general human obligations, scientists, both individually and collectively, generally share a strong sense of responsibility regarding the health and well-being of people and the planet. As concerned members of the human community, scientists have made vital contributions to improvements in the human condition. There are many reasons for viewing those responsibilities in terms of human rights, including:

- **Human rights are necessary in order for scientists to pursue and disseminate their research, resulting in maximum benefit to the public.** Many of the core principles of human rights, such as freedoms of opinion, expression, association, communication, and movement are intrinsic values to the scientific enterprise and

¹ See the last section of the booklet for a brief review of basic human rights definitions and historical background.

are necessary for science to advance. Scientists doing research and educating others on their findings benefit when these and other human rights are respected and protected. Scientists, like anyone, require the rights to health and education, freedom from arbitrary detention and exile, the right to equality before the law, and all the other inalienable rights essential to human life.

- **For science to progress, it is essential that claims to the truth be based on empirical testing and not on ideological or political authority.** Scientific research depends at its core on the constant testing of ideas, theories, or dogmas. These two pillars of the everyday work of scientists can put them and their research at odds with autocratic and repressive governments and can make them targets in human rights atrocities.
- **Efforts to promote and support human rights need science and the skills and expertise of scientists.** Over the course of several decades, human rights practitioners have come to recognize the need for more and better tools and techniques to monitor human rights and document and report violations. Whether to strengthen traditional human rights work or tackle new capabilities, such as early-warning and prevention, science and technology have much to contribute to efforts to enhance human rights work.
- **Human rights are the closest thing disparate human societies have to a unifying global set of values.** The scientific endeavor is inherently international, requiring the sharing of knowledge and information, and collaboration across borders. Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Ireland, noted, “Human rights are the closest thing we have to a shared values system for the world. We should take every opportunity to see them not simply as shared goals, but as legal obligations and policy making tools [that] can assist those charged with making complex decisions—whether in the areas of trade, migration, the environment, security or public health.”²
- **Human rights will only be realized when scientists join other communities calling on their governments to meet their human rights obligations.** Governments will take their human rights responsibilities seriously when they encounter demands to do so from their citizens. Scientists, as a highly respected segment of societies throughout the world, can help by bringing their respected voices to global demands that governments be held to account to their human rights duties.

² Robinson, Mary. “The value of a human rights perspective in health and foreign policy.” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* [online]. 2007, v. 85, no. 3, pp. 241-242.

How to Get Started

Scientific associations have a range of options for getting involved in human rights. Later in the booklet, we provide examples of a wide range of activities in which particular associations have engaged. First we provide some suggestions for first-steps:

1. Join or attend a meeting of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition:

Through the Coalition, scientific associations have an opportunity to learn from colleagues in other societies about what they are doing in the area of human rights. The Coalition also provides opportunities to participate in working groups that tackle issues ranging from service to the human rights community, to science ethics and human rights, to welfare of scientists. You will be able to choose the working group that best matches your association's and members' interests.

More information on the Coalition is provided in a later section of the booklet.

2. Invite someone from the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition to speak at your association:

Members of the Coalition will be happy to meet with your association leadership and members to present our work and plans and answer any questions. Whether your association would like to hear from a colleague in a behavioral, life, physical, or social science, or someone from the staff, board, or executive officer of an association, the Coalition will be able to identify someone for you.

3. Hold a session on human rights at your association's annual meeting:

A great way to engage your members in thinking about human rights issues and identifying ways of contributing that are specific to your discipline is by holding a session at your annual meeting on human rights. The session could address the relevance of your scientific discipline to human rights and/or the implications of human rights for your discipline. There is no "one size fits all" approach to engagement in human rights; therefore, we encourage each community to explore what it is best suited for them to do. By presenting your members with an array of possibilities, such a session can help generate new thinking, new opportunities, and new discoveries.

4. Work with your association's governing body to establish a committee, working group, or section on human rights:

This is a high-level and long-term commitment by your association and/or discipline to contribute to human rights. By establishing a formal body (e.g., committee, working group, section), you would be seeking to ensure an ongoing commitment and investment of time and resources to advancing thinking and action on human rights. The relevant body can focus on a single issue, for example human rights standards related to your discipline's practice, or the defense of human rights of colleagues, or it can be broader to

include a range of possibilities, including a *pro bono* program that links practitioners of your discipline with human rights groups in need of science expertise.

Scientific Associations' Current Involvement in Human Rights

Since the 1970s in particular, scientific and professional societies have engaged in a number of different human rights activities:

- Acting to protect colleagues whose human rights are under threat;
- Issuing policy statements and position papers on timely human rights issues;
- Applying their tools and expertise to promote human rights;
- Providing discipline-specific volunteer services to human rights organizations;
- Awarding human rights prizes to noteworthy scientists;
- Upholding human rights in their mission statements;
- Researching human rights questions.

The following provides some examples of the current work of associations. Please consider contacting the associations listed for advice and suggestions:

A. Defending scientists' human rights:

American Chemical Society (ACS): The ACS Committee on International Activities Subcommittee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights monitors the world for violations of the human rights of scientists.

American Mathematical Society (AMS): The American Mathematical Society's Committee on the Human Rights of Mathematicians concentrates its activity on the rights of mathematicians living outside the United States. It investigates cases of rights abuse, makes polite inquiries of foreign governments and embassies, and, when appropriate, intervenes on behalf either of individuals or, occasionally, groups of individuals.

B. Adopting human rights policies or positions:

American Anthropological Association (AAA): The American Anthropological Association issued a Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights in which it affirmed "concern [...] whenever human difference is made the basis for the denial of basic human rights."

American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA): The American Industrial Hygiene Association released a statement advocating the protection of human rights for all workers.

C. Promoting the application of scientific discipline to human rights questions:

[Association of American Geographers \(AAG\)](#): The Association of American Geographers (AAG) is broadly engaged in human rights through the Science and Human Rights Coalition; work on Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights; and the development of an AAG Geography and Human Rights Clearinghouse. The AAG also actively promotes human rights throughout the discipline of geography via featured speakers and sessions at its annual meetings, and through the activities of its Ethics, Justice, and Human Rights Specialty Group and its Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Committee.

The AAAS Science and Human Rights Program, with funding from the [MacArthur Foundation](#), the [Oak Foundation](#), and the [Open Society Institute](#), is working to expand the applications of geospatial technologies to human rights issues through its Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project. Geospatial technologies include a range of modern tools, such as satellite images, geographic information systems (GIS), and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) that allow for mapping and analysis of multiple layers of data related to physical location in space. For more details, see <http://shr.aaas.org/geotech/>. Also, examples of scientific associations' completed past engagements on human rights can be found at <http://shr.aaas.org/pastprojects.htm>.

D. Setting up a volunteer program:

[American Statistical Association \(ASA\)](#): The ASA's Volunteerism Special Interest Group (SIG) is an informal initiative that has been involved in human rights activities, including planning a survey of refugee camps for Darfurians and sampling of Guatemala police records archives. SIG also led to the formation of "Statisticians Without Borders," a sub-group which seeks to provide *pro bono* statistical help, particularly in the field of international health.

[Society of Exploration Geophysicists \(SEG\)](#): SEG formed the Geophysicists Without Borders, a program that connects universities and industries with communities in need through applied geophysical projects that benefit people and the environment around the world.

E. Establishing a human rights award:

[American Physical Society \(APS\)](#): The American Physical Society is committed to the human rights of scientists. Through its Committee on International Freedom of Scientists, the APS monitors and advocates for the rights of scientists in the United States and around the globe. The Society also awards the Andrei Sakharov Prize to scientists who uphold these rights, and has acknowledged the rights of scientists through official APS statements.

[American Psychiatric Association \(APA\)](#): The [APA] Human Rights Award was established to recognize an individual and an organization whose efforts exemplify the capacity of human beings to act courageously and effectively to prevent human rights

violations, to protect others from human rights violations and their psychiatric consequences, and to help victims recover from human rights abuses.

F. Pursuing human rights research:

[*American Political Science Association \(APSA\)*](#): The Section on Human Rights was established to encourage scholarship and facilitate exchange of data and research findings on all components of human rights (e.g., civil, political, economic, social, cultural, environmental), their relationship, determinants and consequences of human rights policies, structure and influence of human rights organizations, development, implementation, impact on international conventions, and changes in the international human rights regime.

About the Coalition

The [AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition](#) is a network of scientific membership organizations that recognizes a role for science and scientists in efforts to realize human rights. Launched in January 2009, the aim of the Coalition is to facilitate communication and partnerships on human rights within and across the scientific community, and between the scientific and human rights communities.

The Coalition as a whole meets twice a year, in January and July, providing members the opportunity to discuss human rights issues central to the mission of the Coalition, participate in working meetings, and take part in training and workshops on topics at the junction of science and human rights.

The principal substantive work of the Coalition is undertaken throughout the year through the Coalition's programs.

Programs

Coalition members work both through working groups devoted to specialized areas of activity and together on an over-arching initiative. The Coalition is currently committed to the following areas of activity:

1. [Welfare of Scientists](#)
2. [Science Ethics and Human Rights](#)
3. [Service to the Scientific Community](#)
4. [Service to the Human Rights Community](#)
5. [Education and Information Resources](#)

The Coalition is also pursuing a [joint initiative](#) to help realize the human right to “the benefits of scientific progress.”

Further information about the Coalition's programs, mission and goals, membership, and organizational structure is available in the [Foundational Documents](#) and [Plan of Action \(2009-2011\)](#).

Membership

Scientific associations, professional societies, and science academies that recognize a role for science and scientists in the realization of human rights are welcome to join the Coalition as Member Organizations. Those wishing to learn more can join as Affiliated Organizations. Individual scientists can also join as Affiliated Scientists in order to learn more about science and human rights, help in introducing human rights to their scientific associations, or contribute to human rights through participation in a coalition working group. Membership is free.

Resources

There is a range of resources available for your exploration of science and human rights. The following are good places to start.

A. AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition

The Coalition seeks to become a major resource for scientific associations that want to establish or explore human rights programs or activities. **Member Organizations** are entitled to:

- Benefit from the Coalition's programs, workshops, and materials in five areas of activity and joint initiative mentioned above;
- Receive assistance in organizing science and human rights workshops, annual meeting sessions;
- Receive assistance in developing principles on science and human rights for ethics codes;
- Link with scientists and scientific associations across disciplines;
- Link with the human rights community both in the United States and abroad;
- Access human rights expertise; and
- Join the Coalition listserv and receive news and information about science and human rights developments, events, and publications.

Affiliated Organizations have the benefit of:

- Coalition support in introducing human rights to their associations;
- Participation in all Coalition activities, including area of activity working groups; and
- Joining the Coalition listserv to receive news and information about science and human rights developments, events, and publications.

B. Speakers

The AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition helps members to identify speakers for association meeting sessions and presentations. Speakers can be found who work in specific disciplines or who can address science and human rights more broadly. For help in finding a speaker(s), contact: SHRP@aaas.org.

C. Associations as a Resource

Scientific associations and professional societies that are engaged in a range of human rights activities can serve as excellent resources.

Human Rights Committees, Sections, Working Groups

- American Anthropological Association, [Committee for Human Rights](#)
- American Political Science Association, [Human Rights Section](#)
- American Psychological Association, [Committee on International Relations](#)
- American Statistical Association, [Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights](#)
- Association of American Geographers, [Ethics, Justice, and Human Rights Specialty Group](#)

Awards for Human Rights Work

- American Physical Society, [Andrei Sakharov Prize](#)
- American Political Science Association, [Human Rights Books/Dissertation awards](#)
- International Studies Association, [Human Rights Topic Paper Awards](#)
- Psychologists for Social Responsibility, [The Anthony J. Marsella Prize](#)

Declarations, Resolutions, and Statements on Human Rights

- American Anthropological Association, [Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights](#), (1999)
- American Industrial Hygiene Association, [Statement on Sweatshops In Global Economy](#), (2001)
- American Physical Society, [Human Rights Statements](#)
- American Psychological Association, [Human Rights Resolutions](#)
- American Sociological Association, [Statement on Human Rights](#), (2005)
- American Sociological Association, [Updated Statement Affirming and Expanding Commitment to Human Rights](#), (2009)
- Sociologists Without Borders, [Sociologists without Borders Human Rights Manifesto](#)

Defending the Welfare of Scientists

- American Anthropological Association
- American Historical Association

- American Philosophical Association
- American Physical Society
- American Political Science Association
- American Sociological Association
- International Studies Association

Ethics Codes Incorporating Human Rights

- American Anthropological Association, [Code of Ethics](#)
- American Political Science Association [A Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science](#) (See Part C. under "Grievance Procedures")
- American Psychological Association, [Code of Ethics](#) (See Preamble)
- American Public Health Association [Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health](#) (See "Values and Beliefs Underlying the Code")
- Association of American Geographers, [Statement on Professional Ethics](#) (See "Ethical Behavior During Field Research")
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, [Professional Oath for Mathematics Teachers](#) (See last paragraph of Oath)

D. Publications and Websites

Journals

- [Human Rights Brief](#) (American University)
- [Human Rights Quarterly](#) (Johns Hopkins University)
- [Journal of Human Rights](#) (University of Connecticut)

Websites

[AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition Resources:](#)

The Science and Human Rights Coalition Resources webpage offers a searchable database, annotated bibliography, and course syllabi addressing the connection between science and human rights. Additionally, the webpage links to previous partnerships between scientists and human rights organizations, and to over two dozen scientific societies engaged in human rights.

[AAAS Science and Human Rights Program:](#)

“The AAAS Science and Human Rights Program (SHRP) works with scientists to ‘advance science and serve society’ through human rights. The Program carries out its mission by engaging individual scientists and scientific associations in human rights efforts; applying scientific tools and technologies to enhance human rights work; bringing human rights standards to the conduct of science; and promoting the human right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress.”

[Human Rights Education Associates:](#)

“Human Rights Education Associates (HREA) is an international non-governmental organization that supports human rights learning; the training of activists and professionals; the development of educational materials and programming; and community-building through on-line technologies. HREA is dedicated to quality education and training to promote understanding, attitudes and actions to protect human rights, and to foster the development of peaceable, free and just communities.”

[University of Minnesota Human Rights Library:](#)

“[The University of Minnesota Human Rights Library](#) houses one of the largest collections of more than sixty thousand core human rights documents, including several hundred [human rights treaties](#) and other primary international human rights instruments. The site also provides access to more than four thousands [links](#) and a unique [search device](#) for multiple human rights sites. This comprehensive research tool is accessed by more than 250,000 students, scholars, educators, and human rights advocates monthly from [over 150 countries](#) around the world. Documents are available in nine languages: [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Japanese](#), [Korean](#), [Russian](#), [Spanish](#), and [Swedish](#).”

E. Some Recent Titles in Science and Human Rights

The following is not an exhaustive bibliography but simply a listing of some recent publications of relevance.

Chapman, Audrey R. “Towards an Understanding of the Right to Enjoy the Benefits of Scientific Progress and Its Applications.” *Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 8, 2009: 1-36.

[Chapman](#), Audrey R. and [Sage Russell](#). *Core Obligations: Building a Framework for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Antwerp: Intersentia, 2002.

Claude, Richard Pierre. *Science in the Service of Human Rights*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Claude, Richard Pierre. “Science and Human Rights.” *Human Rights Encyclopedia* (4 vols.). Edited by David P. Forsythe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Donders, Yvonne and Vladimir Volodin, eds. *Human Rights in Education, Science and Culture: Legal Developments and Challenges*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2007.

Murphy, Therese. *New Technologies and Human Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Rubenstein, Leonard and Mona Younis. “Scientists and Human Rights.” *Science*, 28 November 2008: 1303.

Human Rights: A Basic Overview

Human rights are fundamental entitlements needed to safeguard every person's dignity and promote the realization of each person's full potential. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights describes human rights as:³

- Universal, the birthright of every human being;
- Inalienable, they cannot be waived or taken away;
- Interdependent and interrelated, every human right is closely related to and often dependent upon the realization of other human rights;
- Entitlements of individuals and groups;
- The responsibility of governments to protect; and
- Internationally guaranteed and legally protected.

Until the end of World War II, how a government treated its citizens was largely seen as its own internal affair. With the creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 and the adoption of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) by the UN General Assembly in 1948, however, citizens' rights became the legitimate concern of all states and their inhabitants.

The [UN Charter](#) commits each member state to take action to promote "universal respect for and observance of human rights." Giving substance to this commitment is the international bill of rights. The bill of rights is comprised of the UDHR and two international treaties: the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) and the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR). Below are examples of the rights contained within each.

ICCPR

- expression
- information
- association
- fair trial
- freedom from torture

ICESCR

- health
- food
- employment
- adequate standard of living
- benefits of scientific progress

Example: The right to education must be accompanied by the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information. Similarly, the right to health is unattainable for many without the right to benefit from scientific progress.

Responsible parties

Governments have the primary responsibility, both within their own territory and in their activities overseas, to adhere to human rights standards and law. Specifically, governments must:

³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Frequently asked questions on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation*. New York and Geneva, United Nations, 2006.

- Respect - not do anything that will violate a human right;
- Protect - ensure that private actors do not violate human rights; and
- Fulfill - do what is needed to ensure human rights are enjoyed by all.

Example: Governments must respect the right of students to learn about science by not removing funding for basic science education; they must protect students against restrictions on what is taught as part of science curricula, and not allow, for example, political, religious, or moral ideology to dictate curricula and science content; and they must dedicate adequate resources for the training of qualified science teachers.

The role of governments in a context of limited resources

Governments are required, individually and through international cooperation, to implement their human rights obligations to “the maximum of their available resources.” In certain circumstances, full realization of rights is not expected, but progressive realization is required. That is, governments must take documentable and visible steps toward meeting their obligations and may not take deliberately retrogressive steps.

What is more, human rights protection does not always require an outlay of financial resources. The duty to “respect” human rights, for example, is a responsibility to refrain from violating human rights, and often would not require expenditure of financial resources. In addition, the realization of many human rights requires a reassessment of funding priorities in a way that saves money, rather than requires more spending.

Example: To remove barriers to girls’ participation in science education or to international collaboration among scientists principally requires policy changes rather than financial resources. Ensuring universal access to basic water and sanitation contributes to the realization of the right to the benefits of scientific progress, and goes toward redressing systemic discrimination while reducing health-related costs.

Enforcement

Each human rights treaty has a corresponding treaty-monitoring body. Some of these bodies have the power to hear complaints from individuals against governments that have ratified the specific treaty. Decisions of the treaty-monitoring bodies, however, are not well enforced, relying heavily on the will of governments and the strength of civil society to demand compliance with human rights laws.

Other enforcement mechanisms exist at the regional and national levels and are often more effective than the international mechanisms at ensuring compliance with human rights:

- Regional: Africa, the Americas, and Europe each have regional human rights mechanisms that include treaties and human rights courts. These courts can hear cases and issue judgments against governments that violate human rights.

- National: When governments have incorporated human rights into their domestic laws, then national courts can hear cases involving alleged human rights violations.

Ultimately, the enforcement of human rights requires the engagement and commitment of a strong civil society to demand of governments that they comply with their human rights obligations.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. It has a unique mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights. The High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal human rights official of the United Nations. The High Commissioner heads OHCHR and spearheads the United Nations' human rights efforts. The OHCHR is part of the United Nations Secretariat with its headquarters in Geneva.

Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the UN system made up of 47 States responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe. The Council was created by the UN General Assembly in 2006 with the main purpose of addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them