

An Invitation to American Sociologists

Oddly, the most powerful, richest country in the world is estranged from worldwide commitments and endeavors to advance the rights of humans – their wellbeing, dignity, and human differences.

In 1948, member states of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) “as a common standard and achievement for all peoples and all nations.” It sets forth “human rights and fundamental freedoms to which all men and women, everywhere in the world, are entitled, without any discrimination.” The first article captures its framing principle: “*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*” In detail, the UDHR proclaims the fundamental rights of all people, including political freedoms; equal recognition before the law; the right to travel; the right to education, freedom of thought and opinion; freedom to participate in governance; social security, including the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to work; freedom from discrimination; the right to food security; the rights to housing and medical care; special protections for mothers and children; and the rights to culture.

Over the years, this remarkable document has been elaborated in greater detail in two Covenants (treaties that draw from the UDHR) and in treaties protecting the rights of racial and ethnic minorities, children, women, and immigrants. Additionally, there are scores of declarations dealing with indigenous rights, language rights, rights of the disabled, rights to develop, and others, as well as a body of international, humanitarian law, such as the prohibition of torture. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has promulgated its own standards, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has as well, most recently in its Declaration for Cultural Diversity, which affirms peoples’ rights to their culture, traditions, and language.

In recent decades, the planet has become truly interconnected, but transnational corporations and neoliberal ideologues, and imperialists and militarists have gained the upper hand. The United States, the epicenter of neoliberalism and militarism, is increasingly resented by peoples around the world.

Yet the globe is also interconnected through people themselves, in myriad and complex webs of cosmopolitan global citizenships, diaspora, solidarity movements, and in interlinking grassroots movements that center on democratization, sustainability, peace, collective enterprise, and closing the gap between the poverty of the Global South and the wealth of the Global North. Foundational in all of these myriad and complex webs are the shared principles of human rights.

Sociologists have much to offer the ‘human rights revolution,’ and much to learn from it. Investigations and research gain by multidisciplinary undertakings, international collaborations, and a human rights perspective is implicit in many sociological fields, such as race and ethnicity, gender, environmental sociology, peace studies, Third World studies, indigenous and peasant studies, and others.

Sociologists without Borders is an invitation to participate in this human rights revolution and to contribute to it.