



INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role and activities of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in protecting human rights. It discusses prominent organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Civil Rights Defenders, Global Rights, UN Watch, and the International Federation for Human Rights, highlighting their efforts to monitor violations, support local partners, and promote civil and political rights globally. The article also identifies challenges these organizations face, including repressive governments, limited resources, and widespread human rights abuses, and emphasizes the importance of collaboration, legal assistance, and innovative approaches to strengthen human rights protection worldwide.

The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1998, states in Article 1 that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms”[1]. Thus, individuals or groups engaged in activities aimed at protecting and promoting human rights may be regarded as human rights defenders. Any individual or organization that promotes and protects human rights, including non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs), can therefore be considered a human rights defender.

The documents of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the decisions of the Council of Europe also emphasize the important role of civil society institutions and NGOs in promoting and protecting human rights[2]. In addition, a number of international organizations operate globally in the field of human rights protection. Some of them are discussed below.

1.Amnesty International – Founded in 1961 in London, United Kingdom, Amnesty International is a non-governmental organization independent of any political ideology, religion, or economic interest. Today, it represents a global movement with over 10 million members. The main goal of Amnesty International is to protect and promote human rights. Its key functions include:

- Building a society where the dignity and rights of every individual are respected;

- Ensuring the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international legal instruments are implemented;
- Combating torture, unlawful detention, political persecution, and restrictions on freedom of expression[3].

Amnesty International carries out its activities based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Convention Against Torture (1984), and other international and regional treaties, including those concerning children's rights, women's rights, and migrant rights. Therefore, Amnesty International is a major human rights organization covering a broad spectrum of rights—from the release of prisoners to the protection of sexual and reproductive rights.

2. Human Rights Watch – Human Rights Watch is an independent international NGO for the protection of human rights, established in 1978. Initially called the Helsinki Watch, it was created to monitor governments in the Soviet bloc countries for compliance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords and to support civil society groups.

The organization exposed human rights violations publicly through the media, drawing international attention to abuses in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, thereby contributing to the strong democratization movements in the late 1980s.

In 1981, Americas Watch was established during the bloody civil wars in Central America, documenting local facts and investigating not only government abuses but also military crimes committed by refugee groups under international law. In the 1980s, Asia Watch (1985), Africa Watch (1988), and Middle East Watch (1989) merged to form the Watch Committees, and in 1988 the organization officially adopted the name Human Rights Watch. The organization expanded its focus to protecting the rights of women, children, refugees, and migrant workers, addressing human rights violations such as domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, and the conscription of children into armed forces[4].

Today, Human Rights Watch monitors human rights violations worldwide and prepares reports on them, employing nearly 450 experts, lawyers, journalists, and human rights defenders.

3. Civil Rights Defenders – An independent international human rights organization, originally founded in 1982 as the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. It currently operates from Stockholm, Sweden. Its main goal is to cooperate with and support human rights defenders working in the most repressive countries worldwide. The organization collaborates with defenders of civil and political rights, protecting the rights of people facing oppression in violent states[5].

The organization currently monitors repressive regions worldwide, collaborates with over 200 local partners, and focuses on innovations and sustainable changes. It also works to expand and strengthen citizens' access to justice and freedom by promoting respect for civil and political rights.

4. Global Rights – Founded in 1978 in Washington, D.C., Global Rights is an international NGO focused on human rights. In 2014, it relocated its headquarters to Nigeria and now works with local activists in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to protect citizens' rights. The organization prioritizes assisting marginalized populations and documents human rights abuses, exposing violations and providing legal support and training to communities[6].

Global Rights primarily works on interconnected issues such as women's rights, human rights security, and natural resource management.

5. UN Watch – Based in Geneva, Switzerland, UN Watch was established in 1993 by Morris B. Abram, a prominent civil rights activist and the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva. The organization is accredited as an NGO with special consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and as an associate NGO with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). Its main purpose is to “protect future generations from the scourge of war” and to promote a just world[7].

UN Watch aims to support the protection of universal human rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to monitor UN activities in accordance with its Charter.

6. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) – A global human rights NGO uniting 188 organizations with branches in 116 countries. Since 1922, it has actively participated in promoting and protecting civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The organization works collaboratively with its members, employing rapid response, investigative actions, legal protection, advocacy, and public awareness campaigns to prevent human rights violations. Its primary goal is to assist victims of human rights abuses and hold perpetrators of international crimes accountable[8].

The article highlights the activities and significance of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that protect human rights, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Civil Rights Defenders. These organizations monitor human rights violations, expose abuses, and support local partners and citizens to ensure global protection. At the same time, repressive governments, resource limitations, and widespread violations pose major challenges to their work. Through local cooperation, innovation, and legal assistance, these challenges can be mitigated, expanding the effectiveness of human rights protection worldwide.

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