

# United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR)

Organization: United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR)

Author: Adrian Jones , McMaster University

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**Description** The UNHCHR rests atop a range of United Nations (UN) bodies mandated with overseeing the protection and promotion of human rights including: conventional treaty-monitoring bodies; extra-conventional initiatives (e.g. investigators, experts, and working groups); and a growing number of field offices which provide advisory services and technical expertise for the development of national institutions and procedures. The UNHCHR exists outside of the six principal organs of the UN. The High Commissioner has primary responsibility for human rights, and reports directly to the UN Secretary-General. The High Commissioner travels worldwide to promote human rights values, and to make public appeals on human rights crises. The UNHCHR also supports various educational initiatives and administers trust funds for non-governmental organizations. On a more formalized basis, the UNHCHR provides research and administrative services to the UN Commission on Human Rights, a separate body existing under the Economic and Social Council which is one of the six principal UN organs.

Human Rights are recognized as a "fundamental purpose" in the UN Charter, and are increasingly viewed as transcending all of its work. Thus, coordination and cooperation, not only amongst UN bodies, but between them and other governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental actors, is an increasing challenge. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action provides a new "framework of planning, dialogue and cooperation" in furtherance of a more integrated and pro-active UN strategy. These imperatives were echoed in the Secretary-General's 2002 report, *Strengthening the United Nations: An Agenda for Further Change*. Overall, the UN human rights framework is concerned with the dignity, well-being, and autonomy of individual persons. That work is increasingly viewed as integral to more effective and holistic approaches to global governance which combine human rights, democracy, development, and peace and security considerations.

**Suggested Reading:** **Mingst, Karen A. and Margaret P. Karns.** 2000. Human rights. In *The United Nations in the post-cold war era*. 158-98. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

**Tandon, Yash.** 2001. Global governance and justice. In *Global governance and the United Nations system*. ed. Volker Rittberger, 203-31. New York: United Nations University Press.

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**White, Nigel D.** 2002. Human rights. In *The United Nations system: Towards international justice*. 221-44. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

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