

# AAAS Welfare of Scientists Working Group Primer on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights



*produced by the*

[American Chemical Society](#)

Office of International Activities in cooperation with the AAAS Science and Human Rights  
Coalition

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## Introduction to the Primer

This primer focuses on equipping scientific and engineering societies, as well as other scientifically-oriented organizations, with the tools to effectively develop processes and procedures to address human rights issues, particularly responding to allegations of human rights violations.

The primer has emerged out of discussions arising from the Welfare of Scientists Working Group of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Science and Human Rights Coalition. The primer was developed and drafted at the American Chemical Society (ACS) with input from members of the Science and Human Rights Coalition.

The goal of this primer is to serve as:

- A resource for scientific and engineering societies and organizations looking to begin engaging in human rights and human rights-related activities;
- A resource for scientific discipline societies and organizations already engaged in human rights work that are looking to expand upon their present activities; and
- An internal educational document for scientific and engineering societies and their members, as well as members of their respective committees on human rights or international activities, and any internal governance committee responsible for overseeing and influencing the international activities of the society.

Questions regarding the primer may be directed to the ACS' Office of International Activities at [HumanRights@acs.org](mailto:HumanRights@acs.org) or to the AAAS Program on Scientific Responsibility, Human Rights, and Law at [srhrl@aaas.org](mailto:srhrl@aaas.org).

# I. Science and Human Rights: An Introduction

## What are Human Rights?

Human rights are fundamental entitlements, guaranteed by law, inherent to all humans regardless of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or membership or any other social group, to be enjoyed on an equal and nondiscriminatory basis. They are universal and inalienable, and promote the inherent dignity of all mankind. Human rights are interdependent, interrelated, and indivisible – the realization of one right advances others, while the deprivation of one right is a detriment to all others. Human rights include civil and political rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights, and can be enjoyed on an individual and collective basis.

Examples of human rights include:

- The right to equality before the law;
- The right to freedom of expression;
- The right to work;
- The right to education; and
- The right to self-determination.

Human rights are expressed and guaranteed in a variety of ways, including domestic, regional, and international law; international human rights treaties; and other international norms and principles. According to international human rights law, governments are required to respect, protect, fulfill, and promote human rights.

## Major Human Rights Documents and Treaties

There are several core human rights documents that are commonly referenced when addressing violations of individual human rights.

In 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was drafted as a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations.” The Universal Declaration is widely accepted as the fundamental and universal basis for human rights.

The rights enshrined within the Universal Declaration are further enumerated in various legally binding international human rights treaties. By voluntarily ratifying the treaty, governments assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, protect, fulfill and promote the human rights recognized in a given treaty.

There are nine core international human rights treaties:

- [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) (1965)
- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (1966)
- [International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights](#) (1966)
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (1979)
- [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (1984)
  - [Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment: Prevention of Torture](#) (2006)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989)
  - [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#) (2000)

- [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict](#) (2000)
- [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#) (1990)
- [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#) (2006)
- [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2006)
- [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (2007)

Ratification and signatory statuses of the treaties may be found [in the UN's Treaty Collection page](#).

Of these treaties, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are the two most commonly referenced when addressing human rights issues affecting scientists and engineers, and are among the most widely ratified with over 167 states party to the ICCPR, which includes the rights to life, equality before the law, and freedom of expression among others; over 160 states are party to the ICESCR, which includes the right to education and the right to work, among others.

The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Punishment (CAT) has been ratified by over 147 states and is also relevant to the treatment of scientists and engineers.

There are provisions embedded in each of the treaties listed above that allowed for the creation of treaty-based bodies mandated to monitor state parties' compliance with their treaty obligations. For additional information on the human rights monitoring mechanisms of the UN, please see the appendix *United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms* on page 22.

Additionally, the General Assembly of the UN adopted the general resolution [Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) in 1999. In this resolution, the General Assembly reaffirms the importance of the observation of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, promotes education about human rights, and the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups to promote and protect human rights.

## Human Rights Principles Affecting Scientists and Engineers

There are several human rights principles that commonly affect scientists who are subject to human rights abuses, including:

- Freedom of Expression (UDHR Article 19; ICCPR Article 19);
- Freedom of Association (UDHR Article 20; ICCPR Article 22);
- Freedom of Movement (UDHR Article 13; ICCPR Article 12);
- Freedom from Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane and Degrading Punishment (UDHR Articles 9 & 15; ICCPR Articles 7 & 9; CAT).

While these are the principles most relevant to scientists and engineers who face human rights violations, other human rights may also be relevant depending on the specifics of each case.

## Intersections of Science and Human Rights

There are three major ways in which science and human rights intersect:

### **1. Violations of the rights of scientists and engineers, whether individually or as a group**

Scientists and engineers enjoy the same rights as all other members of society in accordance with international law. However, in many parts of the world they have been, and continue to be, targets of human rights violations because of their identity as scientists. Promoting and protecting the individual rights of scientists and engineers is the primary focus of this primer.

### **2. Science and scientific discovery conducted in the service of human rights**

Technological and scientific developments can be leveraged to assist in the realization of fundamental human rights, such as the right to food and the right to water and sanitation.

One example of science conducted in the service of human rights is green chemistry, which promotes the design, development and implementation of chemistry to minimize the use and development of substances that are hazardous to human and environmental health. Green chemists affiliated with the Global Innovation Imperatives (Gii) program at the ACS came up with recommendations to improve arsenic remediation processes from groundwater surfaces in India.

Another example of science in service to human rights is the assistance provided by Statistics Without Borders (SWB), an apolitical volunteer organization under the auspices of the American Statistical Association, that is providing pro bono statistical assistance on the design and execution of a survey in Haiti that will assess the human rights impact of the earthquake in January 2010.

### **3. The right to enjoy and benefit from scientific progress and its applications**

Both the UDHR and the ICESCR enumerate a right that falls directly under the umbrella of science and scientific discovery. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right ...to share in scientific advancement and its benefits;” and Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights promotes and protects the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications and requires states that are party to the convention to “respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity.”

Although lesser known and recognized, the promotion of these rights are critical for the protection of individual scientists to freely conduct their research and for continued innovation and discovery.

## **II. History of Organizations Promoting Scientific and Academic Freedom**

Independent organizations and scientific discipline societies have been acting to address the needs of persecuted scholars and scientists for decades, and new organizations have emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries to acknowledge the changing realities for scholars and scientists in particular.

### History of Organizations Engaging in Science and Human Rights Activities

Some organizations have been addressing the rights of scholars, and more specifically the rights of scientists, for many years. The Institute for International Education (IIE) has been supporting threatened scholars to escape persecution since 1919 when it began assisting academics and students targeted during the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

Independent organizations as well as scientific discipline societies appear to have begun addressing the human rights of individual scientists in the 1970s, as evident by the formation of the Committee of Concerned Scientists in 1972 and the American Physical Society's activities dating back to that decade.

Since that time, numerous scientific and engineering societies have been involved in a variety of human rights activities, including defending scientists' human rights, adopting human rights policies or positions, promoting the application of the scientific or engineering discipline to human rights questions. Other activities include setting up a volunteer program, establishing a human rights award, and pursuing human rights research.

Additional organizations, such as Scholars at Risk and the Network for Education and Academic Rights, emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries to build upon the existing work in supporting scholars who were targeted for persecution or had their human rights violated. Scholars at Risk partnered with IIE to establish the Scholar Rescue Fund at the Institute to provide financial support for scholars facing grave threats.

### ACS's History of Human Rights Activities and Engagement

With more than 163,000 members, ACS is the world's largest scientific society and one of the world's leading sources of authoritative scientific information. A nonprofit organization chartered by Congress, ACS is at the forefront of the evolving worldwide chemical enterprise and the premier professional home for chemists, chemical engineers and related professions around the globe.

ACS has been addressing issues of scientific freedom and human rights since the 1980's with 'refusenik' scientists in the former Soviet Union and academic dissidents in China. The frequency and trends of the Society's actions have mirrored the geopolitical context in which they have occurred. The regularity with which the Society has acted on human rights cases has also been dependent upon the engagement of the International Activities Committee (IAC). The 15-member Committee is responsible for studying and recommending appropriate Society participation and cooperation in international undertakings pertaining to chemical education, professional activities, and scientific matters of interest to chemists and chemical engineers, and coordinating its efforts with those of other organizations. The Society's human rights activities have expanded over the last 25 years to address rights violations of scientists in a variety of related disciplines predominantly located in Asia, the Middle East, the former Soviet bloc, and the United States (U.S.).

ACS initially developed its criteria for action in 1997 and in 2011 the ACS Board of Directors updated its human rights case selection criteria and procedures.

#### ACS Human Rights Case Selection Procedures

Cases acted upon by the Committee and the Society at-large must be:

1. Grounded in principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Council for Science (ICSU) Statute 5 about the Universality of Science, and the Objects of the Society;
2. Oriented toward professionally engaged chemists, chemical engineers or practitioners in closely related fields in the physical and natural sciences (such as material science, nanotechnology, biochemistry, and molecular biology);
3. Directed towards human rights and scientific mobility abridgements and issues where ACS is uniquely positioned and qualified to impact the case in a meaningful way;
4. Considered in the context of whether domestic remedies have been exhausted, unless it appears that such remedies would be ineffective or unreasonably prolonged;
5. Made based upon clear evidence and a factual description of the alleged rights violations.

#### ACS Human Rights Case Response Procedures

1. ACS members, local sections, divisions, committees, or ACS staff offices may generate a request for action when evidence of abridgement of the scientific mobility and human rights of chemists, chemical engineers, and other scientists in closely related fields is reported.
2. A request for action will be transmitted to the chair of the Committee on Professional and Member Relations (P&MR). If warranted by the evidence and consistent with ACS human rights case selection criteria, P&MR will recommend that the Society issue a statement on the matter or take such related action as may be appropriate, with signature prerogative from the ACS President, President Elect, Past President, Chair of the Board, and/or Chair of P&MR. P&MR will carry out this action under delegated authority from the Board. This policy supersedes procedures for issuing such statements put in place by previous Boards, most notably on September 7, 1997.
3. In addition, The Office of the ACS Executive Director or authorized designee will regularly monitor agencies and organizations engaged in human rights activities for evidence of abridgement of the scientific mobility and human rights of chemists, chemical engineers and other scientists in closely related fields, and make a request for action as outlined above.

The Society has primarily addressed rights violations facing individual scientists or groups of scientists through letter writing campaigns targeting both U.S. and host government officials. In some instances members of the IAC have visited countries where scientists were imprisoned and met with government officials or made phone calls to scientists' friends and families if they were unable to visit. The scope of the Society's actions have shifted in more recent years towards issuing letters of inquiry and more carefully selecting cases for action. The Society has also issued organizational position statements that have legitimized the status of human rights within the organization and affirmed the Society's commitment to human rights. The most relevant position statement has been the [Statement on Freedom of International Scientific Exchange](#), which advocates for the most open and fair exchange among scientists without limitations imposed by national or geopolitical contexts.

The Society has also engaged in other activities that, while not explicitly conducted under the framework of human rights, have human rights implications. One exceptionally pertinent



example is the Society's provision of resources on visa issues. The Society supplies its members with valuable information on the visa process in order to facilitate international travel and collaboration, and these resources, in turn, promote the freedom of movement and mobility for scientific discovery and innovation.

ACS has offered webinars meant to inform the public on how to identify appropriate and practical solutions to human rights problems facing the scientific community. These webinars demonstrated the use of chemistry to address global challenges such as access to safe water and sanitation. In 2011, ACS organized a symposium addressing the capacities, roles and responsibilities of a scientific professional society to monitor the welfare of scientists. It included the participation of a Nobel Laureate and ACS leadership who shared their perspectives on the history, needs and new strategies for addressing human rights and infringements to scientific freedom.

### III. Moving Forward: Engaging Human Rights in a Scientific Context

#### Science's Unique Contributions to the Human Rights Community

For scientific discipline societies looking to begin their human rights activities or revisit their human rights activities and priorities, there are three main actions that ought to be taken to most effectively and efficiently direct energies and resources into programs.

First, societies ought to **broadly examine the connections between their discipline focus and human rights**. Some disciplines, especially in many of the social sciences, such as anthropology or political science, may lend themselves to the study of human rights or the application of theoretical paradigms to understand and address human rights. Other disciplines, like those in the physical or natural sciences, may be more aligned with using the science of the discipline to promote other fundamental human rights.

Secondly, it is critical to determine how to **leverage the science behind the organization and the ways in which the discipline can uniquely contribute to the human rights movement**. Scientific discipline societies looking to engage in human rights activities ought to explore beyond the sole protection of individual rights and liberties to examine how their discipline and work can contribute to the human rights movement more broadly. Some disciplines, like statistics, have lent themselves to humanitarian investigations and support after natural disasters, and designed and implemented survey techniques or databases to track human rights violations. Still other disciplines have connections to different elements of human rights. Ecological and environmental justice movements often incorporate the rights of indigenous populations and the preservation of their knowledge has intrinsic ties to human rights. Regardless of the connection between the discipline and human rights, it is imperative to determine how to leverage the discipline to the fullest extent.

Finally, it is important for membership organizations to not only assess the impact of the discipline, but **the unique qualities that the organization itself and its membership bring to the human rights community**. The size, composition, or focus of an organization or its membership base may provide an organization with a unique perspective when engaging in human rights work.

#### Advancing Human Rights in Scientific Organizations

In order to further enhance the role of human rights in science, and for scientifically oriented organizations to advance human rights within their internal structure, there are a few key factors that must be addressed:

Scientific organizations should determine their **organizational priorities regarding human rights and human rights activities before beginning or expanding upon human rights endeavors**. Given the myriad of ways in which scientific discipline societies may choose to address human rights, it is critical to determine how a given society wants to address human rights. Clearly outlining priorities will enable an organization to effectively utilize its resources, including time and staff, to achieve its goals. It is critical to have a dedicated subcommittee or representatives within a committee to address human rights on a larger scale within an organization and have adequate staff resources to support human rights endeavors.

Additionally, scientific societies should continue to **engage their membership in human rights-related activities and expand their efforts to connect to diverse subsections of their members**. By incorporating more individual members into the organization's human

rights activities, its actions in support of human rights will be strengthened and the position of human rights within the organization will be heightened. If more members are aware of the organization's human rights activities and are actively involved in the discipline's efforts to engage human rights, an organization can broaden its efforts and have a larger impact, as well as lessen the burden on staff members and be more of a member-driven activity and respond to member concerns.

Scientific discipline societies also ought to **further explore areas for collaboration and connections** among each other as well as with organizations and individuals that are more traditionally aligned with the human rights community. Fostering networks and collaboration with other organizations, both scientific in nature and those that are members of the human rights community, will only strengthen the scientific human rights community and the individual actions taken by scientific societies. It is imperative that scientifically-oriented organizations engaging in human rights related activities begin to develop connections as a way to build capacity and increase the effectiveness of their human rights activities. It may be useful to formalize these relationships before undertaking collaborative projects. While not to detract from the actions taken by individual scientifically-oriented organizations on behalf of human rights, the impact of such actions could only be increased through better information and experience sharing. This factor, coupled with opportunities for unified responses or actions taken by a variety of organizations, can legitimize the actions and enhance their impact. It may be useful to develop and formalize relationships with related discipline societies and scientific organizations prior to approaching other potential collaborators outside of the scientific arena.

Scientific organizations ought to examine the potential implications of their human rights activities and the tone of their activities. While there is a moral imperative to act on behalf of individuals who have had their rights violated, there is the possibility that the tone or type of advocacy may be seen as proselytizing or promoting a particular political agenda.

## IV. Introduction to Human Rights Violations: Individual Scientists

Many scientific discipline societies and other scientifically-oriented organizations looking to begin engaging in human rights activities start by addressing individual rights violations that scientists and engineers may face.

### Types of Human Rights Violations

The major human rights treaties enshrine a variety of human rights, all of which may be threatened or abridged. Of the rights encapsulated in the major treaties, there are four types of violations that most commonly affect scientists: violations of personal welfare; restrictions on mobility; threats from third-party actors; and work place issues.

**Violations of an individual's personal welfare** tend to be the most visible and identifiable type of human rights abridgement. This type of violation is often seen as the most egregious because of the severity of the consequences, including arbitrary detention or arrest, injury, or even death. This kind of violation can be easily comprehended by both the public and the scientific community as a violation of an individual's human rights, and are thus often easier to garner support for in terms of developing action and advocacy plans.

#### Case Study: Russia

A Russian engineer was charged with high treason and divulging state secrets for co-authoring a report that documented the environmental dangers posed by abandoned nuclear submarines of the Russian Northern Fleet in 1996. The engineer issued a report on his findings and was subsequently arrested and detained. He was held in isolation without access to a lawyer or his family. Many organizations advocated on his behalf, and his treatment was ultimately improved and he was acquitted of all charges.

#### Case Study: Bangladesh

A Bengali economist was imprisoned in 2002 for 'instigating' government officials and employees to join a demonstration in Dhaka that led to the removal of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's Government from power in 1996. He was allegedly tortured while in custody. He was ultimately freed as a result of a decision by the High Court of Bangladesh.

**Restrictions on mobility** are another common type of human rights violation affecting scientists, and may often involve the U.S. in some capacity. Restrictions on mobility may encompass a variety of issues, including the confiscation of an individual's passport, or the refusal of a state to issue an entry visa. This type of violation may not seem as egregious as violations of an individual's personal welfare, but it can have a significant, detrimental effect on the advancement of science due to the international nature of research and collaboration in scientific endeavors, as well as the promotion of science education throughout the world.

#### Case Study: Cuba/U.S.

A chemist, serving as president of a scientific society, was invited to participate in an international meeting held in Puerto Rico in 2007. Despite the specific nature of his visit to Puerto Rico, and completion of appropriate visa procedures, he was denied an entry visa due to the geopolitical tension between the U.S. and Cuba.

Another type of human rights violation scientists may endure is a **threat from third party actors**. While governments tend to be the primary perpetrators in human rights violations,

rights abridgements can also be committed by third party, nongovernmental actors, such as paramilitaries and guerilla groups. In the case of violations perpetrated by third party actors the government is often unable or unwilling to provide protection or seek justice for the scientist who has been the target of the violations. Threats from third party actors may often include various forms of harassment, verbal threats of physical violence or harm, or dismissal from work.

#### Case Study: Guatemala

A Guatemalan forensic anthropologist was the target of multiple threats from third party actors. As the executive director of a forensic anthropology foundation, he and his team were carrying out exhumations of victims massacred during the counter-insurgency campaign carried out by the Guatemalan military in the 1980s. He and his family received numerous death threats in the form of threatening letters and telephone calls starting in 2002, and continuing through 2006. In addition, there was a suspicious fire at the facility where he and his team stored their equipment, documents, and occasionally the remains of individuals exhumed from mass graves. It was believed that the individuals behind the threats had ties to the military during Guatemala's civil war. Continued pressure by the global human rights community has resulted in the anthropologist's continued protection and safety.

A fourth type of rights violation that may affect scientists falls broadly into the category of workplace issues, including restrictions on publication and funding. These kinds of rights violations are not yet as widely recognized or acknowledged when addressing the nexus of science and human rights, but they may begin to play a larger role in the discussion, especially when addressing human rights of scientists in the U.S. and other Western states.

### Impetuses for Human Rights Violations

There are three primary motivators behind human rights violations that affect scientists: the scientist's research and findings; the scientist's sociopolitical beliefs, opinions, or actions; or the greater geopolitical context or diplomatic tensions of states involved in a dispute.

**The content or context of a scientist's research** is often an underlying cause for human rights abuses. Rights violations often occur when the scientist's output is viewed as possibly divulging state secrets, jeopardizing national security, or contradicting the historical narrative of a state or a group.

Human rights violations may also be **the result of a scientist's sociopolitical opinions, beliefs, or actions**, especially when they contradict the views of the government. In some nondemocratic countries scientists may be advocates for democracy and transparent governmental practices that reject and contradict the status quo. As well-educated and often well traveled members of society, scientists have prominent positions in society that make them particularly visible and vulnerable to infringements by the government or other actors should they dissent from the common or accepted sociopolitical narrative. In some cases, by targeting an outspoken and successful scientist, the group perpetrating the violation may have an effective way to intimidate and silence an entire group sharing a similar position, such as being a member of a political, religious, or ethnic minority group.

Another reason a scientist may have his or her rights violated, especially in cases where mobility is restricted, may be **diplomatic tensions or the global political climate, rather than the scientist and his or her work**. Tensions between two nations, such as the U.S. and Cuba or Iran, may affect individual scientists in a variety of capacities, including limiting their mobility regardless of the scientist's research or sociopolitical opinions. This element can be further compounded in instances where the scientist in question conducts research,

such as the case of nuclear scientists or biochemists, which could be seen as threatening to peace or security between the two nations.

## V. Responding to Human Rights Violations

### Developing a Standard Operating Procedure: Verification and Vetting Processes

All organizations and societies that engage in human rights activities must develop some kind of standard operating procedure for addressing allegations of human rights abuses and abridgements. By standardizing how an organization responds to requests for assistance, the organization's potential response may be expedited and ensure continuity in the event of staff turnover.

One of the first items that a society or organization must do in establishing their human rights procedure is **determine its criteria for action**. Some societies have very specific criteria for the types of scientists they assist and the types of rights violations that they respond to; others have more general or broad criteria for the scientists they assist; while it is up to the organization to determine how broad or strict their criteria for assistance may be, it is important to develop it prior to engaging in human rights activities. Criteria may involve the discipline of the scientist, the type of rights violation, or the location where the rights violation took place. Regardless of the parameters, it is critical for organizations, especially those that are just starting out or are revising their human rights activities, to clearly outline their priorities both for internal continuity, as well as for legitimizing and strengthening their outward face of a human rights-aware organization.

Another important element for organizations to address early on in their human rights activities is **the verification or vetting processes for determining the legitimacy of a claim and request for assistance, and what kind of monitoring procedures the organization would like to establish**. Some scientific societies gather information about cases through their own connections with scientists and government officials or receive information from individual members of the organization or from members of a related governance committee; most societies receive information about cases through trusted and reliable third-party sources such as Scholars at Risk, Committee of Concerned Scientists, or the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Program on Scientific Responsibility, Human Rights, and Law, as well as from press releases by major human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The majority of scientific discipline societies do not have the staff capacity to independently monitor for rights violations internationally. Some organizations, like the American Chemical Society, conduct independent research when they are alerted of a possible case and additionally verify the case and how it fits in to the predetermined criteria. For other organizations that may not have the staff resources or be new to engaging in the scientific human rights community, receiving information from a trusted third-party may be sufficient verification to determine whether to act upon a request for assistance.

Often times it may be difficult for organizations to proceed with a specific action on a human rights case based on a lack of inadequate or unverified information. In these instances, it may be exceedingly helpful for the organization to issue a letter of inquiry into the case to government officials at home or abroad rather than issuing an appeal or call to action. Requesting further information about a human rights case may assist an organization in determining whether further action is warranted while also alerting government officials to their knowledge and concern for specific claims of human rights abridgements.

### Types of Responses and Actions to Claims of Rights Violations

When a scientific discipline society chooses to act on claims of human rights abridgements, there are two different categories of action they may take. There are institutional or association actions – those that comes with institutional backing, from the society at-large

often with the backing of executive level staff and board members, and there are individual actions – those taken by individual members of an organization with the encouragement of the organization, but not necessarily carrying the weight of the organization behind it.

### *Institutional or Organizational Responses*

The majority of society-sponsored or sanctioned activities tend to require some kind of approval from high level staff, Committee members, or Board members, depending on the organization, its governance structure, and the type of activity in question. In many instances, it is important for the staff or offices that are promoting human rights activities to describe the value added to the organization by acting upon human rights violations. The status of human rights in an organization may be enhanced by drawing upon how the discipline interacts with human rights or by highlighting the unique contributions that the society can provide to human rights efforts. Increasing the visibility human rights within the organization staff may be an effective way to engage leadership officials in promoting human rights activities. It is also important to follow the appropriate institutional channels to get approval on actions; depending on the governance structure of an organization, different individuals in different positions may be the correct ones for providing support for any institutionally sponsored human rights activities.

There are a variety of mechanisms that an organization may take on behalf of individual scientists who have had their rights abridged, including:

- Letter writing campaigns
- Developing and distributing petitions at scientific meetings
- Holding press conferences about an individual case
- Conducting online outreach regarding human rights cases through organizational newsletters and social media such as Twitter, blogs, Facebook
- Issuing institutional policy statements
- Meeting with government officials in the U.S. and abroad
- Developing and maintaining relationships with elected officials
- Providing expert testimony
- Monitoring and documenting research interferences
- Taking legal action
- Sponsoring relevant poster presentations or symposia
- Dedicating scientific articles or presentations to a specific individual involved in a case
- Engaging partner scientific societies in-country for information gathering and advocacy development

The most common type of action that organizations take on behalf of scientists who have had their rights abridged is through letter writing campaigns. Many organizations, including scientific discipline societies and human rights organizations, have used letter writing campaigns as an effective tool to advocate for imprisoned individuals, gather more information about cases, and express concern about individual human rights cases. In the history of the American Chemical Society's human rights activities, letter writing has been primarily to express concern and gather more information about given human rights cases; given that the letters are addressed to high ranking government officials both in the U.S. and abroad, it is advisable to take a relatively neutral stance when issuing a letter and approach the subject with concern, but caution. While letter writing campaigns may seem like an impersonal response to an egregious offense, they can be effective and are relatively easy to bring together in a short period of time, which may be critical in life-or-death situations.

Tips for letter writing campaigns:



- Brevity is important. Be succinct while including all of the available and relevant facts.
- Briefly state the facts of the case that have been confirmed, or if issuing a letter inquiring into a case, refer to the facts that are available thus far.
- Cite relevant human rights principles that have been violated, including the treaties where they are enshrined. Be sure to confirm that the country where the rights violation occurred is a party to the treaty that incorporates the right.
- Express concern for the individual in the case, and encourage some kind of action such as if the individual is detained or facing trial that they receive due process of law and access to counsel of their choosing, or for additional information to be provided about a potential case.
- In international cases where the rights violation occurs abroad, it may be useful to send the letter not only to in-country officials, but also U.S. envoys or ambassadors in the country, or relevant Department of State officials here in the U.S.
- Indicate a hope for response or action by the host government; it is unlikely but important to note anyway.
- It can be helpful to track letters and responses, especially if the organization decides to send follow-up letters.

#### Other Institutional Actions:

It may also be useful for scientific discipline societies to further explore developing relationships with government officials in the U.S. and abroad. By developing channels of communication with individuals at the Department of State, for example, societies may have additional avenues for receiving information about rights violations or visa issues. By having some organizations test the waters of responsiveness at different U.S. government offices and departments, scientific discipline societies may be able to forge a path into working with these organizations.

The American Chemical Society has begun this process by taking advantage of travel by executive level individuals to increase the visibility of the Society's human rights program. In October, 2010 on the occasion of the 2010 CHEMINDIX meeting in Manama, Bahrain, ACS President, Joe Francisco, and ACS Office of International Activities Director, Bradley Miller, met with officials of the U.S. Embassy in Manama and were briefed on and discussed a particular human rights case and procedures embassy staff were following to stay current on it. While this visit required the support and interest of the President's office, it was a relatively easy way to begin to cultivate relationships and provide a face to the organization's human rights activities. This activity, like others, managed to leverage the Society's actions and activities that occurred outside of the explicit realm of human rights and reframe it as a human rights activity. It is necessary, however, to take into consideration the geopolitical climate when conducting visits, especially visits to foreign embassies within the U.S.

Other types of activities that come from the organization may not require as thorough of an approval process, such as conducting online outreach. Establishing a webpage dedicated to human rights provides important resources such as updated content about human rights cases and other news items, which can be a relatively low energy activity to promote human rights to membership.

Regardless of the type of activity undertaken by an organization, it is important that the appropriate mechanisms are utilized in establishing an organizational action so that it is branded accordingly and properly vetted through the proper institutional channels. The general process may follow steps similar to those outlined below:

- Receive information on or request for action on a particular case of human rights abridgement;
- Follow the verification and vetting processes as determined by the organization in order to assess if action should be taken;
- Present the facts of the case and outline for action to the appropriate organizational authorities, which may include but not be limited to: appropriate subcommittees, executive level staff, members of a presidential succession, and Board members; and
- Upon receiving institutional support for action, implementing the action plan.

### *Individual Responses and Actions*

Scientific membership organizations may choose to encourage individual members to act in support of human rights. These types of actions may be encouraged by the organization, but not necessarily carry the prestige or name of the organization. Individual member actions may be more informal or grassroots than those sanctioned by an organization at large. These types of actions may include:

- Letter writing campaigns;
- Developing and distributing petitions at scientific meetings;
- Conducting public protests;
- Conducting online outreach regarding human rights cases through Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and other social media outlets;
- Providing monetary support to allow the scientist(s) to continue research;
- Monitoring and documenting research interferences;
- Publishing relevant scientific articles; and
- Dedicating scientific articles and presentations to a specific case or individual.

The mechanisms for supporting or promoting individual-level human rights interventions may be considerably different than those that come from the Society or institution at-large. These mechanisms may include:

- Receiving information on or request for action on a particular case of human rights abridgement;
- Following the verification and vetting processes as determined by the organization;
- Providing information and resources for different kinds of individual action such as sample letters, draft petitions, and links to organizations that are supporting a given case; and
- Determining appropriate staff contacts if necessary for the action or activity.

## VI. Sustaining Momentum: Developing Membership Engagement and Investment

One of the most critical steps in developing and maintaining a human rights program is developing membership engagement and investment. Garnering support from individual members within a membership-based discipline society can provide further validation to the institution for supporting human rights activities.

Education is a critical component of encouraging membership investment and engagement; even organizations that are actively involved in promoting human rights and conducting human rights activities may have their efforts stymied or minimized because of a lack of awareness about their activities. Societies may take an assortment of approaches to heighten awareness of their activities and educate their members about the importance of human rights within the discipline, including:

- Providing annual meeting sessions about human rights;
- Developing multimedia educational tools such as webinars and podcasts;
- Developing and publishing written pieces such as articles for institutional newsletters or blog posts;
- Providing opportunities for members to apply their knowledge and skills to human rights projects;
- Promoting the development of a robust literature about the connections between science, engineering, and human rights through scholarly journals; and
- Providing additional information about human rights and resources outside of the organization, including links to human rights blogs, links to major human rights organizations and scientifically-oriented human rights groups and listservs.

Many of these kinds of educational tools are relatively low investment in terms of time and resources; while they may seem to be rather passive attempts, providing information is one of the critical first steps to develop engagement – if members are unaware of the activities that an organization is undertaking, or unaware of the ways in which human rights are implicated within the discipline, it is harder to engage them.

Another way to develop membership investment in human rights is to translate activities the organization and individual members or subgroups of members already engage in into a human rights framework. For example, the American Chemical Society's active support in addressing visa issues and providing resources on securing visas can be framed as an activity promoting human rights. Drawing implicit connections between interests and activities of members with different elements of human rights can assist in cultivating members' interest in contributing to an organization's human rights activities. It may also be useful to reach out to different subsections of the organization's membership to diversify those who are engaged in their activities such as recruiting younger members who may already have more of a social justice slant to their approach to science. The American Chemical Society produced a webinar in October 2011 on access to water, and the role that chemistry can have in addressing access to clean water and sanitation.

Finally, if an organization chooses to promote the science of the discipline as a way to realize fundamental human rights, it may be able to draw more members into its human rights activities because they are able to see the direct impact that their discipline and perhaps even their particular focus can have on human rights, particularly in improving the lives of

others. This may be especially relevant for organizations with focuses in the natural and physical sciences where the connection to human rights may seem more obscure to some individual members, and be a way to easily draw additional members into the organization's human rights efforts.

## VII. Appendices: UN Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms

There are two broad categories of mechanisms that the UN has to monitor human rights in signatory states where treaties have been ratified: Charter-based bodies and treaty-based bodies.

There are three charter-based bodies charged with monitoring human rights:

- [Human Rights Council](#), an inter-governmental body within the UN that is charged with strengthening both the promotion and protection of human rights globally;
- [Universal Periodic Review](#), a new process that involves a review of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states once every four years in a state driven process that provides each state the opportunity to state how it has improved its human rights situation and fulfilled its obligations to all human rights treaties it is a party to; and
- [Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council](#), which is a series of mechanisms addressing either the human rights situation in a specific country or thematic issues across the globe.

In addition to the three charter-based bodies, there are ten human rights treaty bodies that monitor the implementation of the core international human rights treaties:

- [Human Rights Committee \(ICCPR\)](#)
- [Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights \(CESCR\)](#)
- [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination \(CERD\)](#)
- [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)
- [Committee against Torture \(CAT\)](#)
- [Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture \(SPT\)](#)
- [Committee on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#)
- [Committee on Migrant Workers \(CMW\)](#)
- [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#)
- [Committee on Enforced Disappearance \(CED\)](#)

Please visit the UN websites linked above for further information into the human rights monitoring and reporting processes.

## Selection of Human Rights Resources

### *Science and Human Rights Resources:*

[AAAS Science and Human Rights Program](#)  
[Committee of Concerned Scientists](#)  
[National Academies Committee on Human Rights](#)  
[Network for Education and Academic Rights](#)  
[Scholar Rescue Fund](#)  
[Scholars at Risk](#)

### *UN Resources:*

[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)  
[International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)  
[International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights](#)  
[Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, and Degrading Punishment](#)  
[Treaty Ratification Status](#)

### *Selection of Scientific Discipline Societies Engaged in Human Rights Activities:*

[American Anthropological Association](#)  
[American Chemical Society](#)  
[American Physical Society](#)  
[American Mathematical Society](#)  
[American Sociological Association](#)  
[American Statistical Association](#)  
[Association of American Geographers](#)  
  
[International Council for Science](#)

### *Human Rights Organizations:*

[Amnesty International](#)  
[Human Rights Watch](#)  
[Human Rights First](#)  
[Physicians for Human Rights](#)  
[Scholars at Risk](#)