

## THE JANUS FACE OF JUSTICE: HUMAN RIGHTS DEVOURING THEMSELVES

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### ABSTRACT

*Imagine a powerful tool that can help people live better lives, but sometimes causes problems when used wrongly. That's what human rights are like in today's world. This paper explores the paradoxical nature of this noble concept which was meant to protect everyone and has become a double-edged sword, capable of both emancipation and exploitation. It starts by asking why, even though we've had these rights for over seven decades, many people still don't enjoy them fully. Drawing on diverse scholarly perspectives, it examines why the UDHR's implementation continues to falter in a world rife with violations and selective enforcement. It looks at how different cultures view these rights differently, and how countries sometimes use human rights talk to gain power over others. It analysis delves into how different cultures view these rights differently, and how countries sometimes use human rights talk to gain power over others. It scrutinise the politicisation of human rights in international relations, where noble ideals often collide with real politics. The paper also confronts emerging challenges posed by rapid technological advancements, from mass surveillance to algorithmic bias, which reshape the human rights landscape in unprecedented ways. The findings suggest that while human rights remain a powerful moral framework, their effectiveness hinges on our ability to navigate complex geopolitical realities and embrace more inclusive, pluralistic approaches. This critical examination serves as a call to action, urging a reimagining of human rights for the 21st century. By acknowledging both the transformative potential and the limitations of human rights, I believe that human rights are still very important, but we need to be smart about how we use them to create a fairer world for all rather than misusing or manipulating it.*

**Keywords:** UDHR; Implementation Challenges; Cultural Relativism; Universality; Enforcement Mechanisms; Ethical Dilemmas.

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## Introduction

The concept of human rights, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, stands as one of the most significant moral and legal achievements of the 20th century. It represents a global consensus on the fundamental dignity and worth of every human being, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or any other status. However, more than seven decades after its adoption, the implementation and effectiveness of the UDHR remain contentious issues in international relations and domestic politics. This paper examines human rights' complex and often paradoxical nature as a 'double-edged sword', exploring its transformative potential and its limitations in practice. The metaphor of a double-edged sword aptly captures the dual nature of human rights discourse and practice. On one hand, human rights provide a powerful moral and legal framework for protecting individuals from abuses of power and promoting social justice. On the other hand, the concept has been criticised for its Western-centric origins, its potential for misuse in international politics, and its uneven application across different cultural and political contexts. This duality raises important questions about the universality, effectiveness, and future of human rights in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. As we delve into this analysis, it is crucial to recognize that the human rights framework, despite its noble intentions, has often fallen short of its lofty goals. The persistence of grave human rights violations, the selective application of human rights principles in international relations, and the challenges posed by cultural relativism all contribute to a sobering reality that stands in stark contrast to the ideals expressed in the UDHR. Yet, even as we critically examine these shortcomings, we must also acknowledge the profound impact that human rights discourse has had on shaping moral norms and legal standards around the world.

### **Between Rhetoric and Reality: Why Enforcement Remains Elusive?**

Despite the lofty ideals expressed in the UDHR and subsequent human rights treaties, the gap between rhetoric and reality remains stark in many parts of the world. The persistence of gross human rights violations, from torture and arbitrary detention to discrimination and denial of basic freedoms, underscores the limitations of the international human rights regime. As Posner argues, the problem is not the moral value of human rights but the difficulty of enforcing them and the negative consequences that result when enforcement is attempted but fails.<sup>1</sup> One

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<sup>1</sup> Eric A Posner, *The Twilight of Human Rights Law* (Oxford University Press 2014) 7.

fundamental challenge to the effective implementation of human rights norms is the conflict between state sovereignty and international oversight. While states are the primary duty-bearers for protecting and promoting human rights within their territories, they often resist external scrutiny or intervention in what they consider domestic affairs. This resistance is particularly pronounced among authoritarian regimes, but even democratic states have sometimes been reluctant to fully embrace international human rights mechanisms that might constrain their policy choices.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the institutional framework for enforcing human rights at the international level remains relatively weak. The United Nations Human Rights Council, established in 2006 to replace the discredited Commission on Human Rights, has been criticised for its politicisation and inability to effectively address serious human rights crises. As Freedman notes, the Council's failure to respond adequately to grave and ongoing situations in countries such as Syria, North Korea, and Yemen has raised serious questions about its credibility and effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

The challenge of implementation is further complicated by the broader geopolitical context in which human rights norms operate. Power dynamics between states, economic interests, and strategic alliances often take precedence over human rights concerns in international relations. This *realpolitik* approach to diplomacy can lead to selective enforcement of human rights norms, undermining the credibility of the entire system. As Hafner-Burton observes, the inconsistent application of human rights pressure by powerful states has created a perception that human rights are a tool of foreign policy rather than a universal moral imperative.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms at the international level means that even when human rights violations are well-documented and condemned, perpetrators often face little to no consequences. The International Criminal Court (ICC), established in 2002 to prosecute individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, has faced significant challenges in terms of jurisdiction, cooperation from states, and political opposition. As Bosco argues, the ICC's limited reach and the reluctance of major powers to subject themselves to its jurisdiction have constrained its ability to serve as a truly global mechanism for accountability.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory & Practice* (3rd edn, Cornell University Press 2013) 28-29.

<sup>3</sup> Rosa Freedman, *Failing to Protect: The UN & the Politicization of Human Rights* (Hurst & Company 2014) 2.

<sup>4</sup> Emilie M Hafner-Burton, *Making Human Rights a Reality* (Princeton University Press 2013) 44.

<sup>5</sup> David Bosco, *Rough Justice: The International Criminal Court in a World of Power Politics* (Oxford University Press 2014) 2.

**BETWEEN UNIVERSALITY AND RELATIVISM: RIGHTS WITHOUT BORDERS?**

One of the most persistent critiques of the international human rights framework is its purported Western bias. Critics argue that the UDHR and subsequent human rights instruments reflect a distinctly Western, liberal conception of individual rights that may not be fully compatible with other cultural traditions or value systems. This critique has been particularly salient in the context of Islamic countries, many of which have expressed reservations about certain provisions of international human rights treaties. The conflict between universal human rights norms and cultural particularism is evident in the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, adopted by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in 1990. This document, while affirming many of the rights contained in the UDHR, explicitly subordinates these rights to Islamic Sharia law. As An-Na'im observes, the Cairo Declaration clearly indicates that Muslim countries are unwilling to accept the full implications of the international standards of human rights as binding on them.<sup>6</sup>

This cultural relativist challenge to the universality of human rights raises complex philosophical and practical questions. While recognizing the importance of cultural diversity and the dangers of imposing Western values on non-Western societies, many scholars and activists argue that certain fundamental rights must be considered universal and non-negotiable. Donnelly proposes a concept of "relative universality" that acknowledges both the universal validity of human rights and the legitimacy of limited cultural variations in their interpretation and implementation.<sup>7</sup>

The debate over universality versus cultural relativism extends beyond Islamic contexts to encompass a wide range of cultural and political systems. For instance, the "Asian values" discourse promoted by some East Asian leaders in the 1990s challenged the applicability of Western-style individual rights to societies that prioritise communal harmony and social order. As Engle Merry notes, the assertion of cultural difference has become a powerful tool for resisting human rights, particularly in the areas of women's rights and political freedoms.<sup>8</sup> Critics of cultural relativism argue that it can be used as a pretext for authoritarian regimes to justify human rights abuses and resist international scrutiny. They contend that the core

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<sup>6</sup> Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, 'Human Rights in the Muslim World: Socio-Political Conditions and Scriptural Imperatives' (1990) 3 Harvard Human Rights Journal 13, 46.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Donnelly, 'The Relative Universality of Human Rights' (2007) 29 Human Rights Quarterly 281, 283.

<sup>8</sup> Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (University of Chicago Press 2006) 15.

principles of human dignity and equality underlying human rights are, in fact, present in various forms across different cultures and religions.

As Ignatieff argues, Human rights have gone global by going local, adapting its universal principles to local conditions.<sup>9</sup> The challenge for the human rights movement is to find a balance between respecting cultural diversity and upholding universal standards. This requires engaging in cross-cultural dialogue, promoting local ownership of human rights norms, and developing more nuanced approaches to human rights advocacy that are sensitive to different cultural contexts. As Mutua suggests, the human rights corpus must be reconceived to decenter the Western perspective and incorporate other cultural viewpoints if it is to become truly universal.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Weaponization of Human Rights: From Noble Ideals to Realpolitik**

Another aspect of the double-edged nature of human rights is their susceptibility to politicisation and selective enforcement in international relations. While human rights advocacy has undoubtedly contributed to positive changes in many countries, it has also been criticised for serving as a tool of Western foreign policy and economic interests. This instrumentalization of human rights discourse can undermine its moral authority and effectiveness. The selective application of human rights concerns in foreign policy decisions has been a particular source of controversy. Western powers, especially the United States, have been accused of using human rights as a pretext for intervention in some cases while ignoring comparable abuses by strategic allies.

As Moyn argues, the selective defence of human rights allowed Western states to style themselves as righteous protectors of humanity while simultaneously pursuing their national interests.<sup>11</sup> This inconsistency in the application of human rights principles has fueled scepticism about the motives behind human rights advocacy, particularly in the Global South. It has also provided ammunition for authoritarian regimes to dismiss human rights criticism as a form of Western hypocrisy or Neo-colonialism. The result is a paradoxical situation where the language of human rights can be used both to challenge oppression and to justify geopolitical interventions that may themselves violate human rights norms.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton University Press 2001) 7.

<sup>10</sup> Makau Mutua, *Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2002) 3.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Harvard University Press 2010) 176.

The politicisation of human rights is further evident in the functioning of international bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council. Critics argue that the Council's agenda is often driven more by political alliances and power dynamics than by objective assessments of human rights situations. As Hurst Hannum observes, the selectivity and double standards apparent in the Council's work have led many to question whether it can ever be an impartial and effective promoter of human rights.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the increasing use of economic sanctions as a tool to punish human rights violations has raised questions about the effectiveness and ethical implications of such measures.

While sanctions can put pressure on repressive regimes, they often have unintended consequences that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. As Gordon notes, Comprehensive sanctions regimes have been criticised for their indiscriminate effects on civilian populations and their potential to strengthen rather than weaken authoritarian rule.<sup>13</sup> The weaponization of human rights in international trade and development policies adds another layer of complexity to this issue. Conditional aid and trade agreements that tie economic benefits to human rights performance have been both praised as a means of promoting reform and criticised as a form of neo-colonial control. As Alston and Robinson argue, the use of human rights conditionality in development assistance raises difficult questions about sovereignty, cultural imperialism, and the proper role of external actors in promoting social change.<sup>14</sup>

### **Trade and Human Rights: A Complex Interplay**

The intersection of trade and human rights presents another compelling example of the double-edged nature of human rights discourse and practice in the international arena. On one hand, trade has the potential to promote economic development, raise living standards, and indirectly support the realisation of various human rights. On the other hand, certain trade practices and agreements can lead to human rights violations, exacerbate inequalities, and undermine social protections. This complex interplay highlights the challenges of balancing economic interests with human rights obligations in an increasingly globalised world.

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<sup>12</sup> Hurst Hannum, 'Reforming the Special Procedures and Mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights' (2007) 7 Human Rights Law Review 73, 100.

<sup>13</sup> Joy Gordon, 'Smart Sanctions Revisited' (2011) 25 Ethics & International Affairs 315, 317.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Alston and Mary Robinson (eds), *Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement* (Oxford University Press 2005) 12.



Proponents of free trade often argue that economic liberalisation can contribute to the advancement of human rights. As Stiglitz and Charlton note, Trade can be a powerful force for poverty reduction and development, potentially improving the lives of millions of people.<sup>15</sup> The theory suggests that increased trade leads to economic growth, job creation, and higher incomes, which in turn can facilitate the realisation of economic and social rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living, health, and education. Moreover, trade agreements have increasingly incorporated human rights provisions, labour standards, and environmental protections. These clauses aim to leverage economic incentives to promote human rights compliance. The European Union, for instance, has made respect for human rights a condition for trade preferences under its Generalised System of Preferences (GSP+) scheme.

As Bartels argues, Trade conditionality can serve as a powerful tool for encouraging countries to improve their human rights records.<sup>16</sup> International trade has also facilitated the spread of ideas, technologies, and best practices that can support human rights. For example, the global dissemination of medical knowledge and pharmaceuticals through trade has contributed to improvements in healthcare and the realisation of the right to health in many developing countries. However, the relationship between trade and human rights is far from uniformly positive. Critics argue that the current global trading system, characterised by power imbalances and a focus on profit maximisation, often leads to human rights abuses and exacerbates inequalities both within and between nations.

One of the most pressing concerns is the exploitation of workers in global supply chains. As companies seek to minimise costs and maximise profits, they often outsource production to countries with weak labour protections, leading to poor working conditions, low wages, and even forced labour. The tragic collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh in 2013, which killed over 1,100 garment workers, starkly illustrated the human cost of such practices. As Locke observes, the pursuit of low-cost production in global supply chains has created a race to the bottom in terms of labour standards and working conditions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph E Stiglitz and Andrew Charlton, *Fair Trade for All: How Trade Can Promote Development* (Oxford University Press 2005) 12.

<sup>16</sup> Lorand Bartels, *Human Rights Conditionality in the EU's International Agreements* (Oxford University Press 2005) 31.

<sup>17</sup> Richard M Locke, *The Promise and Limits of Private Power: Promoting Labor Standards in a Global Economy* (Cambridge University Press 2013) 6.

Intellectual property rights provisions in trade agreements have also been criticised for potentially undermining the right to health by limiting access to affordable medicines. The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) has been particularly contentious in this regard. As Sell argues, the TRIPS agreement prioritises the protection of pharmaceutical patents over public health concerns, potentially hindering access to essential medicines in developing countries.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, trade liberalisation policies have sometimes led to the displacement of small farmers and indigenous communities, threatening their right to food security and cultural survival. The influx of heavily subsidised agricultural products from developed countries can devastate local farming communities in developing nations, leading to rural poverty and migration. As De Schutter notes, Trade rules that fail to account for the vulnerabilities of small-scale farmers can undermine food security and rural livelihoods.<sup>19</sup>

The challenge for policymakers and human rights advocates is to navigate the conflict between the potential benefits of trade and its potential negative impacts on human rights. This requires a balanced approach to trade policy that explicitly considers human rights implications. One promising avenue is the development of human rights impact assessments for trade agreements. These assessments, conducted before and after the implementation of trade deals, can help identify potential human rights risks and inform mitigation strategies.<sup>20</sup> As Harrison and Goller argue, Human rights impact assessments can serve as a crucial tool for ensuring that trade policies are compatible with human rights obligations.<sup>20</sup> Another important strategy is strengthening the enforcement mechanisms for labour and human rights provisions in trade agreements. While many trade deals now include such provisions, their effectiveness has often been limited by weak enforcement. As Vogt suggests, Enhancing the enforceability of labour rights clauses in trade agreements could significantly improve their impact on working conditions and human rights.<sup>21</sup> Corporate accountability initiatives, such as mandatory human rights due diligence laws, also play a crucial role in addressing human rights abuses in global supply chains. The French Duty of Vigilance Law and the proposed EU directive on corporate

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<sup>18</sup> Susan K Sell, *Private Power, Public Law: The Globalization of Intellectual Property Rights* (Cambridge University Press 2003) 139.

<sup>19</sup> Olivier De Schutter, 'The World Trade Organization and the Post-Global Food Crisis Agenda: Putting Food Security First in the International Trade System' (2011) Activity Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, 5.

<sup>20</sup> James Harrison and Alessa Goller, 'Trade and Human Rights: What Does 'Impact Assessment' Have to Offer?' (2008) 8 *Human Rights Law Review* 587, 589.

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey S Vogt, 'The Evolution of Labor Rights and Trade - A Transatlantic Comparison and Lessons for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership' (2015) 18 *Journal of International Economic Law* 827, 830.



due diligence are examples of efforts to hold companies legally accountable for human rights violations in their operations and supply chains.

The relationship between trade and human rights exemplifies the double-edged nature of human rights in the global economy. While trade has the potential to contribute to the realisation of human rights through economic development and the spread of progressive norms, it can also lead to serious human rights violations if not properly regulated and balanced with social considerations. Moving forward, the challenges are to develop trade policies and practices that harness the positive potential of economic exchange while safeguarding human rights and addressing global inequalities. This will require ongoing dialogue, innovative policy approaches, and a commitment to placing human rights at the centre of trade negotiations and economic governance. Only by recognizing and grappling with these complexities can we hope to forge a global trading system that truly serves the interests of all humanity.

### **Balancing Innovation and Human Rights in the 21st Century**

As we look to the future, the concept of human rights faces new challenges and opportunities presented by rapid technological advancements. The digital age has created novel threats to privacy, freedom of expression, and other fundamental rights, while also offering new tools for human rights monitoring and advocacy. The rise of mass surveillance technologies, often deployed in the name of national security, poses significant risks to individual privacy and freedom of association. As Zuboff argues in her critique of surveillance capitalism, the unprecedented concentrations of information and power in the hands of private corporations and state agencies threaten to undermine the very foundations of democratic society.<sup>22</sup> The potential for these technologies to be used for social control and political repression highlights the need for new legal and ethical frameworks to protect human rights in the digital sphere.

Artificial intelligence and algorithmic decision-making systems present another frontier for human rights concerns. While these technologies have the potential to improve efficiency and objectivity in various domains, they also risk perpetuating and amplifying existing biases and discrimination. As Eubanks demonstrates in her study of algorithmic governance in social

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<sup>22</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Profile Books 2019) 8.

services, Automated decision-making systems can reproduce and exacerbate patterns of inequality, often in ways that are opaque and difficult to challenge.<sup>23</sup>

The rapid development of facial recognition technology and biometric surveillance systems raises particular concerns about privacy, freedom of movement, and the right to peaceful assembly. As these technologies become more widespread and sophisticated, they create new possibilities for state and corporate surveillance that could fundamentally alter the balance of power between individuals and institutions. Bernal warns the normalisation of ubiquitous surveillance threatens to create a chilling effect on political dissent and civil liberties, potentially undermining the very essence of democratic participation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the increasing centrality of digital platforms in public discourse has raised complex questions about freedom of expression and access to information. While social media has empowered individuals and civil society organisations to amplify their voices and organise for social change, it has also created new vectors for the spread of disinformation, hate speech, and extremist ideologies. The content moderation policies of major tech companies have become de facto arbiters of free speech online, raising concerns about accountability and transparency in these quasi-public spaces.

At the same time, digital technologies have empowered human rights defenders and civil society organisations to document abuses, mobilise support, and hold perpetrators accountable in unprecedented ways. Social media platforms have played a crucial role in exposing human rights violations and coordinating activist campaigns, as seen in movements such as the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter. As Tufekci argues, Digital technologies have fundamentally altered the landscape of political activism, creating new opportunities for mobilisation and collective action.<sup>25</sup> The development of secure communication tools, blockchain technologies, and decentralised networks offers potential solutions to some of the privacy and security challenges posed by the digital age. However, the cat-and-mouse game between privacy advocates and surveillance actors continues to evolve, with implications for human rights that are still unfolding.

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<sup>23</sup> Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (St. Martin's Press 2018) 10.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Bernal, *The Internet, Warts & All: Free Speech, Privacy & Truth* (Cambridge University Press 2018) 167.

<sup>25</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (Yale University Press 2017) 6.

As we grapple with these technological challenges, it becomes clear that the traditional human rights framework may need to be updated and expanded to address the realities of the digital age. New rights, such as the right to internet access or the right to algorithmic transparency, may need to be articulated and codified. As Risse suggests, the human rights regime must evolve to encompass not only negative liberties but also positive entitlements in the digital realm if it is to remain relevant in the 21st century.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Future of Human Rights: Challenges and Opportunities**

As we look towards the future of human rights, it is clear that the concept faces both significant challenges and new opportunities. The persistence of human rights violations, the rise of authoritarianism in many parts of the world, and the complex challenges posed by globalisation and technological change all suggest that the human rights movement must evolve and adapt to remain relevant and effective. One key challenge is the need to address economic and social rights with the same vigour as civil and political rights. While the UDHR encompasses both sets of rights, in practice, economic and social rights have often been treated as secondary or aspirational. As Alston argues, the neglect of economic and social rights has created a lopsided human rights agenda that fails to address the most pressing concerns of many of the world's poor and marginalised populations.<sup>27</sup> Addressing this imbalance will require normative development and practical strategies for implementation and enforcement.

Another crucial task is to strengthen the institutional mechanisms for human rights protection at both the national and international levels. This includes reforming existing bodies like the UN Human Rights Council to enhance their effectiveness and credibility, as well as developing new mechanisms to address emerging challenges. As Pegram suggests, the future of human rights governance may lie in more flexible, networked approaches that can respond rapidly to crises and leverage diverse actors and resources.<sup>28</sup> The role of non-state actors in both promoting and violating human rights is likely to become increasingly significant. Multinational corporations, in particular, wield enormous power that can impact human rights both positively and negatively. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,

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<sup>26</sup> Mathias Risse, 'Human Rights and Artificial Intelligence: An Urgently Needed Agenda' (2019) 41 Human Rights Quarterly 1, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Alston, 'Universal Basic Income as a Social Rights-Based Antidote to Growing Economic Insecurity' in Niklas Bruun and others (eds), *The Future of Work: Labour Law and Labour Market Regulation in the Digital Era* (Hart Publishing 2020) 385.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Pegram, 'Global Human Rights Governance and Orchestration: National Human Rights Institutions as Intermediaries' (2015) 21 European Journal of International Relations 595, 597.

adopted in 2011, represent an important step towards holding companies accountable for their human rights impacts. However, as Ruggie notes, Implementing these principles and creating effective remedies for corporate human rights abuses remains a major challenge for the coming decades.<sup>29</sup>

Climate change presents another critical frontier for human rights. The impacts of global warming disproportionately affect vulnerable populations and threaten a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water, and housing. As Knox argues, Recognizing the human rights dimensions of climate change is crucial for mobilising action and ensuring that climate policies are equitable and just.<sup>30</sup> Integrating human rights considerations into climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies will be a key task for the human rights movement in the coming years. The ongoing process of decolonizing human rights discourse and practice represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Critics have long argued that the dominant human rights framework reflects a Western, liberal worldview that may not fully resonate with other cultural and philosophical traditions. As Mutua contends, the future relevance of human rights depends on its ability to incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, particularly from the Global South.<sup>31</sup> This process of re-imagining human rights in a more inclusive and pluralistic manner could lead to a more robust and truly universal framework.

Technology will undoubtedly continue to play a central role in shaping the future of human rights. While presenting new threats, as discussed earlier, technological innovations also offer unprecedented opportunities for human rights monitoring, documentation, and advocacy. As Land and Aronson observe, "From satellite imagery to big data analysis, new technologies are revolutionising the way human rights violations are detected and investigated."<sup>32</sup> Harnessing these tools while mitigating their potential negative impacts will be a critical balancing act for the human rights community. Education and awareness-raising remain fundamental to the future of human rights. Fostering a global culture of human rights requires sustained efforts to

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<sup>29</sup> John Gerard Ruggie, *Just Business: Multinational Corporations and Human Rights* (W. W. Norton & Company 2013) 124.

<sup>30</sup> John H Knox, 'Human Rights Principles and Climate Change' in Cinnamon P Carlarne, Kevin R Gray and Richard Tarasofsky (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Climate Change Law* (Oxford University Press 2016) 213.

<sup>31</sup> Makau Mutua, 'Is the Age of Human Rights Over?' in Sophia A McClennen and Alexandra Schultheis Moore (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights* (Routledge 2015) 450.

<sup>32</sup> Molly K Land and Jay D Aronson (eds), *New Technologies for Human Rights Law and Practice* (Cambridge University Press 2018) 3.

integrate human rights education into school curricula, professional training programs, and public discourse. As Tibbitts argues, Human rights education has the potential to empower individuals, transform societies, and create a more just world.<sup>33</sup> Innovative approaches to human rights education, including the use of digital platforms and interactive methodologies, could play a crucial role in expanding the reach and impact of human rights ideas.

Finally, the future effectiveness of human rights will depend on the ability of advocates and policymakers to build broader coalitions and connect human rights issues to other global challenges. This may involve forging stronger links between the human rights movement and other social movements focused on issues such as economic justice, environmental protection, and gender equality. As Sikkink suggests, the power of human rights lies in its ability to provide a moral framework for addressing a wide range of social and political issues.<sup>34</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The concept of human rights, as embodied in the UDHR and subsequent international instruments, remains a powerful ideal and a crucial framework for promoting human dignity and social justice. However, its implementation and effectiveness continue to be hampered by a complex web of political, cultural, and practical challenges. The metaphor of a double-edged sword aptly captures the dual nature of human rights: they can be wielded as a tool for emancipation and protection, but also as an instrument of political manipulation and cultural imposition. The persistent gap between human rights norms and realities on the ground, more than seven decades after the adoption of the UDHR, calls for a critical reassessment of the international human rights regime. This reassessment must grapple with the tensions between universality and cultural diversity, the challenges of enforcement in a world of sovereign states, and the new frontiers of human rights in the digital age.

The politicisation of human rights in international relations has both advanced and undermined the cause of human rights. While it has elevated human rights concerns on the global agenda, it has also led to selective enforcement and scepticism about the motives behind human rights advocacy. Addressing this challenge requires a more consistent and principled approach to human rights in foreign policy and international institutions. The rapid pace of technological

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<sup>33</sup> Felisa Tibbitts, 'Understanding What We Do: Emerging Models for Human Rights Education' (2002) 48 *International Review of Education* 159, 163.

<sup>34</sup> Kathryn Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century* (Princeton University Press 2017) 234.

change presents both unprecedented threats to human rights and new opportunities for their promotion and protection. Navigating this complex landscape will require new legal frameworks, ethical guidelines, and collaborative approaches that bring together human rights advocates, technologists, policymakers, and affected communities.

Looking to the future, the human rights movement must find ways to address these multifaceted challenges while preserving the core principles that have made it such a compelling moral vision. This may involve developing more nuanced approaches to cultural differences, strengthening international enforcement mechanisms, and creating new norms and institutions to protect rights in the face of emerging global challenges such as climate change and technological disruption. Ultimately, the future effectiveness of human rights will depend on the ability of advocates, policymakers, and citizens to navigate the complexities and contradictions inherent in the concept. By recognizing both the transformative potential and the limitations of human rights, we can work towards a more just and equitable world while remaining vigilant against the misuse or manipulation of human rights discourse.

The double-edged nature of human rights serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle to translate lofty ideals into practical realities. It challenges us to continually reflect on and refine our understanding of human rights, adapting to new contexts and challenges while remaining true to the fundamental principles of human dignity and equality. Only through this process of critical engagement and adaptation can the promise of human rights be fully realised in our complex and ever-changing world. As we move forward, it is crucial to approach human rights with both hope and humility. The human rights framework has undoubtedly contributed to significant progress in many areas, from the abolition of slavery to the advancement of women's rights. Yet, it has also fallen short of its ambitious goals in many respects. Acknowledging these limitations is not a rejection of human rights, but rather a necessary step towards strengthening and rejuvenating the human rights project for the challenges of the 21st century.

In conclusion, the concept of human rights as a double-edged sword reminds us that even our most cherished ideals can have complex and sometimes contradictory effects when put into practice. It is through grappling with these complexities, rather than shying away from them, that we can hope to forge a more robust, inclusive, and effective human rights regime for the future. The journey towards realising the full promise of human rights is ongoing, requiring constant vigilance, critical reflection, and renewed commitment from each generation.