

The Globalization of Human Rights Violations: “The Right to Live a Dignified and Decent Living”

Review and Analysis of the Violation of Political and Civil Rights in Asia

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One of the most popular and regular items of the Western media menu is the demonization of China, Iran and North Korea for their human rights violations. These media have three characteristics.

First, they give us the impression that human rights violation takes place only in those countries which are not friendly to Washington; they try to tell us that Washington-friendly countries do not violate human rights.

Second, the Western media limit their critics to the violation of civil and political rights such as oppression of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. They do not talk about the violation of economic, social and cultural rights (foods, clothing, public housing, public health, public education) which China and North Korea are trying to respect and protect.

What makes me disturbed is that the violation of human rights is globalized and getting worse.

In this paper, I am asking the following question: “What is human rights?” and “How badly is it violated in Asia?”

Definition of Human Rights

I define human rights in this way:

“Every normal human being has right to live a dignified and decent living.”

Decent living means the access to foods, clothing, housing, a job, health and education. On the other hand, dignified life means independence, autonomy and freedom.

Thus, we have two sets of inseparable human rights. One is the right to be autonomous and free from government intervention. This concept has led to international covenant on civil and political rights.

This concept of civil and political right is much influenced by English philosophers, Thomas Hobbes (1558-1670) and John Locke (1632-1701). These philosophers have one thing in common, namely, the sovereignty of individuals and freedom for self preservation. The right to self preservation is a natural right.

However, the major difference between the two philosophers is their perception of the type of political regime. Hobbes goes for monarchy which is likely to better protect human rights. For Locke, non-authoritarian regime also can protect human rights. However, for him, if the government fails its job of protecting human rights, the government deserves to be replaced.

The idea of civil and political rights was enshrined in the Declaration of the French Revolution and that of American Revolution.

The right to individual freedom is called the first generation of human rights or negative human rights in the sense that the state should not infringe on individual freedom.

The concept of decent of economic, social and cultural rights is well defined by James Nickel. These rights are called the second generation of human rights.

“Human rights aim to secure for individual the necessary conditions for leading a minimally good life. Public authorities, national and international, are identified as typically best placed to service these conditions.” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Human Rights)

The idea of economic, social and cultural rights derives from the need for mutual cooperation. This idea is inspired primarily by religious traditions. The Christian love of neighbours, the Muslims teaching of interconnectivity of humans, the respect for all living beings in Buddhism are sources of inspiration for the doctrine of economic, social and cultural rights.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) argues that one’s freedom should not harm the freedom of others. Marx emphasized the recognition and importance of economic, social and cultural rights.

These two schools of thought on human rights have invited a sustained debate, especially the debate on the universality of civil and political rights. One side of the controversy argues that human rights, especially the right to individual freedom, is universal; China’s oppression of individual freedom is human rights violation. James Nickel argues for the universality of human rights.

“The moral justification of human rights is thought to precede consideration of strict national sovereignty.” (James Nickel, 1992)

“Moral universalism posits the existence of rationally identifiable trans-culture and trans-historical moral trust.” (James Nickel 1992)

On the other hand, the argument for relative universality is also convincing. At the World Congress on Human Rights in Vienne in 1993, the Foreign Minister of Singapore said this:

“The universal recognition of human rights can be harmful, if universalism is studied to deny or mask the reality of diversity.”

The localized human rights become more convincing when it comes down to economic, social and cultural rights. These rights are also known as positive rights in the sense that the state has the positive duty to assure decent living or at least produce conditions conducive to such life.

The point is this: all human rights are of universal value, but depending on the local conditions, they cannot be realized everywhere to the same degree. In short, the degree of the guarantee of such human rights cannot be universal.

There are also third generation of human rights which are not covered in operational terms in the first and the second generation human rights; these rights are collective rights designed to protect specific groups of people such as women, religious and cultural minorities, elderly people, children, the disabled and so on. Later in this paper, a partial list of these rights will be shown.

Evolution in the Fight for Human Rights

The first fight for freedom was the Magna Carta of 1215. It was the fight against unpopular king and the protection of the right of the Church and Barons.

The most important battles for the human rights promotion were the Declaration of American Independence of 1776 and the Declaration of Man and the Citizen of the France’s National Constituent Assembly of 1789. The key message of these documents was the idea that “Man is born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

The first important international covenant on human rights was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (UDHR) which was followed by two other international human rights covenants, namely the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966 and the International covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (UDHR)

Image: The universal declaration of human rights 10 December 1948 (Licensed under Public Domain)



THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF Human Rights

WHEREAS recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

WHEREAS disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

WHEREAS it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

WHEREAS it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations among nations,

WHEREAS the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have

determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

WHEREAS Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

WHEREAS a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realisation of this pledge,

NOW THEREFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY PROCLAIMS **THIS** Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

ARTICLE 1 — All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

ARTICLE 2 — Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. 2. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether that territory be an independent, trust or Non-Self-Governing territory, or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

ARTICLE 3 — Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

ARTICLE 4 — No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

ARTICLE 5 — No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

ARTICLE 6 — Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

ARTICLE 7 — All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

ARTICLE 8 — Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

ARTICLE 9 — No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

ARTICLE 10 — Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

ARTICLE 11 — 1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial of which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence. 2. No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

ARTICLE 12 — No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

ARTICLE 13 — 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. 2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

ARTICLE 14 — 1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. 2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

ARTICLE 15 — 1. Everyone has the right to a nationality. 2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

ARTICLE 16 — 1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. 2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. 3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

ARTICLE 17 — 1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. 2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

ARTICLE 18 — Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

ARTICLE 19 — Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

ARTICLE 20 — 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. 2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

ARTICLE 21 — 1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. 2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country. 3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

ARTICLE 22 — Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

ARTICLE 23 — 1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. 2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. 3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration

issuing for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. 4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

ARTICLE 24 — Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

ARTICLE 25 — 1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. 2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

ARTICLE 26 — 1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. 2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. 3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

ARTICLE 27 — 1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. 2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

ARTICLE 28 — Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

ARTICLE 29 — 1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. 2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society. 3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

ARTICLE 30 — Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.



Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its 1831st meeting, held in Paris on 10 December, 1948.
Revised by the Economic and Social Council.

This was one of the decent things ever done by human beings.

No less than 193 countries adopt the UDHR.

It has 24 articles roughly divided into three parts.

Part 1. (Articles 1 to 11): the judicial system suitable for human rights protection. For instance, Article 5 prohibits torture, while Article 11 argues for innocence before proven guilty.

Part 2. (Article 12 to 17): civil rights. For example, Article 12 is about privacy, while Article 17 is concerned with private property.

Part 3. (Article 18 to 24): political rights. Article 18 is about the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

The International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (ICCPR)

Adopted by 119 countries.

It has four parts and 53 articles.

Part 1. Article 1 deals with the right to self determination (Article 1-1) and the duty of the State (Article 1-3).

Part 2. State responsibility (Article 4 to 5): Article 4-1 is concerned with racial discrimination. Article 4-1 explains the role of international institutions.

Part 3. (Article 6 to 27): the UN's human-right related functions. For instance, Article 6-2 asks the abolition of death penalty. Article 18-3 merits our particular attention. It explains the limit of religious freedom:

“Freedom to manifest one's religious or belief may be subject only to such limitation as are prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health or the fundamental rights and freedom of others.”

What this article is saying is that religious freedom is not absolute; it should be contextualized.

Part 4. (Article 28 to 45): the organization of the UN's human-right related UN institutions including UN Human Rights Committee and Commission. Article 28-2 specifies that the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) is composed of 18 members. Article 41-1 specifies how inter-government human-right related dispute should be dealt with through the UNHRC.

Part 5. (Article 46-53): The legitimacy of the ICCPR. Article 46 says that the ICCPR does not impair the provisions of the UN Charter and the constitutions of the specialized agencies which define the responsibility of UN agencies.

The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 (ICESCR)

Adopted by 111 countries.

It has 4 parts and 31 articles.

Part 1. (Article 1): deals with the right to self determination.

Part 2. (Article 2 to 5): international cooperation, rights of women: Article 2-3 is of particular interest: “Developing countries with due regard to human rights and their national economy may determine to what extent they would guarantee the economic rights recognized in the present Covenant to non-nationals.” This allows the developing countries some flexibility in the range of human rights protection.

Part 3. (Article 6 to 15): Labour, education, daily necessities. Articles 6 to 9 are concerned with labour rights. Article 10 is for education right. Article 11 is for the right to food clothing and housing. Article 12 is for public health.

Part 4. (Article 16-31): role of UN agencies for human rights, in particular the role of the UN

Economic and Social Council.

List of Human Rights Conventions

In addition to UDHR, ICCPR and ICESCR, we have the following international agreements on human rights and national declaration of human rights:

- The Covenant on the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)
- The International Convention of the Statute of Refugees (1951)
- The European Convention on Human Rights (1954)
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Language Minorities (1966)
- International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1966)
- The UN Declaration on the Human Environment: The right to freedom and equality in the condition for life of dignity (1972)
- International Convention against Torture and Cruel Inhuman and Degrading Treatment of Punishment (1984)
- The African Charter on Human Rights under the auspice of the African Union (1986)

It is interesting to notice that Article 19 guarantees the right to equality; Article 20 is about the right to self determination; article 21 the right to natural resources:

- The UN Convention of the Right of Children (1989)
- The UN Declaration on Indigenous People (2007)
- The La Via Campesina Movement (2008)

This movement had a huge assembly in Jakarta to promote the international convention on the protection of peasants; 200 million peasants support it worldwide; the meeting was attended by representatives of 20 countries. The movement was approved by the UN General Assembly in 2018 supported by 121 countries.

- The Beijing Declaration on Human Rights. In this Declaration, human rights are the unity of individual and collective rights. To be more precise, individual rights cannot be harmonized, if collective economic and social entitlement is not sufficient (2017).

Western critics think that this is an international blackmail against the West's attachment to individual rights and freedom. The third world human rights are hostage with the notion that without more economic aid, economic and social rights cannot be enjoyed in the Third World.

This is true, indeed, because the Third World has provided cheap labour and natural resources which have made the West rich.

In recent years, there is a movement for the protection of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), but there is no international convention.

There is one other group which is not covered by an international convention; it is the right

of senior people who may need more protection than other groups.

One of the controversies on human rights is about the proliferation of international human rights agreements, which the former Secretary of State Michael Pompeo was quoted to have said:

“Indeed, human rights proliferation is watering down and diluting focus on protecting basic liberty.”

Here, Pompeo is alluding to the individual freedom of American version which values the merciless competition for the sake of efficiency and business profit.

What he is saying is that the government should not interfere with the free action of individuals and businesses; he does not consider the cases where the liberty of one person can harm that of another person.

Take, as an example, the right to free public assembly. Most national constitutions guarantee the right to free expression, even in so-called authoritarian countries like Iran, China, Russia and North Korea.

However, there is one condition for the guarantee of this freedom; such freedom should not threaten national security. But, even in liberal democratic country like the U.S., violent public protest such as the “June 6 Washington protest” is a criminal act; its leaders are expected to be charged for their activities. In fact, as long as we live in a society, absolute freedom cannot be tolerated.

The authoritarian countries especially China and North Korea are criticized for violating civil and political rights.

In the West, for individual liberty such as individual property, free assembly, free choice of religion, freedom of speech and other civil and political rights, the government should not interfere.

The Western perception of freedom may seem logical, but in reality, it is just impossible for a responsible government not to set up the red line which cannot be ignored. In other words, even in the U.S., individual rights cannot be tolerated without considering the danger of undermining the collective right of the American society.

In China, it is the official position that civil and political rights are vertically structured. The individual right is subordinate to the collective entity; the right of the collective entity is subordinate to the right of the State; the right of the State is subordinate to right of the nation. The basic idea is that individual rights and the collective rights are to be assured simultaneously.

Violation of Civil and Political Human Rights in Asia

The Western opinion makers try to make the world to believe that in Asia, human rights violation is the monopoly of China and North Korea.

Civil rights mean the right to healthy physical and mental life requiring safety, non-discrimination, freedom of opinion, press, religion, association and movement. On the other hand, political rights mean the right to vote, political party membership and other politics-

related activities. It is to be noted that political and civil rights can be the same; the distinction is blurred.

What we will see in this section is how difficult it is to find countries that are free from human rights violations. There are always the strong and the weak ones. The strong wants to despise and exploit the weak. Such is human nature. In other words, violation of human rights is a part of human life. No country, whether liberal or authoritarian, can say it is clean. Therefore, what is wise and constructive is to avoid labelling other countries as human violators and rather cooperate to fight against human rights abuse.

None of the Asian countries I discuss here is free from being violator of human rights. I will discuss the human rights violations by types.

I have decided not to mention the names of the violators and the violated to respect their confidentiality.

The Sexual violence: The case of rape of women is particularly high in India. In September 2020, a Dalit woman was raped and murdered by a group of upper-class men in Hathra District in Uttar Pradesh and she was cremated by the police without consulting her family. There are dozens of other reported cases where low-class women were raped by upper-class men.

The crime of rape is not confined to India. In many countries, lot of girls are raped every day by the rich and the powerful. Lots of women are raped by close life-partners in developed countries.

Mass killing of people: Mass killings by the government or large corporations in complicity with corrupt governments are widespread. In India, since the BJP took over the power in March 2017, 77 people were killed and 1,100 were injured by 2020. In the Philippines, a Major General killed thousands of political activists. In Malaysia, on 25th of August 2018, the military assisted by several ethnic groups attacked Rohingya villages, raped and massacred the poor people. More than 362 villages were destroyed, more than one million Rohingya people were excluded from the Census; 12,800 were displaced.

Immunity Killing: In India in February 2020, violence erupted that killed 50 Muslims. On April 18 in Uttar Pradesh, a Muslim man died in a hospital after being beaten by the police. In July 2020 in Kashima, three young workers were killed by the Indian army in an apple orchard. In Cambodia, a prominent political commentator was murdered after a Cambodian general ordered the army to kill anyone who foments turmoil. One of the worst mass immunity killings took place in Indonesia between 1965 and 1966. Millions of Indonesian communists, Chinese, trade union leaders and others were killed.

The violation of the right to freedom of speech, expression, opinion and the press: In India in recent years, 49 people including cinema-related people were convicted of sedition charges for having written a letter to the Prime Minister expressing concern over hate crimes. A journalist with Hindustar was killed for writing about the political leaders.

In Pakistan on the 29th of May 2011, a journalist of the Pakistan Bureau of the Asia times was abducted and killed. In Cambodia, the authorities revoked the license of Mohanokor Radio which broadcasts for Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. In Indonesia in March 2017, two French journalists were deported from Papua for a reporting that may

have displeased the authorities. In Malaysia in April, 2017, the government threatened to withdraw the license of a Chinese language newspaper because of the publication of a satirical cartoon about the parliament's debate on Islamic law.

In Myanmar in December, 2018, the police arrested two reporters for reporting on the violence of the security forces against the Rohingya people. They were charged for possessing leaked documents related to the security forces operations. In Thailand in March 2017, Voice TV, Spring News Radio, Peace TV, TV24 were forced to temporarily close operations because of their critical reporting against the government.

The violation of the freedom of press occurs when government prevents by force the reporting of unfavourable news. But, is the government's sin of violating the right to free press always bad? Suppose that the press use the freedom of press to topple the good government. In such case, would it not be justified to restrict the freedom of press?

Take the case of South Korea. The government of Moon Jae-in did his best to free the Korean people from injustice committed by the corrupted conservative elite. Under Moon's government, the press is completely free. But the press does everything to topple Moon's government so that they can have a part of wealth stolen by the corrupt conservative elite group. To what extent should we allow the right to free press?

In many developed countries, the press abuse their freedom to promote the interests of corrupt privileged groups. Hence, we have to be careful before labelling certain countries for the violation of the freedom of press.

Persecution of human rights activists: The violation of the right to the promotion of human rights is another wrongdoing of many countries. In Cambodia in 2017, the government detained four senior staff member of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC). In August 2018, a Women's Rights defender was arrested during "Black Monday", day of protest for the release of five ADHOC members. She was sentenced to 30 years in prison. In August 2019, the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs closed the US-funded Democratic Institute and expelled foreign staff members.

In Myanmar on January 1, 2017, a prominent Muslim lawyer, senior advisor to NLD (National League of Democracy under Aung Saan Suu Kyi) was shot to death. In Vietnam in 2017, 40 human rights activists were arrested under the National Security Law.

Racial/Religious Discrimination: In India in February 2020, the India Supreme Court ruled to evict two million people from tribal communities. In August 2020, the government of India published the National Registration of Citizens excluding three million people mostly Muslims. In Indonesia in March 2017, a Jakarta court handed down 5-year imprisonment to two leaders of non-Muslim religious community. On May 9, former Jakarta governor, a Christian, got 2-year prison life for blaspheming Islam.

In Malaysia in August 2018, the government has ordered to remove a statue of a woman with wings from a park for being atheist. In Myanmar, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and other non-Buddhist religions are threatened on a daily basis. In Vietnam, the Christian Church and Buddhist Temples are under constant surveillance.

The Violation of the Right to Assembly: In Malaysia, the Society Act requires that all organizations of 7 persons or more must register. In Thailand in August 2017, several

academic people who attended the International Conference on the Thai Studies in the province of Chiang Mai were charged with the violation of NCPO (National Council for Peace and Order) policy.

On November 27, the Thai police dispersed peaceful protests in a province against the construction of a coal power plant. In Vietnam, no labour union is allowed; no assembly for human rights is allowed. In Singapore, public assembly is allowed only at predetermined place, namely Hong Lun Park, where the “speaker corner” is located; no foreigner is allowed.

Abduction: There are many cases of abduction without trace. In the Philippines in August 2016, a girl was abducted on her way to work with no trace.

In 2019 in Asia as a whole, there were 2,500 cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances. In Thailand in August 2004, it was found out that a Muslim lawyer disappeared since 1980.

Other Violations of Human Rights: There are cases of violations of the rights of children. For example, in Indonesia, thousands of children were working on tobacco fields risking exposure to pesticides.

Unlawful detention seems to be widespread. In Singapore, under the Internal Security Act and Criminal Laws, persons can be arrested and detained for unlimited period without any charge of judicial review. In Thailand, under the law of NCPO (National Council for Peace and Order) the military can detain for 7 days without charge and without a lawyer.

To sum up, the human race has been trying for centuries to promote and respect human rights. An impressive number of institutions and international agreements have been established in order to combat the violation of human rights. The UN has allocated an important amount of scarce resources to the protection of human rights. Furthermore, every country has some sort of mechanism created to uphold and improve human rights.

However, the reality is not encouraging. Every country is a victim of human rights violations.

It is perhaps inevitable as long as there is the strong and the weak; as long as there is the rich and the poor. It is human nature that the strong exploit the weak; the rich despise the poor.

Therefore, it is ridiculous to label a certain country as human rights violator. What we can do is to minimize the destructive effects of human rights violations. For this, we need more international cooperation and, especially, more binding laws.

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