

Nobel Peace Laureates to Human Rights Watch: Close Your Revolving Door to U.S. Government

By [Global Research News](#)

Global Research, May 12, 2014

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The following letter was sent today to Human Rights Watch's Kenneth Roth on behalf of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and Mairead Maguire; former UN Assistant Secretary General Hans von Sponeck; current UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Richard Falk; and over 100 scholars.

Dear Kenneth Roth,

Human Rights Watch [characterizes itself](#) as “one of the world’s leading independent organizations dedicated to defending and protecting human rights.” However, HRW’s close ties to the U.S. government call into question its independence.

For example, HRW’s Washington advocacy director, Tom Malinowski, previously [served](#) as a special assistant to President Bill Clinton and as a speechwriter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. In 2013, he left HRW after being [nominated](#) as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights & Labor under John Kerry.

In her HRW.org biography, Board of Directors’ Vice Chair Susan Manilow [describes](#) herself as “a longtime friend to Bill Clinton” who is “highly involved” in his political party, and “has hosted dozens of events” for the Democratic National Committee.

Currently, HRW Americas’ [advisory committee](#) includes Myles Frechette, a [former](#) U.S. [ambassador](#) to Colombia, and Michael Shifter, [one-time Latin America director](#) for the U.S. government-financed National Endowment for Democracy. Miguel Díaz, a Central Intelligence Agency analyst in the 1990s, sat on HRW Americas’ advisory committee from [2003–11](#). Now at the [State Department](#), Díaz [serves](#) as “an interlocutor between the intelligence community and non-government experts.”

In his capacity as an HRW advocacy director, Malinowski [contended](#) in 2009 that “under limited circumstances” there was “a legitimate place” for CIA renditions—the [illegal practice](#) of kidnapping and transferring terrorism suspects around the planet. Malinowski was quoted [paraphrasing](#) the U.S. government’s argument that designing an alternative to sending suspects to “foreign dungeons to be tortured” was “going to take some time.”

HRW has not [extended](#) similar consideration to [Venezuela](#). In a 2012 [letter](#) to President Chávez, HRW criticized the country’s candidacy for the UN Human Rights Council, alleging that Venezuela had fallen “far short of acceptable standards” and questioning its “ability to serve as a credible voice on human rights.” At no point has [U.S. membership](#) in the same council merited censure from HRW, despite Washington’s [secret, global assassination](#)

[program](#), its [preservation](#) of [renditions](#), and its [illegal detention](#) of individuals at Guantánamo Bay.

Likewise, in February 2013, HRW correctly described as “[unlawful](#)” Syria’s use of missiles in its civil war. However, HRW [remained silent](#) on the clear [violation](#) of international law constituted by the U.S. threat of missile strikes on Syria in August.

The few examples above, limited to only recent history, might be forgiven as inconsistencies or oversights that could naturally occur in any large, busy organization. But HRW’s close relationships with the U.S. government suffuse such instances with the appearance of a conflict of interest.

We therefore encourage you to institute immediate, concrete measures to strongly assert HRW’s independence. Closing what seems to be a revolving door would be a reasonable first step: Bar those who have crafted or executed U.S. foreign policy from serving as HRW staff, advisors or board members. At a bare minimum, mandate lengthy “cooling-off” periods before and after any associate moves between HRW and that arm of the government.

Your largest donor, investor George Soros, [argued](#) in 2010 that “to be more effective, I think the organization has to be seen as more international, less an American organization.” We concur. We urge you to implement the aforementioned proposal to ensure a reputation for genuine independence.

Sincerely,

1. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Nobel Peace Prize laureate
2. Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize laureate
3. Joel Andreas, Professor of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University
4. Antony Anghie, Professor of Law, S.J. Quinney College of Law, University of Utah
5. John M. Archer, Professor of English, New York University
6. Asma Barlas, Professor of Politics, Director of the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity, Ithaca College
7. Rosalyn Baxandall, Professor Emeritus of American Studies, State University of New York-Old Westbury
8. Marc Becker, Professor of Latin American History, Truman State University
9. Jason A. Beckett, Professor of Law, American University in Cairo
10. Angélica Bernal, Professor of Political Science, University of Massachusetts-Amherst
11. Keane Bhatt, activist, writer
12. William Blum, author, Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II
13. Audrey Bomse, Co-chair, National Lawyers Guild Palestine Subcommittee
14. Patrick Bond, Professor of Development Studies, Director of the Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban
15. Michael Brenner, Professor Emeritus of International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh
16. Jean Bricmont, Professor of Theoretical Physics, University of Louvain; author, Humanitarian Imperialism
17. Renate Bridenthal, Professor Emerita of History, Brooklyn College, CUNY
18. Fernando Buen Abad Domínguez, Ph.D., author

19. Paul Buhle, Professor Emeritus of American Civilization, Brown University
20. David Camfield, Professor of Labour Studies, University of Manitoba
21. Leonard L. Cavise, Professor of Law, DePaul College of Law
22. Robert Chernomas, Professor of Economics, University of Manitoba
23. Aviva Chomsky, Professor of History, Salem State University
24. George Ciccariello-Maher, Professor of Political Science, Drexel University
25. Jeff Cohen, Associate Professor of Journalism, Ithaca College
26. Marjorie Cohn, Professor of Law, Thomas Jefferson School of Law
27. Lisa Duggan, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, New York University
28. Carolyn Eisenberg, Professor of History, Hofstra University
29. Matthew Evangelista, Professor of History and Political Science, Cornell University
30. Richard Falk, Professor Emeritus of International Law, Princeton University
31. Sujatha Fernandes, Professor of Sociology, Queens College, CUNY Graduate Center
32. Mara Fridell, Professor of Sociology, University of Manitoba
33. Frances Geteles, Professor Emeritus, Department of Special Programs, CUNY City College
34. Lesley Gill, Professor of Anthropology, Vanderbilt University
35. Piero Gleijeses, Professor of American Foreign Policy and Latin American Studies, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University
36. Jeff Goodwin, Professor of Sociology, New York University
37. Katherine Gordy, Professor of Political Science, San Francisco State University
38. Manu Goswami, Professor of History, New York University
39. Greg Grandin, Professor of History, New York University
40. Simon Granovsky-Larsen, Professor of Latin American Studies, Centennial College, Toronto
41. James N. Green, Professor of Latin American History, Brown University
42. A. Tom Grunfeld, Professor of History, SUNY Empire State College
43. Julie Guard, Professor of Labor Studies, University of Manitoba
44. Peter Hallward, Professor of Philosophy, Kingston University; author, *Damming the Flood*
45. John L. Hammond, Professor of Sociology, Hunter College, CUNY Graduate Center
46. Beth Harris, Professor of Politics, Ithaca College
47. Martin Hart-Landsberg, Professor Economics, Lewis and Clark College
48. Chris Hedges, journalist; author, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*
49. Doug Henwood, journalist; author, *Wall Street*
50. Edward Herman, Professor Emeritus of Finance, University of Pennsylvania; co-author, *The Political Economy of Human Rights*
51. Susan Heuman, Ph.D., independent scholar of history
52. Forrest Hylton, Lecturer in History & Literature, Harvard University
53. Matthew Frye Jacobson, Professor of American Studies and History, Yale University
54. Jennifer Jolly, Co-coordinator of Latin American Studies, Ithaca College
55. Rebecca E. Karl, Professor of History, New York University
56. J. Kehaulani Kauanui, Professor of Anthropology and American Studies, Wesleyan University
57. Ari Kelman, Professor of History, University of California, Davis
58. Arang Keshavarzian, Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, New York University

59. Laleh Khalili, Professor of Middle East Politics, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
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72. Allan Nairn, independent investigative journalist
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78. Paul O'Connell, Reader in Law, School of Law, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
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82. Claire Potter, Professor of History, The New School
83. Margaret Power, Professor of History, Illinois Institute of Technology
84. Pablo Pozzi, Professor of History, Universidad de Buenos Aires
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86. Vijay Prashad, Edward Said Chair of American Studies, American University of Beirut
87. Peter Ranis, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, CUNY Graduate Center
88. Michael Ratner, human rights attorney; author, *The Prosecution of Donald Rumsfeld*
89. Sanjay Reddy, Professor of Economics, New School for Social Research
90. Adolph Reed, Jr., Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania
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96. Andrew Ross, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, New York University

97. Elizabeth Sanders, Professor of Government, Cornell University
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103. Falguni A. Sheth, Professor of Philosophy and Political Theory, Hampshire College
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105. Dina M. Siddiqi, Professor of Anthropology, BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh
106. Francisco Sierra Caballero, Director of the Center for Communication, Politics and Social Change, University of Seville
107. Brad Simpson, Professor of History, University of Connecticut
108. Nikhil Pal Singh, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis and History, New York University
109. Leslie Sklair, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, London School of Economics
110. Norman Solomon, author, War Made Easy
111. Judy Somberg, Chair, National Lawyers Guild Task Force on the Americas
112. Jeb Sprague, author, Paramilitarism and the Assault on Democracy in Haiti
113. Oliver Stone, filmmaker; co-author, The Untold History of the United States
114. Steve Striffler, Professor of Anthropology, Chair of Latin American Studies, University of New Orleans
115. Sinclair Thomson, Professor of History, New York University
116. Miguel Tinker Salas, Professor of History and Latin American Studies, Pomona College
117. James S. Uleman, Professor of Psychology, New York University
118. Alejandro Velasco, Professor of History, New York University
119. Robert Vitalis, Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania
120. Hans Christof von Sponeck, former United Nations Assistant Secretary General (1998-2000)
121. Hilbourne Watson, Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Bucknell University
122. Barbara Weinstein, Professor of History, New York University
123. Mark Weisbrot, Ph.D., Co-director, Center for Economic and Policy Research
124. Kirsten Weld, Professor of History, Harvard University
125. Gregory Wilpert, Ph.D, author, Changing Venezuela by Taking Power
126. John Womack, Jr., Professor Emeritus of Latin American History and Economics, Harvard University
127. Michael Yates, Professor Emeritus of Economics, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown
128. Kevin Young, Ph.D., Latin American History, State University of New York-Stony Brook
129. Marilyn B. Young, Professor of History, New York University
130. Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, Professor of History; Co-Director, South Asian Studies, Brown University
131. Stephen Zunes, Professor of Politics and Coordinator of Middle Eastern Studies, University of San Francisco

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