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# Globalization, human rights and education

Jacques Hallak

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## Globalization, human rights and education

*Jacques Hallak*

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# Contents

Introductory statement	7
1. Reminders and updates	8
(a) Globalization	8
(b) Human rights	9
(c) Education	10
(d) Why cross globalization, human rights and education?	11
2. Scenario 1 – conflict of objectives	13
(a) Globalization	13
(b) Human rights	14
(c) Education	15
3. Scenario 2 – complementarities	17
(a) Globalization	17
(b) Human rights	17
(c) Education	18
4. An agenda for discussion and implications for international co-operation in education	20
(a) Human rights	20
(b) Education towards the 21st century	20
(c) Sustainable development	21
(d) Formulating and implementing education policies	21
(e) Shift in priorities for international co-operation in education	22
5. Concluding remarks	23

# Globalization, human rights and education

*Jacques Hallak*

## **Introductory statement\***

I am extremely grateful to the Education Division of Sida for its invitation to me to talk to you today about a rather sensitive topic, yet of a lot of relevance to us all. Given the complexity of the subject, I will first assume that we already know a great deal about each of the dimensions covered (globalization, human rights and education); but it is useful to remind ourselves of what is shared by the profession.

After that overview, I would like to say that, looking at the future, different possibilities exist as to the results of the dynamic interactions between the three dimensions – I will propose two contrasting scenarios:

- Scenario 1 – The case for conflict of objectives.
- Scenario 2 – The case for complementarities.

Clearly the reality will be somewhere in between. It is most interesting to review the likely consequences for us. I am, therefore, submitting an agenda for discussion and implications for international co-operation.

Finally, I would like to share with you, by way of conclusion, some concerns I have regarding the future of international co-operation.

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\* I should like to thank Muriel Poisson for her comments on previous versions of this paper and Anne-Marie Crehan for her editorial assistance.

## **1. Reminders and updates**

### **(a) Globalization**

The phenomenon of globalization is a result of worldwide integration of economic and financial sectors. It was made possible by:

- fast and significant technological progress, in particular in the area of information and communication technologies;
- geo-political changes, in particular the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the emergence of economic grouping of countries (EU, Mercosur, etc.);
- a dominant ideology of regulation by the market, initially applied to economic and finance exchanges, and gradually proposed to all sectors of human activity, including the social sector (education, health, etc.).

The aims of increasing return to capital, added to the possibility of locating the units of production of goods and services almost everywhere, have thus contributed to **uniting** or **globalizing** the world.

Among the main implications of the phenomenon of globalization, one can mention:

- the emergence of learning societies, due to the multiplication of sources of information and communication;
- the transformation of the nature of work with, in particular, the need for more flexibility and mobility, the importance of communication skills, the necessity of teamwork, the increasing use of new technologies, etc.; and
- the progression of social exclusion, a large part of the world population being unemployed or misemployed and/or receiving inadequate remuneration, finds itself outside social integration.

## (b) Human rights

Fifty years after the adoption of the Declaration of Human Rights, much progress has been made: more legal guaranties, including two conventions in 1966 (one on civil and political rights and the other on economic and cultural rights); more attention paid to the rights of women and the rights of the child; the end of apartheid in South Africa and of totalitarian regimes in Latin America and in Eastern Europe; and, more recently, following the adoption of the Rome Agreement to establish an International Criminal Court (ICC), the International Criminal Tribunal (ICT), with growing recognition and capacity for prosecution (in The Hague and Arusha).

In reality, the picture is less rosy. Although 142 countries have signed the 1966 Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 144 countries the 1966 Convention on Civil and Political Rights and 191 countries the 1989 International Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>1</sup>, a number of countries have not yet adopted the three conventions (the USA has not ratified the first and China the second of these treaties). Outstanding and significant issues remain, based on:

- (i) Ideological arguments – some societies (governmental, religious and political bodies) challenge the universality of the rights, on the grounds that the Declaration is ‘western oriented’, putting the emphasis on the individual, when in other cultures social groups are most important. Another challenge addressed by some societies is based on the indivisibility of the rights. There is no human dignity with poverty, illiteracy, lack of adequate health services and other social protection.
- (ii) Contradictions generated by scientific and technological progress – new challenges for human rights – are to be addressed, resulting from conflictual concerns: environmental, genetic, communication. Here are a few examples that illustrate the arguments. How to reconcile the

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1. Informations on international human rights instruments can be obtained on the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Web site, <http://www.unhchr.ch>. The World University Service publishes also a very interesting newsletter, namely the *Human Rights Bulletin*.

principle of freedom of expression in the era of the Internet when we want to protect privacy, avoid the exposure of children and youth to the pervasive effects of certain messages (drugtrafficking, pornography, violence), while at the same time respecting the right of children to access of information and knowledge? How to promote intellectual creativity by protecting copyright when, at the same time, ‘downloading’ books and messages is regarded a human right for a free flow of information and communication? Many other examples can be found from the consequences of the progress of science and technology. For example, research on genetics: (a) the use and abuse of analyses of DNAs to protect the rights of children from recognition of paternity against the wills of the adults concerned; (b) the risks of ‘cloning’ on the human species; and (c) the potential consequences of the general use in agriculture of species genetically modified, on the protection and equilibrium of the environment.

### **(c) Education**

There is a rather broadly shared consensus on both the issues facing education today and the approaches and strategies that are offered. Indeed, there is a need to address the issues of access<sup>2</sup>, efficiency, equality, gender, quality and relevance of education. At the same time, it is suggested that policy-makers, planners, decision-makers, educators and managers should adopt a change in their approaches to education, namely: less state involvement and more ownership, participation, collaboration and mobilization of educational protagonists.

Changes in focus are also recommended: from systems to institutions, from inputs to processes and resource allocations, from higher levels to lower levels of education, from initial to lifelong education and from teacher to learner-centred education.

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2. The right to education belongs to the second generation of economic and social rights.

Finally, a gradual process of integration of theories of learning is highlighted: from passive to active memorization, with in-built incentives (behaviourist), to constructivist or cognitive development of learning to, recently, a more 'learner-centred' approach to the capacity of each learner to build his/her own learning model, using the mediation of the teachers, a didactic environment, and both school and out-of-school educational resources.

#### **(d) Why cross globalization, human rights and education?**

There seem to be two grounds for combining the three areas of interest into one topic for discussion:

**I. *Convergence of focus of attention:*** (i) in **Education**, the issues, challenges and the process of learning are now focused on the 'individuals' and far less on the 'system'. In this respect, it is amazing to note that for very different reasons, the 'individuals' are the targets of economists, educators and political protagonists. The economists promote education vouchers and the freedom of choice of individuals on arguments of market efficiency. Educators believe that it is the learner who ultimately determines the construction of knowledge, on pedagogical grounds. As for the political protagonists, the values of alternative policies can only be assessed by their impact on the learners. (ii) The main utopian assumption of **Globalization** is that there is a 'world market' where all 'individuals' can buy and sell, no matter where they live and how they live. We all know the highly questionable merit of this assumption, but the dominance of the ideology of the market is such that, while recognizing that there is no such thing as a 'perfect' market (free access, free information, etc.), the literature on globalization refers to individuals as the key actors of a 'world market'. Finally (iii) in the Declaration of 1948 and the other instruments of 1966 relating to the protection of **Human rights**, the 'individuals' (all individuals, children, youth and adults, male and female, of the whole world) are the subjects and the objects of concern; they have rights and their obligations are to respect human rights across country borders.

**II. Emergence of new concerns:** with the acceleration of globalization and the weakening of governments and intergovernmental authorities in their ability to regulate economies and societies, in most countries today the state has experienced erosion of its power, its credibility and even its legitimacy. The state is no longer in a position to unilaterally decide on public policy. A redistribution of powers is taking place between the state, companies, news and media agencies, etc. The respect for human rights, including the right to quality education for all citizens has so far been the responsibility of public authorities. Large numbers of treaties and different legal international instruments, concluded in written form between states and governed by international law, such as the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties of 1969, play (and have played) a crucial role in the progress achieved in the matter of respect of human rights. More specifically, for education, the General Conference of UNESCO has adopted several recommendations during its different sessions. For example, in 1974 the General Conference agreed upon a recommendation concerning 'Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace' – education relating to human rights and fundamental freedom. More recently, the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All, adopted in 1990, emphasizes the need to ensure access to quality education to all. The efficiency of such legal instruments depends upon the agreements of the states and on their capacity to respect them. With the weakening of the state, the capacity becomes problematic. This has led to different scenarios for the future, in particular, to contradictions or support between the trends of globalization and the challenges facing education and the human rights agenda.

## 2. Scenario 1 – conflict of objectives

The main rationale for this scenario is based upon the observation that the ‘globalization dynamic’ is determined by different factors from those that seem to affect the trends in the progress of human rights – they are primarily economic and financial, supported by the opportunities offered by communication technologies; when, in the case of human rights, the concerns are the moral and ethical convictions of individuals. The scenario assumes that if the present trends in globalization continue, they may generate political and social resistance and turmoil, but no concrete action is either possible or feasible. This is a *laissez-faire* scenario and a quite likely possibility when we analyze and compare some of the ‘governing forces’ of the three social processes: globalization, human rights and education.

### (a) Globalization

- (i) Is based on market mechanisms which do not include the concerns of values: the driving forces of globalization are ideological (the market), economical (the capital) and political (the leadership). Individuals are ‘economic actors’ and, as such, their behaviour is based on narrow economic concerns.
- (ii) Assumes a market of individuals and not of ‘social actors’, when we know that behaviour of individuals is determined by their social characteristics and that not all individuals have ‘equal’ access to markets. Hence
- (iii) Contributes to segmentation of societies and groups; the concentration of capital in Europe, Japan and North America, and the higher concentration of political leadership in the United States of America.
- (iv) Contributes to the strengthening of communitarian ideology and the weakening of universalistic values.
- (v) Contributes to the weakening of the states, whose capacity to monitor,

regulate and manage national economies, taking into account social concerns, is severely restricted by the multinationals. Thus, the ability of the states to protect human rights and ensure access to quality education becomes more and more limited.

**(b) Human rights**

- (i) In theory, violation of human rights may be regarded as an obstacle for globalization and uniting of world markets. In practice, with some particular exceptions, ‘are some societies being excluded from globalization because of violation of human rights?’ The answer is no, when we compare the list of countries singled out by the Annual Report of Amnesty International and the degree of the integration of some of them into the world economy.
- (ii) The Declaration assumes full equality of all rights to all when globalization is clearly dividing the world and the people into three groups: ‘those who globalize’, ‘those who are globalized’ and ‘those who are left out of globalization’, thus contributing to the violation of ‘economic and social rights’.
- (iii) In spite of significant progress in literacy and access to education, there is persistent denial of access to education and close to one billion illiterate people, meaning a violation of the rights to education and to the maintenance of a large proportion of the world population outside the main stream of development.

The progress of respecting human rights rests on: (a) the capacity of individuals to keep monitoring closely the attitudes and behaviours favourable to human rights; (b) the political will of governments to ensure such respect; and (c) the capacity of supranational agencies, like the United Nations, to enforce the compliance of governments to international human rights treaties. Needless to say, these conditions are not always met.

**(c) Education**

- (i) Education policies may be designed and adopted taking human rights principles into consideration, but more often than not, access to schooling and to good education is determined by market considerations and by prevailing social, economical, cultural and geographical inequalities (not consistent with the conventions on human rights).
- (ii) Child-centred learning contributes to the promotion of autonomy and self-development – basic conditions for social and economic promotion in a global world. At the same time, child-centred learning may generate biases towards individualistic values (lack of interest in social concerns) and rejection of universalistic values (a basic feature of the culture of human rights).
- (iii) Excessive emphasis put on evaluation and assessment (standards and excellence) may support the culture of globalization and, at the same time, of selection and inequalities leading to denial of social and political human rights.
- (iv) While the dominant suppliers of education are ‘nationals’, a growing number of producers of education services are multinationals: this may lead to less attention being paid to cultural diversity and even, potentially, to the domination by one culture. This would not necessarily be a bad thing if the dominating culture were to be really ‘universal’, when it embodies the creative work of world artists, architects, creators, musicians, painters, poets, etc. No one would complain of belonging to a culture that associates Beethoven, Bialik, García Márquez, Gibrane, Joyce, Kafka, Khiriostami, Ki Zerbo, Kurosawa, Rimbaud, Woody Allen, and Chagall. But there is an in-built contradiction between the logic of the market – highest short-term return to investment – and the process of creativity – highly unpredictable long-term return. Leaving aside the language of communication – English<sup>3</sup>, the dominant culture that globalization could

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3. But, then, most specialists believe in English as a second or third language for non English-speaking societies; hence cultural diversity would be protected.

produce is likely to be 'Kitsch' products: jeans, soap operas, thrillers, talk shows, etc.

Altogether, this scenario may lead to **domination of future societies by the logic of the market; weakening of states; economic and cultural globalization; productivist concept of education, ignoring values (social and individual); violation of human rights – in particular their universality and indivisibility.**

### **3. Scenario 2 – complementarities**

This scenario assumes that education, human rights and globalization will affect, separately and together, the future of societies because of their interdependencies. A number of illustrative arguments can be offered for consideration:

#### **(a) Globalization**

- (i) Globalization contributes to a wide diffusion of ideas and values (including human rights), mobilizing international attention to universalistic issues and challenges.
- (ii) Pervasive effects of globalization – by generating social injustices and economic exploitation made visible by the mass media – can produce resistances and claims to protect human rights. The more educated and well informed a population, the more likely the mobilization for an effective respect of human rights. The recent freezing of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) by militant groups using Internet facilities, later supported by some governments in Western Europe, is an example of this.
- (iii) Multinationals are using universalistic values (protection of the environment, no child labour and human rights consideration) more and more in their marketing strategies. The Italian ‘Benetton’ is a spectacular case in point, but examples can be found in all sectors and in different countries: production and commercialization of sportswear, films, theatre plays and music, saving water campaigns in international hotels, and promotion of the use of motor cars using lead-free petrol.

#### **(b) Human rights**

- (i) Negation of human rights is an obstacle to the participation of a large percentage of the population in education and globalization; it is in the

interests of ‘globalizers’ to participate in the ‘opening’ of closed, authoritative societies and thus generate new markets.

- (ii) The ICT and the growing visibility of a human rights agenda borne by the multinational press and media agencies are, and will, gradually affect the mode of operation of some multinationals against child labour and the violation of social laws, as well as the market of armaments, in particular landmines, and contribute to more attention being paid by educators at all levels to universalistic values, such as respect for the environment, human rights, tolerance, and other cultures.
- (iii) Respect for human rights can be a good condition for integration in a global world and involves universal access to quality education.
- (iv) The concerns of human rights affect education on three grounds – contents, methods and values. There are countless education programmes on human rights, at all levels, and in a variety of countries, from a modest scale (NGO) to a more prestigious host (university). Two contrasting examples can be quoted: the Peruvian Institute for Education in Human Rights Education and Peace (IPEDEHP), a Peruvian NGO initiated in 1996, which seeks to train community leaders on ‘You have rights: know them, promote them, defend them’, using interactive methodology with a strong empowerment focus, and the Oxford University’s International Human Rights Summer Programme, with about 90 students from 29 countries, and which has a five-credit rating from the American Bar Association.

### **(c) Education**

- (i) Education is crucial for successful integration in a ‘global world’; competencies needed: learning to be, learning to do, learning to learn and learning to live together. Even countries under endemic conflict with their neighbours, or having suffered from decades of discrimination, are revising their teaching of history and geography to ‘learn to live together’. This is the case in Israel, where new textbooks teach empathy with

Palestinians. More spectacular is the decision of the South African education authorities to re-write their history/geography textbooks to promote post-apartheid values.<sup>3</sup>

- (ii) Education is a most powerful means to protect and promote the cultural identity of different societies and to maintain cultural diversity when globalization tends to cultural uniformity.
- (iii) Finally, good education, efficient participation in the process of globalization, and the capacity to defend and promote human rights require 'fully autonomous' individuals. Putting it differently, *educating for autonomy* means building the capacity of individuals to participate in globalization and to protect their rights.

The main assumption of this scenario can be formulated as follows: **education can contribute to the regulation of globalization, in particular by establishing the conditions for respect of human rights – a prerequisite for a successful evolution of globalization.**

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4. As an illustrative example of the resistances generated by these changes among the 'conservatives', reference is made to the 'Campaign for Real Education' in the United Kingdom. "Politically correct changes to the curriculum will brainwash students into becoming environmental activists, education traditionalists claim: the inclusion of new material will halt the coverage of basic topics", quoted from Tracy Connor, *The Times*, August 1999.

## **4. An agenda for discussion and implications for international co-operation in education**

Five ‘clusters’ of concern are proposed below:

### **(a) Human rights**

Human rights education includes **Contents** (information about the legal instruments and experiences), **Methods** (behaviour of teachers, participation, organization of education) and **Values** (acceptance of contradictions of conflicting views and recognition of human diversity). Examples can be given from the UNESCO programme: The Associated Schools Movement, UNESCO Chairs, activities in co-operation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as with the National Commissions for UNESCO, IGOs, NGOs and academic institutions.

### **(b) Education towards the 21st century**

- Education at all levels should devote particular attention to the potentials of the human diversity of our world: skills for globalization include a better knowledge and understanding of the heterogeneity of our world, including information, in particular, on economic inequalities and social injustice. Moreover, educational curricula should include references to international concerns and experiences. In this respect, there are good arguments for facilitating mobility of learners and teachers, valuable means for contributing to widening experience beyond national boundaries.
- Another priority for education is the promotion of the autonomy of the learner. A prerequisite for success in a global world is indeed autonomy of the individual; at the same time, respect for human rights is conditioned by autonomy. Autonomy means more knowledge of oneself and of the

world around one. What are the implications for the adaptation of the curricula and methods of teaching?

- There is also a large consensus on the priority to be attached to the development of negotiation skills by learning conflict resolution and peaceful human relations. The implications for policy-makers are: **What to teach?** In brief, ‘learning to live together’, economics, international law, social sciences – basically to train professionals in human rights; **How to teach?** Naturally an emphasis should be put on teamwork and participation, and learning to listen and become informed – learning to learn.

### **(c) Sustainable development**

Education should be regarded as a social process of becoming a world citizen. Multi-disciplinary approaches to teaching and learning should be adopted to promote the unity of the world and the interdependence of societies. The potentials of learning networks should not be minimized, as numerous recent experiences show. Finally, efforts should be made to promote exposure of learners to new social norms, e.g. against polluting industries, against child labour, etc.

### **(d) Formulating and implementing education policies**

Here is a tentative list for consideration:

- (i) revisiting educational aims to balance economic, social, cultural and ethical interests;
- (ii) allowing a large space for autonomy in design and implementation;
- (iii) ensuring participation of different protagonists: the world of work, the media, the different entities of governments at central and local levels, the civil society, the education profession, and the children and youth;

- (iv) organizing channels of consultation on universalistic values;
- (v) updating the mission for teachers and teacher training;
- (vi) improving articulation between curricula, methods and teacher training;  
and
- (vii) introducing in the curricula both human rights concerns and skills for globalization (autonomy, communication, and learning to learn).

**(e) Shift in priorities for international co-operation in education**

The comments made under the preceding four sections suggest at least four priorities for consideration:

- (i) What is 'basic' in education (to be supported by donor agencies)? Communication (literacy), 'learning to learn' (focus on teaching/learning approach), autonomy (focus on self-learning) ...
- (ii) There is a case for supporting the promotion of 'universalistic values' in education at all levels: it is a basic condition for a 'humane globalization'.
- (iii) In spite of traditional scepticism among co-operation agencies on the merit of new technologies, there is a strong case for investment in ICTs in the education sector.
- (iv) Finally, co-operation agencies will significantly affect the implementation of the human rights treaties, and the Jomtien Declaration, by contributing to the promotion of the institutional development of informal educational entities. In fact, in many countries, states' efforts need to be supplemented by the actions of NGOs in expanding access to education.

## **5. Concluding remarks**

Moving from scenario 1 ‘Conflict’ to scenario 2 ‘Complementarities’ assumes that a supranational regulator system (like the United Nations) covering cultural, economic, financial, social, and other needs will gradually compensate for the loss of power of national authorities and ensure the respect of human rights. Now the basic and simple question is whether an intergovernmental organization like the United Nations can be effective in regulating globalization or if we need to think of other processes.

The issue is crucial on many grounds; take, for example, the modalities for ensuring respect of human rights. It is usually considered that, thanks to appropriate international treaties (signed by governments), one can expect a reasonable compliance with the Declaration, the conventions and other legal instruments. In actual fact, the picture is less simple; there are governments who have not signed the treaties, others who do not respect their signature, and others who do not have the capacity to protect human rights. Indeed, in many societies, human rights have traditionally been interpreted as the ‘rights of the individual against the government’. Lefort, a French philosopher, suggests that ‘human rights’ are to be interpreted as ‘rights to human relationships’, e.g. freedom to move, freedom to speak, freedom to contribute to public needs and requirements, freedom to resist, etc. All these rights do not separate and isolate individuals from each other; they rather contribute to strengthening human relationships. Thanks to this function of communication among human beings, human rights contribute to establishing a specific political regulation mechanism based not on the state, but on ‘non-governmental public institutions’. These ‘institutions’ contribute, among other things, to regulating how to live together and to providing legitimacy by seeking a balance between private, public and social concerns. Nonetheless, the state’s role is not negated: it is simply a protagonist among others.

The challenge ‘how to conceive a supranational mechanism of regulation?’ will have four dimensions:

1. Strengthening and confirming the political mission of the states (with no or weak states, the challenges of sustained development, and of observance of human rights and ensuring equal access to good education, cannot be addressed).

2. Strengthening all legal instruments to improve the grounds for international co-operation. More specifically, the human rights treaties (Declaration and conventions) represent a precious framework towards common grounds of co-operation. We need more ratification and compliance with the treaties. We need a systematic effort to clarify their universal values so that they are not pushed aside as an irrelevant borrowing from the 'West' to other cultures.

3. Organizing and supporting the non-governmental public institutions. Thanks to the Internet, 'institutions' can prove to be most effective and powerful, as can be seen from the experience of a number of NGOs or more informal movements like ATTAC.<sup>5</sup> The forthcoming conference in Seattle of WTO (starting on 30 November 1999) will be accompanied by an 'anti-summit' to be attended by some 800 NGOs, to be opened in Seattle on 29 November 1999.

4. Contributing to 'regional mechanisms of international regulation' such as the EU. An illustrative example can be given by a report prepared by a member of the French parliament recommending to the EU that the regulatory function of WTO (in settling disputes) be submitted to legal arrangements and rules established by other agencies linked to the United Nations, including the Declaration of Human Rights and the social norms of ILO.

In the immediate future, what are the global issues before us?

### ***1. Quantitative decline in financial support to co-operation programmes***

The decline in public support and the weakening of state governments are very significant trends to be considered. According to OECD/DAC,

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5. ATTAC is the French Association for the taxation of financial transactions to help the citizens. Launched in June 1998, it recorded, in September 1999, 13,000 members with 130 local committees in France.

aggregate DAC aid fell by over 21 per cent in real terms from \$60.8 billion in 1992 to \$51.5 billion in 1998. Only four countries – Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden – exceeded the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of GNP. The average for DAC is 0.23 per cent.

## ***2. From resources for development co-operation to resources for support, to political stability, peacekeeping, and humanitarian aid***

During the past decade, both bilateral and multilateral co-operation agencies have been very much solicited for both peacekeeping and humanitarian aid. From the Horn of Africa to Central America, from former Soviet countries to former Yugoslavia and Timor, the examples are unfortunately numerous and diverse.

## ***3. From ‘Human Rights’ to the ‘Rights of interference’***

It becomes more and more intolerable for public opinion to observe violation by governments of ‘human rights’: the challenge for the United Nations is to respond to this public demand. Who decides on interference? The capacity for interference by the United Nations is very much dependent on the decision-making system of the Organization and on the capacity to ‘resist’ some countries. The intervention of Kofi Annan on 20 September 1999, at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, on the links between globalization, international co-operation and states’ sovereignty, by the reactions it has generated, is a good illustration in this respect. Most governments of developing countries, in particular Algeria, have clearly rejected any attempt by the United Nations to limit their sovereignty; Europe, USA and Canada have ‘implicitly’ supported Annan on the need to give priority to the nationals and protect their rights against the states. Yet, among the ‘western group’ there are a number of divergences. As for Russia and China, the answer to Annan’s proposal was a simple and polite ‘no’.

## ***4. The potentials and limitations of the ICC and the ITC***

Even if more than 60 countries ratify the establishment of the ICC and the ITC, all decisions will remain in the hands of the United Nations Security

Council whose function is regulated by ‘veto rights’. Hence, ‘permanent members’ of the Security Council enjoy different responsibilities and rights and may contribute to the ‘blockage’ or extension of regulating mechanisms of the ICC and ICT.

***5. Towards ‘more transparency’ in international co-operation?***

International agencies, including UNESCO, still have a fundamental role to play; there can be a bridge between governments and the demands of the population for human rights, peace, development and respect of other universalistic values.

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