



**The Role of Conflict in the Progress of Human Rights.**

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### **What is human right?**

The universal declaration of human rights holds that “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” (“70 years of progress on human rights”, 2019, p.1).

According to Butcher and Hallward (2018), there are three distinct generations of human rights: first, political and civil rights which range from most basic such as life, liberty, and security, but also freedom of religion, opinion, expression, assembly, and association; second, socio-economic rights which include education, work, and housing; third, “solidarity rights” such as development, healthy environment, and the right to peace. In the past, many individuals have been denied their fundamental rights- for instance, there are numerous cases around the world where a group of people did not have a right because of their race, gender, or origin. However, in the recent past, many, if not all, nations have conformed to the universal declaration of human rights, yet, its progress has been derailed by many events, the most common one being conflict.

### **Conflicts and the progress of human rights.**

It is indubitable that conflict hinders the progress of Human Rights. The vivid reality of contemporary conflicts and all the related violent crisis takes a heavy toll on civilians’ rights. It is fathomable that the nature of conflicts has dramatically changed in recent years. A plethora of studies has confirmed the transformation of warfare since the end of the cold war in 1945.

Gettleman (2019) reveals in his research that the principal form of conflict has changed from inter-state wars such as World War I and II to fight for independence, separation or political control, to the recent common forms of violence such as rebels’ wars and organized crime. Regardless of its transformation, conflicts still remain the major cause of the human right violation.

The progress of human rights began in 539 BC when Cyrus, the first king of ancient Persia, did the unthinkable: freeing all slaves to return to their respective homes (Ishay, 2008). Since then, human rights concept has spread throughout the world. Every constitution, the supreme laws of the land, of a nation defends the rights of each and every individual regardless of their social status, age, color, gender, political affiliation, or sexuality. However, conflicts have often slowed down the progress of human rights. The principal right that conflict denies an individual is a right to life. Millions of people around the world have been casualties of conflicts and violent actions. For example: In 1994, approximately one million people were killed in Rwanda during the ethnic conflict between Tutsi and Hutu (Mamdani, 2014); between 1996 and 2008, nearly 5.4 million people have succumbed to conflicts in Congo (Bavier, 2008); in 2003 over 480,000 people were killed in Sudan genocide (Geltman et al., 2005); in 2008, over 1500 people lost their lives in Kenya due to dispute over who should take political control (Dercon & Gutiérrez-Romero, 2012). These millions of people- many of which are children and women-did not deserve to die. Their right to life was brutally taken away from them.

In addition, conflict denies people right to better healthcare, right to peaceful environment, right to education, amongst many other fundamental rights. Whenever there is war, there must be casualties; either people killed, losing properties, or children rendered orphans.

The story of the lost boys of Sudan is one example of how conflict have violated the right of human beings in the 21st century. These boys lost their parents, got separated from the friends, forced out of their homes, denied opportunity to education, and right for healthy living (Geltman et al., 2005). Although Africa has been a war-torn continent and has caught the eye of human rights watch, other countries like Syria, Iran, Burma, Venezuela, Yemen, and Cuba have engaged in wars denying their citizens many of their core rights.

Currently, there is an ongoing war between Yemen and other countries. As a result, many people have been hurt, killed, and denied food and medication ("Human Rights Watch", 2019). Similarly, the Burma military planned to kill and hurt the Rohingya Muslim group living in Burma just because they had a problem with a fraction of Muslim fighters. As a result, many people have been killed, women and children raped, and their homes burned. According to the New York Times, approximately 700,000 Muslims have moved to Bangladesh to seek asylum (Beech, 2019)

Many of the past studies pinpointed that, peaceful countries that have little-to-no conflicts value the rights of its citizens and those that reside in it. They include the United States, Canada, Australia, and the majority of European Union countries ("Human Freedom Index", 2019). In contrast, those countries that are whelmed with conflicts such as Yemen, Libya, Iran, and Venezuela do not care about the rights of their populaces, thus, have a lower human rights index ratings (ibid). This premise has been confirmed by human rights report of 2019 which indicates that countries that were previously at war but are now peaceful have recorded improved human rights and have the will to hold those who violate the human rights accountable through legal processes ("Human Rights Watch", 2019).

It is evident that conflict is the major cause of human rights violations. Therefore, to ensure that human rights continue to progress, the world must come together as one and strongly condemn conflict. There are many ways that disagreements can be solved peacefully. Despite the many international laws that have been put in place to ensure that global peace prevails, many countries such as Afghanistan, Venezuela, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia continuously violate these laws without being held accountable and it is the common citizens whose fundamental rights remain violated. It is high time we embrace peace so that the universal declaration of human rights can be enjoyed by every human being on this planet.

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