



You Are the Problem Solver

Examples of Human Rights Violations

Directions:

Choose a human rights situation from the true-life examples given below and work out a solution. Assign someone in your group to be a leader and someone to be a secretary. The group leader will supervise the discussion session and make sure everyone can share his idea without negative reactions from anyone else in the group. The secretary will write down all of the ideas. Let the ideas flow freely and write them down quickly. Then decide which idea your group will develop into a workable and effective solution. Decide who will present it.

Important Note:

Just because one student's idea is not agreed upon by the others, does not mean it is a bad idea. Some of the best ideas in history were not agreed upon at first.

1. We are all born free and equal:

Having no sons can be a serious problem for some widows in rural Kenya: women with no children or only daughters are often considered worthless and undeserving of property. "I was thrown out of my home when my husband died because I had given birth only to girls," said Theresa Murunga, a widow from rural Bungoma. Until her husband's death in 1994, Murunga lived in a hut on her husband's homestead, where she grew potatoes and maize. She recalled:

"When my husband died, his relatives came and took everything. They told me to put my clothes in a paper bag and leave. I left because if I had resisted, they would have beat me up. The relatives identified someone to inherit me. It was a cousin of my husband. They told me, 'Now you are of less value, so we'll give you to anyone available to inherit you.' I didn't say anything. I just left and went to my parents' home... This is customary. If I had married the cousin, I could have lived where I was. I decided

not to because he was polygamous—he had five other wives.... I know if a woman is inherited, she is normally mistreated by the one who inherits her.

“If I had sons instead of daughters, they would have apportioned land to me.... When they told me to leave, they said there was no way they could recognize my daughters since they’ll marry and leave the homestead. They said I shouldn’t have given birth at all.... My in-laws took everything—mattresses, blankets, utensils. They chased me away like a dog. I was voiceless.” From: Human Rights Watch, hrw.org/reports/2003/kenya0303/kenya0303-03.htm

In certain countries, the caste system is based on the belief that some people are better or less worthy than others according to the level of society they were born into. According to their caste, they should have certain privileges or should not have those privileges.

In some communities of Sri Lanka, intermarriage between upper-caste and lower-caste persons is still socially discouraged. Marriage ads in Sri Lankan newspapers routinely specify the caste background of the match that the family is seeking. From: Human Rights Watch, hrw.org/reports/2001/globalcaste/caste0801-03.htm

2. Don't discriminate:

In countries throughout Europe, Romani children, sometimes known as Gypsies, receive substandard education, if they attend schools at all. In November 2000, the parents’ association of Greece’s Halastra Public School closed its doors to prevent enrollment of thirty-two Romani children. The Romani children were split up and sent to different schools, often quite far from their homes. From: Human Rights Watch, hrw.org/wr2k2/children.html

In Russia, medical staff may pressure parents to abandon a disabled (having a condition of being unable to move, work or act in a usual or healthy way) child at birth to an institution where the child is likely to be denied medical care and education. Such children are prevented from learning how to read and write. From: isec2000.org.uk/abstracts/papers_j/jones_2.htm

3. The right to life:

The American Medical Association estimates that more than four million women are victims of severe assaults by boyfriends and husbands each year. Studies reveal that family violence occurs in two million families in the United States, a figure that is probably underestimated as many incidents are not reported. From: actabuse.com



In cities across America, gang violence takes the lives of innocent children and teens—not to mention the young lives destroyed by drugs—every day.

From: National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, safeyouth.org/scripts/teens.asp

4. No slavery:

At least 27 million people around the world are forced to work. Some are tricked into taking out a loan because they need money urgently. To repay the loan, they must work long hours, seven days a week, up to 365 days a year. They receive basic food and shelter as “payment” for their work, but might not ever be able to pay off the loan. From: antislavery.org

An 11-year-old in Pakistan is forced to weave carpets to repay a debt that his father owes. He works 14 hours a day, sleeps by his loom, and cannot leave the carpet factory or he will be caught and beaten. From: freetheslaves.net

A 12-year-old girl in India is married to a 60-year-old-man. She has no choice and must work as a servant in a home. From: freetheslaves.net

5. No torture:

In Venezuela, torture against children is committed by some police officers. Such police officers have secretly placed guns on the victims, then have falsely accused them of starting a shootout. Many of these cases are not reported because the relatives and witnesses are frightened or do not believe that they can get justice. From: amnesty.org

Emilio was taken into the Guatemalan army at age 14. “The army was a nightmare. We suffered greatly from the cruel treatment we received. We were constantly beaten, mostly for no reason at all, just to keep us in a state of terror. I still have a scar on my lip and sharp pains in my stomach from being brutally kicked by the older soldiers. The food was scarce and they made us walk with heavy loads, much too heavy for our small and malnourished (underfed) bodies. They forced me to learn how to fight the enemy in a war where I didn’t understand why it was being fought.” From: Human Rights Watch, hrw.org/campaigns/crp/voices.htm

You can read stories about real people and how their human rights are being restored at un.org/works