

Unfinished Journey: The Fight for Human Rights of Vulnerable Groups

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"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..."

Preamble of The Declaration of Human Rights

Human rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible, meaning that everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms regardless of race, color, religion, language, or political opinion. Given this, it is crucial to ensure that the rights of all individuals are protected. However, the failure to uphold these rights for vulnerable groups reflects a significant gap in safeguarding fundamental freedoms. The vulnerable groups are usually termed at-risk or disadvantaged populations, and include children, women, pregnant women, the elderly, refugees, prisoners, persons with disabilities, and those who are affected by addictions among others. These are groups that have special care and attention owing to their vulnerability and frequent denial of rights. As a result, human rights advocates emphasize the need for focused efforts to address the specific challenges faced by these groups and ensure their rights

are fully recognized and protected.

Women are one of the most vulnerable groups and have always been the most vulnerable since time immemorial, owing to historical and contemporary gender inequalities. This was denying the women their equal opportunity, an event that led to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1981. This historical convention took the central position of granting women equal opportunities with men in matters regarding education, employment, politics, and civil issues. Although much has been achieved, the struggle for women's rights remains an ongoing battle in many regions of the world, and CEDAW provides a foundation for advancing gender equality.

Children also need special protection because they are weak and developing. The Convention on the Rights of the

Child was adopted in 1989 to meet the specific needs of children by setting global standards for their protection and well-being. This convention recognizes the rights of children to education, health, and protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The convention also respects the right of children to be involved in any matter that may affect them with due regard to their evolving capacities.

The other vulnerable group is persons with disabilities. They need special protection and support because they face severe challenges in fully participating in society. They need special care and accommodations to enhance their potential. Therefore, in 1975, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted. The declaration provides a framework in order to ensure the rights of such persons, and this declaration mentions rights like access to medical and functional treatment, suitable education, vocational training, economic and social security, etc. It also calls for protection against exploitation, abuse, and discrimination, underlining the importance of creating inclusive societies where persons with disabilities can live with dignity and equality.

International law has come a long way in protecting the rights of vulnerable groups through these conventions: CEDAW, the CRC, and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, more needs to be done to effectively implement and respect these rights

in all parts of the world so that no one is left behind in their pursuit of equality, dignity, and justice.

The conventions the CEDAW, the CRC, and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, among others have been successful enough in raising people's awareness to provide a legal framework for protection of vulnerable groups. International accords have helped facilitate legal reforms, policy, and programming towards equality, children, and persons with disabilities. For instance, improvements in child welfare in many countries, such as greater access to education and health services, can be attributed to the CRC.

But the harsh truth is that it has not been easy implementing the conventions in their entirety. In reality, the situation still presents gender inequalities, women still experience violence, discrimination, and less access to opportunities in certain areas. Similarly, while many countries have made strides in children's rights, millions of children still suffer from poverty, exploitation, and lack of education, especially in conflict zones or underdeveloped nations. People with disabilities, despite legal protections, often face social stigma, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to employment and healthcare.

In Central Asia, several countries including Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan are not very considerate of protecting the


rights of humans against violations concerning vulnerable groups of the population, despite such international frameworks as CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. One of the most prominent examples is the status of women in Central Asia. Women in much of the region are exposed to widespread gender-based violence, lack of access to education and healthcare, and employment and political discrimination. In Uzbekistan, women are underrepresented in leadership positions, and despite existing laws, domestic violence is widespread. The non-application of the law leaves women vulnerable to discrimination and abuse at the hands of society. Similarly, child labor remains a serious problem in Central Asia, and thousands of children are still made to work during the annual cotton harvest in Uzbekistan. While the government committed itself to ending child labor, unfortunately, children continue to work in hazardous conditions instead of going to school. There is also a great deal of neglect concerning persons with disabilities. In Turkmenistan, many persons with disabilities face serious obstacles in their access to education, healthcare,

and employment. The physical and social infrastructure remains inadequate, and persons with disabilities often experience discrimination, hindering their integration into society.

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These are ongoing issues that point to the gap between international human rights agreements and their implementation on the ground. This example shows how far the practice is from the standards of international human rights and testifies to the need for systemic change. In as much as there are laws and conventions, turning them into meaningful changes requires political will, stronger enforcement, and changes in culture to deal with gender inequality, child labor, and discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Meanwhile, international instruments such as CEDAW, the CRC, and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have made a great mark in raising awareness and building a legal framework, yet their implementation remains inconsistent and generally inadequate across much of the region, including Central Asia. However, women remain vic-

tims of serious systemic discrimination, gender-based violence, and are denied opportunities in life. Children are still highly vulnerable to exploitation through labor. People with disabilities face many barriers to full participation in society and are often neglected and discriminated against. These issues underpin the gap between international human rights standards and real-world practices. Stronger political will, effective enforcement of laws, and cultural shifts are all required to make a difference. The challenges related to vulnerable groups need a systematic approach that not only ensures legal protection but also fosters societal inclusion and respect for dignity. Without sustained effort, the journey toward universal human rights and equality for all remains incomplete. 

References

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