



JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL
of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

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GUIDELINES ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

*Approved by the Jewish Community Relations Council
of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties*

The safeguarding of international human rights is central to Jewish religious values and inextricably linked to American strategic values and interests.

Jewish Religious Values and Historical Experience

At the heart of Jewish teaching is the principle that all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This fundamental Jewish value informs our response to all circumstances in which basic human rights—as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—are neglected or violated.

The biblical commandment "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16) is one of many statements in Jewish tradition about our responsibility to respond to injustices directed against others. We understand the historical Jewish religious duty of "freeing the captive" to apply, in our day, to both those unjustly imprisoned and to entire communities or peoples whose fundamental freedoms and rights are unjustly withheld from them.

The historical experience of the Jewish people also leads us to concern for international human rights. We bear witness to the importance of responding to massive human rights abuses and the dire consequences of inadequate responses from those who might speak out on behalf of the victims. Having suffered because of others' silence, we cannot remain passive observers when confronted with evidence of human rights abuses today. Speaking out and seeking to stop human rights abuses, particularly reported atrocities or alleged genocide, is consistent both with the highest Jewish values and the lessons of our history.

Strategic American Values

As Americans, we value our democratic heritage and our nation's legal commitment to protect and uphold the rights of all its citizens. Human rights are upheld by such core American values as equality under the law, justice and due process. These American legal traditions are consistent with our historic Jewish values. They stand as important criteria to apply to the protection of international human rights, along with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human

Rights and other relevant international conventions, including the International Convention on Genocide.

The long-term influence of the United States in the world depends not just on its military superiority but also on its identity as the champion of human rights and the democratic process. America's continued stability and peace is secured to the extent that these values are shared and honored by other nations and the international community. Thus, a primary commitment of the United States government and the American people to the upholding and free expression of international human rights is key to advancing America's strategic interests and core values.

Criteria for Involvement

Based on these values, the guidelines herein apply to the American Jewish community's opposition to violations of human rights throughout the world. While it will naturally respond with special interest to such violations in countries where Jews might become the target, the Jewish community - by reason of both its history and its values - opposes human rights abuses against any group. The specific nature of our response to those issues depends upon three primary areas of consideration:

1. an evaluation of the extent of offenses including: a) genocide or the threat of genocide; b) other massive human rights atrocities; c) forced expulsion (now referred to as ethnic cleansing) and creation of a refugee crisis; d) sexual and other physical violation of human beings; e) elimination of human rights protections in countries where such protections currently exist; and f) other flagrant violations of human rights;
2. an evaluation of national interests, including projected human and other costs of intervention. In general, we would not want to see American action on international human rights curtailed based primarily on financial or commercial considerations. Nor should the alleged absence of a national consensus on "strategic importance" stand in the way of action; leadership should and can help to shape that consensus. But the viability of any given action must be considered, including such factors as: the probability of success, the desirability of working with allies and the probable human cost. These qualifying factors apply to the evaluation of particular actions; but they can never justify general inaction, and must be evaluated in conjunction with the egregiousness of the human rights violations;
3. an evaluation of the range of remedial actions to be recommended to the American government. In general, the more egregious the human rights violations are deemed to be and the more compelling the other strategic factors, the greater will be our intent: a) to urge our government - along with the international community - to be actively engaged in appropriate

and measured actions to halt current, further or threatened violations, including diplomatic negotiations, sanctions, and, if no other viable option seems to remain, military action; b) to be actively engaged in ameliorative humanitarian efforts—generally in cooperation with private aid groups, including the Jewish community; and c) to support efforts to bring perpetrators of massive human rights atrocities before international tribunals.

Recent incidents of human rights atrocities have sometimes been accompanied with public relations efforts to portray the historic treatment of Jews in that country in the best possible light, in the hope of diminishing a strong response from the Jewish community to current abuses. In general, past records of either the perpetrators or victims vis-à-vis treatment of their Jewish communities should not affect American Jewry's response to current actions, although we should make every effort to accurately reflect the historical record.

In the final analysis, decision-making on involvement in international human rights issues cannot be based on a rigid formula based on these guidelines. Certain issues, apart from the guidelines, will galvanize our community because of a unique combination of factors that motivate us to act. However, these guidelines can be useful in helping to orient, educate and mobilize the American Jewish community about matters of such importance to our community. These issues promise to be the subject of a major and fateful national debate, and the Jewish community, because of our own values and interests, should be an active participant in that debate and a forceful advocate for international human rights.