

ADVOCATES WITHIN THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT have had remarkable success in establishing new international laws to address egregious abuses, securing concrete changes in government human rights policies and practices, and transforming the terms of public debate in order to bring new human rights issues squarely onto the global agenda. Yet too often, the strategies that human rights advocates have employed to achieve these goals are not broadly shared or known. While the human rights movement has grown exponentially over the past few decades, the practitioners who are on the front lines of advocacy rarely take time to document their efforts or analyze for a broader audience why their tactics have succeeded or failed.

This book explores the strategies behind some of the most innovative human rights campaigns and exciting victories of recent years. It delves into local, regional, and international advocacy efforts to discover how advocates were able to address seemingly intractable abuses and secure concrete advances in human rights. For example, how did families in Libya organize to demand accountability for a prison massacre despite intimidation by security forces and laws prohibiting human rights activity? How did a small group of advocates mount a global campaign to win an international treaty banning the use of child soldiers? How did African and international groups ensure that former Liberian president Charles Taylor stood trial for alleged war crimes? How were advocates able to use YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Internet blogs, satellite feeds, and an online television station to bring global attention to Tibet during the 2008 Beijing Olympics?

The human rights movement is full of such amazing examples of innovative partnerships, skillful messaging, strategic interventions, and persistent organizing that have highlighted new issues, empowered victims, changed attitudes, and resulted in new policies and practices. The eleven case studies featured in this book are but a sample of the wealth the movement has to offer. Drawing on interviews with dozens of experienced human rights advocates, the examples selected for this volume focus on four strengths of the human rights movement: the development of new international legal standards; the use of the United Nations system and its mechanisms on behalf of human rights; efforts to ensure accountability for human rights abuses and bring perpetrators to justice; and the emergence of broad new alliances and the use of new technology.

Some of the human rights movement's most significant recent victories have been the adoption of new international legal standards, including treaties to abolish anti-personnel mines (1998), to establish the International Criminal Court (1999), to prohibit the use of child soldiers in armed conflict (2000), to protect the rights of persons with disabilities (2006), and to abolish the use of cluster munitions (2008). These campaigns have established new models of organizing that are increasingly accepted as the norm. For example, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines created a new model of partnership between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and "like-minded" governments and established a precedent for treaty negotiations outside of the traditional venue of the United Nations. The successful effort to achieve the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was marked by unparalleled organizing and involvement by persons with disabilities. Their insistence on "nothing about us without us" ensured their presence at the table and active involvement in the negotiations. Many of these new treaties have been ratified at astonishing rates, winning broad acceptance in just a few years, thanks in large part to persistent pressure from the campaigns that worked for their adoption.

Part I of this book provides an in-depth look at two campaigns for international standards. Chapter 1 examines the global campaign to stop the use of child soldiers. During an intense two-year period, a coalition of human rights and humanitarian organizations worked with allied governments to organize an ambitious series of regional conferences, engage influential policymakers, establish the extent of child soldiering, and mobilize public support and national campaigns in more than thirty countries in its successful effort to win a UN treaty banning the participation of children in armed conflict.

Chapter 2 details efforts by domestic workers and their allies to win new global labor standards to protect the rights of tens of millions of women and girls. Domestic workers—which include housekeepers, maids, nannies, and others working in private households—form one of the world’s largest but most vulnerable sectors of employment. Examples of organizing by domestic workers in Tanzania and the Philippines illustrate how national-level mobilization built a base for a successful global effort that reached fruition with the adoption of a new international labour convention in 2011 to ensure decent work for domestic workers.

Part II takes a closer look at UN human rights bodies and their mechanisms. The United Nations is a significant locus of human rights activity and offers advocates myriad opportunities to advance human rights norms and influence the policies and practices of member states and other actors. Human rights advocates have used the UN Commission on Human Rights and its successor, the Human Rights Council, to bring attention to both thematic and country issues, to secure agreements to begin drafting new treaties, to establish special mandates to monitor human rights, to initiate commissions of inquiry, and to secure resolutions sanctioning human rights abusers. Advocates work closely with some forty-five UN special procedures, including special rapporteurs and expert groups that monitor both country situations and themes including torture, extrajudicial executions, violence against women, and the rights to health, education, and housing.

The UN’s premiere human rights body, the Human Rights Council, was established in 2006 to replace its discredited predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights. Chapter 3 examines a series of successful annual campaigns to ensure that the new Human Rights Council avoided the failures of the commission, which had become co-opted by countries with abysmal human rights records in order to protect themselves and other abusers from criticism and scrutiny. By bringing together dissidents and civil society in Belarus, Sri Lanka, Azerbaijan, and other candidate countries with respected international figures such as Václav Havel, Desmond Tutu, and Jimmy Carter, a cross-regional coalition was able to influence the votes of UN member states and defeat the election of some of the world’s worst human rights abusers to the council.

Between 2000 and 2010, the number of UN special rapporteurs nearly doubled, offering human rights advocates greater opportunities to provide information and input for the rapporteurs as they conducted country visits,

sent governments communications regarding human rights violations, and prepared reports and recommendations on how governments could better promote and protect human rights. Chapter 4 explores collaboration between human rights NGOs and special rapporteurs, highlighting three particular cases. In the Philippines, a visit by the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, coupled with pressure from national and international NGOs, helped prompt a dramatic decline in extrajudicial executions. In Brazil, a country mission by the special rapporteur on adequate housing was used by NGOs to launch a renewed campaign on behalf of land rights for *quilombos*, the descendents of African slaves. In Jordan, where national organizations had repeatedly called for the closure of a detention center known for torture, a country visit by the special rapporteur on torture prompted the government finally to shut the facility. In each case, the visit of the special rapporteur was able to reinforce the NGOs' demands and serve as a catalyst for stronger action.

Human rights advocates have also used the UN architecture to bring underrecognized human rights abuses to light and to establish new mechanisms to ensure sustained and systematic action to address them. Chapter 5 details a nine-year effort by children's rights organizations to spotlight the myriad ways that children are subject to violence and to demand a stronger international response through the United Nations, first through an in-depth global study to document the horrific scale of such violence and then by securing the appointment of a high-level UN representative to work with UN member states and agencies to implement the study's recommendations and take meaningful action to prevent and to end violence against children.

Part III addresses efforts to seek accountability. Increasingly, the human rights movement has focused on accountability for human rights abuses and mechanisms to bring offenders to justice, deter future abuses, and provide victims with redress. Special courts and tribunals, including the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (established in 1993), the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (established in 1994), and the hybrid Special Court for Sierra Leone (established in 2000) have prosecuted and convicted scores of individuals responsible for some of the worst abuses of recent armed conflicts. A watershed 1998 agreement between states created the International Criminal Court as a permanent venue to prosecute individuals responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide.

Prior to the 1990s, few believed that world leaders could be held personally criminally responsible for gross human rights abuses. With high-profile indictments of former heads of state, including Augusto Pinochet of Chile and Hissène Habré of Chad, the prosecution of former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori, and ICC-issued arrest warrants for Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir, Libyan leader Mu'ammār Gaddafi, and the former president of Cote d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, even the most powerful began to realize that their positions could not shield them from possible prosecution should they trample the rights of their people.

In 2003, when the Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted Charles Taylor, then the president of Liberia, for alleged war crimes in Sierra Leone, Taylor sought refuge in Nigeria. Chapter 6 outlines how more than three hundred African and international NGOs formed a "Coalition Against Impunity" to keep Taylor's case on the international agenda and use multiple pressure points to ultimately gain his transfer to the Special Court for Sierra Leone to stand trial.

The movement for accountability has been profoundly influenced by family members who have organized to demand the truth about the fate of loved ones who have been disappeared, tortured, or massacred. Prominent examples include women in Latin America such as Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentine, Comadres in El Salvador, and the National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) in Guatemala. More recently but less well-known, a group of families in Libya undertook unprecedented activism to seek the truth regarding a 1996 massacre of more than twelve hundred prisoners. Chapter 7 outlines how years before the Arab Spring, they defied a virtual prohibition on human rights activity to hold demonstrations, file lawsuits in domestic courts, make complaints to UN bodies, and publicize their demands in their quest to learn the fate of their loved ones and hold those responsible to account. Their efforts led Libya's top leadership to acknowledge the massacres, notify families that their loved ones were deceased, offer financial compensation, engage in dialogue with representatives of the families, pledge investigations, and tolerate independent public demonstrations for the first time in forty years. The families' activism also helped spark the 2011 uprising that eventually brought down the Gaddafi regime.

Chapter 8 highlights the efforts of three international NGOs—Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and International Crisis Group—to halt massive civilian casualties during the final months of the civil war in Sri

Lanka between government forces and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Tamil Tigers) and their subsequent efforts to establish an international investigation of alleged war crimes by both sides. The chapter details ongoing efforts that have yet to bear fruit and the significant obstacles they face, including the Sri Lankan government's single-minded determination to destroy a so-called terrorist organization at any cost and the tacit support from other governments for its victory.

Part IV explores the impact of new media and new alliances in human rights advocacy work. Emerging technologies are transforming the human rights movement, as a new generation of activists increasingly uses Twitter, Facebook, Internet blogging, and other new media to raise awareness of human rights issues and mobilize new constituencies to action. Chapter 9 describes the innovative use of new technologies by Students for a Free Tibet in its campaign to spotlight China's human rights violations in Tibet during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The group staged high-profile direct actions during the lead-up to the Olympic Games and during the games themselves and used new media to reach a global audience with its message, ensuring that Tibet was an ongoing theme of Olympic media coverage and putting the lie to China's claims of progress on human rights.

On many human rights issues, communities most directly affected by abuses are the driving force in shaping and leading advocacy efforts on their own behalf, often overcoming threats, isolation, and marginalization to do so. Chapter 10 compares efforts by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activists in Nepal and Jamaica to confront homophobia and antigay violence. In Nepal, court challenges and engagement with a dynamic political process brought extraordinary advances, including a Supreme Court decision decriminalizing homosexual conduct and affirming equal rights for all LGBT citizens. Nepal even began to promote itself as a gay-friendly tourist destination. In Jamaica, the country's leading LGBT organization was able to build a broad coalition of support and create public debate regarding the rights of LGBT persons. An international "Stop Murder Music" campaign was hugely successful in bringing global attention to violent, antigay lyrics in Jamaican dancehall music, forcing the cancellation of hundreds of concerts, and prompting several leading performers to sign pledges promising to stop performing homophobic songs. Sustained engagement with the Jamaican police virtually ended police participation in violent attacks against members of the LGBT community.

The strongest human rights advocacy efforts are based on broad and diverse partnerships—sometimes between unlikely allies—united around a single goal. Chapter 11 details a dynamic grassroots campaign in California to challenge the sentencing of juvenile offenders to life in prison with no possibility of parole. The campaign brought together a diverse coalition including members of the religious community, youth, law professors, family members of the incarcerated, family members of murder victims, and former law enforcement officials. In its effort to change state law, the campaign managed to gain the support of the 30,000-member state’s prison guards’ union, a powerful political force known for its “tough on crime” stance. The campaign generated hundreds of visits to state legislators and thousands of phone calls and letters in an effort that came only one vote short of passing new legislation that would provide juvenile offenders sentenced to life without parole an opportunity for review and possible release.

In addition to the eleven case studies explored here, this book also provides a series of profiles, one accompanying each chapter, to lend insight into the lives of some of the individuals at the center of these campaigns. Some of the profiles are about activists, and others are about individuals who have suffered the human rights abuses described. Some are both. These personal stories show how human rights abuses profoundly affect people’s lives, what motivates people to become activists, and why they persist in their struggle, despite tremendous obstacles.

Many of the individuals profiled never intended to become activists. They began other careers—for example, one as a computer scientist, one as a journalist, another as a gemologist—but once exposed to human rights abuses, they became passionate advocates for justice. Some became advocates as a result of intensely personal experience—such as the Libyan seeking justice for the brother who was massacred at Abu Salim prison, or the young woman who survived years of exploitative child labor to become a national leader for domestic workers. Their stories depict the diversity among human rights advocates, and their reflections illuminate both the frustrations and the rewards of human rights work.

Before turning to the case studies and profiles, it is important to note that most of the tactics and strategies of the modern-day human rights movement are not new. Today’s human rights advocates stand on the shoulders of the slavery abolitionists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, and other social movements

that have transformed society in profound and unalterable ways. Exploring this rich history is beyond the scope of this book. Interested readers can find resources on the history of the human rights movement and social activism in the Further Readings section at the end of this volume.

While virtually all the tools human rights advocates use—from press releases to lobbying meetings with government officials to public demonstrations—have been used before in many other contexts, there are new lessons to be learned from how these tools have been applied to human rights issues; the way advocates have been able to navigate the United Nations to advance the human rights agenda; the development of innovations and the adaptation of traditional advocacy strategies to a rapidly changing world environment; and the explosive growth of civil society and its potential for powerful new alliances and partnerships on behalf of human rights.

This book gives preference to cases where advocates have been able to win victories and advance the cause of human rights, even in modest ways, in order to illuminate campaigns that have been effective and can offer lessons for others. The reality of human rights work, however, is that despite their best efforts, advocates may work on an issue for years without discernible progress. Often external factors, such as powerful governmental interests, are simply insurmountable. This book also attempts to explore the considerable challenges that human rights advocates encounter in their work. Each chapter examines the elements that contributed to a campaign's success, as well as barriers to progress. Not every case study presented here ends in triumph. Some have failed to achieve their goals, at least in the short-term. Regardless of outcome, each story provides valuable lessons, and in many instances, tremendous inspiration. These accounts provide a window into the way that human rights advocates conduct their work, their real-life struggles and challenges, the rich diversity of tools and strategies they employ, and ultimately their courage and persistence in advancing human rights.