

## Script: Focus Human Rights 1

The series “WissensWerte” (civic education clips) on human rights consists of a general film on this issue and one film on each of the three dimensions of human rights. Each dimension carries equal weight in the human rights system.

The clips also examine the role of NGOs, the rights of women, the further development of the human rights system and the most important problems.

This clip looks at the first dimension, civil and political rights. It also tells the history of human rights and looks at current human rights violations.

Let us begin by looking at the current human rights situation:

Human rights are being violated all over the world. Every day. In 2010, Amnesty International documented cases of torture and major restrictions on freedom of opinion in almost half of all countries.

Governments around the world therefore face the same task: how to respect, protect and real-ize human rights.

This includes a free press as well as the abolition of the death penalty.

The NGO Freedom House identified the places with the worst human rights violations in 2011.

But human rights violations also occur in industrialized Western democracies which respect the rule of law.

For example, Europe has a restrictive asylum policy. Due to the EU’s hermetically sealed external borders, refugees are often unable to exercise their right to apply for asylum. Many refugees pay for their attempt to reach the EU with their lives.

What is more, certain communities, for instance the Roma, still face discrimination.

The US continues to uphold the death penalty. Furthermore, it is still detaining prisoners in Guantanamo without due process of law.

But not only states can violate human rights.

Non-state players such as organized crime or rebel groups can commit grave human rights violations. These include human trafficking, forced labour, expulsions or the recruitment of child soldiers.

Large companies can also disregard human rights for the sake of economic success, for example by paying low wages, tolerating child labour, preventing the formation of trade unions or imposing working conditions which are detrimental to health. States often fail to take sufficiently resolute action in order not to jeopardize domestic and foreign investment.

Human rights are therefore still being violated on a large scale. Full realization of all rights is not in sight. Nevertheless, humanity has made considerable progress over the years and continues to do so. That becomes evident when we take a look at the past.

Where do human rights actually come from and how have they developed?

The first precursor of the human rights concept emerged as far back as classical antiquity: some philosophers of that age referred to the equality of every individual.

The Magna Charta Libertatum restricted the abuse of power by English kings for the first time.

With the start of the modern age, the view of the individual began to change. Previously, the individual was defined as part of a group into which he or she was born. Most people were serfs.

From that time on, the individual was increasingly the focus of attention. Improved education opportunities and the weakening of feudalism fostered this.

The first key turning point for the concept of human rights came with the start of the Enlightenment. The philosophy of the Enlightenment reflected the interests of an ever more powerful mercantile and professional class.

It wanted to protect its economic power and pushed for political participation.

The Habeas Corpus Act limited arbitrary actions by the state. No-one was to be locked up without a trial and without appearing before a judge.

In the Bill of Rights, the power of the crown was further curtailed and the rights of Parliament strengthened.

These three laws were important human rights milestones. However, very few people benefited from them, principally the aristocracy and a small group of prosperous citizens.

In philosophy, too, crucial progress was made.

The concept of natural law has existed since classical antiquity. According to this idea, there is an unwritten law superior to state legislation. Originally, this concept was founded on religion and signified a divine order.

During the Enlightenment, natural law evolved further into the law of reason.

This law was no longer God-given. It was the right of every individual in their capacity as a being endowed with reason.

John Locke was one of the most important guiding intellectual forces in the sphere of human rights. He claimed that individuals were naturally entitled to certain rights: the right to life, freedom and property.

Furthermore, Locke developed a very important new idea, namely that the state was obliged to protect these rights! If it failed to do so then citizens had the right to revolt.

The concept of human rights lay at the heart of the American War of Independence and the French Revolution.

As a result of these two major events, human rights were enshrined for the first time in national constitutions.

Here, too, rights were limited exclusively to white men with property, that is to say a small minority. Nevertheless, the fundamental concept of human rights could no longer be stopped!

The second major turning point in the history of human rights began after the Second World War. The extreme barbarism of the conflict shocked the world. Astonishing things were achieved during the short period between the end of the war and the start of the Cold War:

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human rights became one of the key pillars of the constitutive charter of the UN. A Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted and adopted by the UN General Assembly.

Two complementary Covenants were also drawn up: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which sets out the rights of the first dimension.

And the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which encompasses the rights of the second dimension.

Three crucial things were new: human rights were now universal. They applied without exception to every individual. Their implementation was monitored by a body of experts.

To intensify this, a whole series of conventions were adopted, for example the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In the 1970s, collective rights were incorporated into the human rights debate, primarily by developing countries. They formed the third dimension of human rights.

But let's get back to the rights of the first dimension. First and foremost, they include civil liberties and protection rights. They are intended to protect each individual from arbitrary acts by the state and make democratic participation in the political sphere possible for everyone.

The rights of the first dimension include: protection from state intervention, for example the prohibition of slavery, forced labour and torture, as well as the right to live and the freedom of the individual.

Furthermore, the first dimension guarantees certain liberties, for example, freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of opinion, information and the press.

In addition, it guarantees the equality of men and women and the prohibition of discrimination of any kind.

It is evident that even if many violations are still being committed, the concept of human rights has come a long way. A world without human rights is barely conceivable today.

There is more information on this issue in the other films in the series "WissensWerte" (civic education clips) on human rights.