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## **A Facade of Action**

### **The Misuse of Dialogue and Cooperation with Rights Abusers**

By Kenneth Roth

In last year's World Report, Human Rights Watch highlighted the intensifying attacks by abusive governments on human rights defenders, organizations, and institutions. This year we address the flip side of the problem—the failure of the expected champions of human rights to respond to the problem, defend those people and organizations struggling for human rights, and stand up firmly against abusive governments.

There is often a degree of rationality in a government's decision to violate human rights. The government might fear that permitting greater freedom would encourage people to join together in voicing discontent and thus jeopardize its grip on power. Or abusive leaders might worry that devoting resources to the impoverished would compromise their ability to enrich themselves and their cronies.

International pressure can change that calculus. Whether exposing or condemning abuses, conditioning access to military aid or budgetary support on ending them, imposing targeted sanctions on individual abusers, or even calling for prosecution and punishment of those responsible, public pressure raises the cost of violating human rights. It discourages further oppression, signaling that violations cannot continue cost-free.

All governments have a duty to exert such pressure. A commitment to human rights requires not only upholding them at home but also using available and appropriate tools to convince other governments to respect them as well.

No repressive government likes facing such pressure. Today many are fighting back, hoping to dissuade others from adopting or continuing such measures. That reaction is hardly surprising. What is disappointing is the number of governments that, in the face of that reaction, are abandoning public pressure. With disturbing frequency, governments that might have been counted on to generate such pressure for human rights are accepting the rationalizations and subterfuges of repressive governments and giving up. In place of a commitment to exerting public pressure for human rights, they profess a preference for softer approaches such as private "dialogue" and "cooperation."

There is nothing inherently wrong with dialogue and cooperation to promote human rights. Persuading a government through dialogue to genuinely cooperate with efforts to improve its human rights record is a key goal of human rights advocacy. A cooperative approach makes sense for a government that demonstrably wants to respect human rights but lacks the resources or technical know-how to implement its commitment. It can also be useful for face-saving reasons—if a government is willing to end violations but wants to appear to act on its own initiative. Indeed, Human Rights Watch often engages quietly with governments for such reasons.

But when the problem is a lack of political will to respect rights, public pressure is needed to change the cost-benefit analysis that leads to the choice of repression over rights. In such cases, the quest for dialogue and cooperation becomes a charade designed more to appease critics of complacency than to secure change, a calculated diversion from the fact that nothing of consequence is being done. Moreover, the refusal to use pressure makes dialogue and cooperation less effective because governments know there is nothing to fear from simply feigning serious participation.

Recent illustrations of this misguided approach include ASEAN's tepid response to Burmese repression, the United Nations' deferential attitude toward Sri Lankan atrocities, the European Union's obsequious approach to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the soft Western reaction to certain favored repressive African leaders such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, the weak United States policy toward Saudi Arabia, India's pliant posture toward Burma and Sri Lanka, and the near-universal cowardice in confronting China's deepening crackdown on basic liberties. In all of these cases, governments, by abandoning public pressure, effectively close their eyes to repression.

Even those that shy away from using pressure in most cases are sometimes willing to apply it toward pariah governments, such as North Korea, Iran, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, whose behavior, whether on human rights or other matters, is so outrageous that it overshadows other interests. But in too many cases, governments these days are disappointingly disinclined to use public pressure to alter the calculus of repression.

When governments stop exerting public pressure to address human rights violations, they leave domestic advocates—rights activists, sympathetic parliamentarians, concerned journalists—without crucial support. Pressure from abroad can help create the political space for local actors to push their government to respect rights. It also can let domestic advocates know that they are not alone, that others stand with them. But when there is little or no such pressure, repressive governments have a freer hand to restrict domestic advocates, as has occurred in recent years in Russia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Cambodia, and elsewhere. And

because dialogue and cooperation look too much like acquiescence and acceptance, domestic advocates sense indifference rather than solidarity.

## **A Timid Response to Repression**

In recent years the use of dialogue and cooperation in lieu of public pressure has emerged with a vengeance at the UN, from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to many members of the Human Rights Council. In addition, the EU seems to have become particularly infatuated with the idea of dialogue and cooperation, with the EU's first high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Catherine Ashton, repeatedly expressing a preference for "quiet diplomacy" regardless of the circumstances. Leading democracies of the global South, such as South Africa, India, and Brazil, have promoted quiet demarches as a preferred response to repression. The famed eloquence of US President Barack Obama has sometimes eluded him when it comes to defending human rights, especially in bilateral contexts with, for example, China, India, and Indonesia. Obama has also not insisted that the various agencies of the US government, such as the Defense Department and various embassies, convey strong human rights messages consistently—a problem, for example, in Egypt, Indonesia, and Bahrain.

This is a particularly inopportune time for proponents of human rights to lose their public voice, because various governments that want to prevent the vigorous enforcement of human rights have had no qualms about raising theirs. Many are challenging first principles, such as the universality of human rights. For example, some African governments complain that the International Criminal Court's current focus on Africa is selective and imperialist, as if the fate of a few African despots were more important than the suffering of countless African victims. China's economic rise is often cited as reason to believe that authoritarian government is more effective for guiding economic development in low-income countries, even though unaccountable governments are more likely to succumb to corruption and less likely to respond to or invest in people's most urgent needs (as demonstrated by the rising number of protests in China—some 90,000 annually by the government's own count—fueled by growing discontent over the corruption and arbitrariness of local officials). Some governments, eager to abandon long-established rules for protecting civilians in time of war or threatened security, justify their own violations of the laws of war by citing Sri Lanka's indiscriminate attacks in its victory over the rebel Tamil Tigers, or Western (and especially US) tolerance of torture and arbitrary detention in combating terrorism. Governments that lose their voice on human rights effectively abandon these crucial debates to the opponents of universal human rights enforcement.

Part of this reticence is due to a crisis of confidence. The shifting global balance of power (particularly the rise of China), an intensified competition for markets and natural resources at a time of economic turmoil, and the decline in moral standing of Western powers occasioned by their use with impunity of abusive counterterrorism techniques have made many governments less willing to take a strong public stand in favor of human rights.

Ironically, some of the governments most opposed to using pressure to promote human rights have no qualms about using pressure to deflect human rights criticism. China, for example, pulled out all stops in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to suppress a report to the UN Security Council on the discovery of Chinese weaponry in Darfur despite an arms embargo. Sri Lanka did the same in an unsuccessful effort to quash a UN advisory panel on accountability for war crimes committed during its armed conflict with the Tamil Tigers. China also mounted a major lobbying effort to prevent the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to imprisoned Chinese writer and human rights activist Liu Xiaobo, and when that failed, it tried unsuccessfully to discourage governments from attending the award ceremony in Norway. China made a similar effort to block a proposed UN commission of inquiry into war crimes committed in Burma.

## **The United Nations and Its Member States**

The obsession with dialogue and cooperation is particularly intense at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, where many of the members insist that the Council should practice “cooperation, not condemnation.” A key form of pressure at the Council is the ability to send fact-finders to expose what abuses were committed and to hold governments accountable for not curtailing abuses. One important medium for these tools is a resolution aimed at a particular country or situation. Yet many governments on the Council eschew any country resolution designed to generate pressure (except in the case of the Council’s perennial pariah, Israel). As China explained (in the similar context of the UN General Assembly), “[s]ubmitting [a] country specific resolution...will make the issue of human rights politicized and is not conducive to genuine cooperation on human rights issues.” The African Group at the UN has said it will support country resolutions only with the consent of the target government, in other words, only when the resolution exerts no pressure at all. This approach was taken to an extreme after Sri Lanka launched indiscriminate attacks on civilians in the final months of its war with the Tamil Tigers—rather than condemn these atrocities, a majority of Council members overcame a minority’s objections and voted to congratulate Sri Lanka on its military victory without mentioning government atrocities.

If members of the Council want dialogue and cooperation to be effective in upholding human rights, they should limit use of these tools to governments that have demonstrated a political

will to improve. But whether out of calculation or cowardice, many Council members promote dialogue and cooperation as a universal prescription without regard to whether a government has the political will to curtail its abusive behavior. They thus resist tests for determining whether a government's asserted interest in cooperation is a ploy to avoid pressure or a genuine commitment to improvement—tests that might look to the government's willingness to acknowledge its human rights failings, welcome UN investigators to examine the nature of the problem, prescribe solutions, and embark upon reforms. The enemies of human rights enforcement oppose critical resolutions even on governments that clearly fail these tests, such as Burma, Iran, North Korea, Sri Lanka, and Sudan.

Similar problems arise at the UN General Assembly. As the Burmese military reinforced its decades-long rule with sham elections designed to give it a civilian facade, a campaign got under way to intensify pressure by launching an international commission of inquiry to examine the many war crimes committed in the country's long-running armed conflict. A commission of inquiry would be an excellent tool for showing that such atrocities could no longer be committed with impunity. It would also create an incentive for newer members of the military-dominated government to avoid the worst abuses of the past. The idea of a commission of inquiry, originally proposed by the independent UN special rapporteur on Burma, has received support from, among others, the US, the United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Yet some have refused to endorse a commission of inquiry on the spurious grounds that it would not work without the cooperation of the Burmese junta. EU High Representative Ashton, in failing to embrace this tool, said: "Ideally, we should aim at ensuring a measure of cooperation from the national authorities." Similarly, a German Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said that, to help advance human rights in the country, it is "crucial to find some co-operation mechanism with the [Burmese] national authorities." Yet obtaining such cooperation from the Burmese military in the absence of further pressure is a pipe dream.

One favorite form of cooperation is a formal intergovernmental dialogue on human rights, such as those that many governments conduct with China and the EU maintains with a range of repressive countries, including the former-Soviet republics of Central Asia. Authoritarian governments understandably welcome these dialogues because they remove the spotlight from human rights discussions. The public, including domestic activists, is left in the dark, as are most government officials outside the foreign ministry. But Western governments also often cite the existence of such dialogues as justification for not speaking concretely about human rights violations and remedies in more meaningful settings—as Sweden did, for example, during its EU presidency when asked why human rights had not featured more prominently at the EU-Central Asia ministerial conference.

Human Rights Watch's own experience shows that outspoken commentary on human rights practices need not preclude meaningful private dialogue with governments. Human Rights Watch routinely reports on abuses and generates pressure for them to end, but that has not stood in the way of active engagement with many governments that are the subject of these reports. Indeed, governments are often *more* likely to engage with Human Rights Watch, because the sting of public reporting, and a desire to influence it, spurs them to dialogue. If a nongovernmental organization can engage with governments while speaking out about their abuses, certainly governments should be able to do so as well.

## The Need for Benchmarks

Dialogues would have a far greater impact if they were tied to concrete and publicly articulated benchmarks. Such benchmarks would give clear direction to the dialogue and make participants accountable for concrete results. But that is often exactly what dialogue participants want to avoid. The failure to set clear, public benchmarks is itself evidence of a lack of seriousness, an unwillingness to deploy even the minimum pressure needed to make dialogue meaningful. The EU, for example, has argued that publicly articulated benchmarks would introduce tension into a dialogue and undermine its role as a "confidence-building exercise," as if the purpose of the dialogue were to promote warm and fuzzy feelings rather than to improve respect for human rights.

Moreover, repressive governments have become so adept at manipulating these dialogues, and purported promoters of human rights so dependent on them as a sign that they are "doing something," that the repressors have managed to treat the mere commencement or resumption of dialogue as a sign of "progress." Even supposed rights-promoters have fallen into this trap. For example, a 2008 progress report by the EU on the implementation of its Central Asia strategy concluded that things were going well but gave no specifics beyond "intensified political dialogue" as a measurement of "progress."

Even when benchmarks exist, Western governments' willingness to ignore them when they prove inconvenient undermines their usefulness. For example, the EU's bilateral agreements with other countries are routinely conditioned on basic respect for human rights, but the EU nonetheless concluded a significant trade agreement and pursued a full partnership and cooperation agreement with Turkmenistan, a severely repressive government that cannot conceivably be said to comply with the agreements' human rights conditions. It is as if the EU announced in advance that its human rights conditions were mere window-dressing, not to be taken seriously. The EU justified this step in the name of "deeper engagement" and a new "framework for dialogue and cooperation."

Similarly, despite Serbia's failure to apprehend and surrender for trial indicted war crimes suspect Ratko Mladic (the former Bosnian Serb military leader)—a litmus test for the war-crimes cooperation that the EU has repeatedly insisted is a requirement for beginning discussions with Serbia about its accession to the EU—the EU agreed to start discussions anyway. The EU also gradually lifted sanctions imposed on Uzbekistan after security forces massacred hundreds in 2005 in the city of Andijan, even though no steps had been taken toward permitting an independent investigation—originally the chief condition for lifting sanctions—let alone prosecuting those responsible or doing anything else that the EU had called for, such as releasing all wrongfully imprisoned human rights activists.

By the same token, the Obama administration in its first year simply ignored the human rights conditions on the transfer of military aid to Mexico, under the Merida Initiative, even though Mexico had done nothing as required toward prosecuting abusive military officials in civilian courts. While in its second year the administration did withhold a small fraction of funding, it once again certified—despite clear evidence to the contrary—that Mexico was meeting Merida's human rights requirements. The US also signed a funding compact with Jordan under the Millennium Challenge Corporation even though Jordan had failed to improve its failing grades on the MCC's benchmarks for political rights and civil liberties.

## **Weak Leadership**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has been notably reluctant to put pressure on abusive governments. As secretary-general, he has two main tools at his disposal to promote human rights—private diplomacy and his public voice. He can nudge governments to change through his good offices, or he can use the stature of his office to expose those who are unwilling to change. Ban's disinclination to speak out about serious human rights violators means he is often choosing to fight with one hand tied behind his back. He did make strong public comments on human rights when visiting Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, but he was much more reticent when visiting a powerful country like China. And he has placed undue faith in his professed ability to convince by private persuasion the likes of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, Burmese military leader Than Shwe, and Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Worse, far from condemning repression, Ban sometimes went out of his way to portray oppressive governments in a positive light. For example, in the days before Burma's sham elections in November, Ban contended that it was "not too late" to "make this election more inclusive and participatory" by releasing political detainees—an unlikely eventuality that, even if realized, would not have leveled the severely uneven electoral playing field. Even

after the travesty was complete, Ban said only that the elections had been “insufficiently inclusive, participatory and transparent”—a serious understatement.

When he visited China the same month, Ban made no mention of human rights in his meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao, leaving the topic for lesser officials. That omission left the impression that, for the secretary-general, human rights were at best a second-tier priority. In commenting on the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo, the imprisoned Chinese human rights activist, Ban never congratulated Liu or called for his release from prison but instead praised Beijing by saying: “China has achieved remarkable economic advances, lifted millions out of poverty, broadened political participation and steadily joined the international mainstream in its adherence to recognized human rights instruments and practices.”

The new British prime minister, David Cameron, did only marginally better during his visit to China. He did not mention Liu in his formal meeting with Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, saving the matter for informal talks over dinner. And his public remarks stayed at the level of generality with which the Chinese governments itself is comfortable—the need for “greater political opening” and the rule of law—rather than mention specific cases of imprisoned government critics or other concrete rights restrictions.

The government of German Chancellor Angela Merkel showed a similar lack of courage in its dealings with China. “Dialogue” is the German government’s widely mentioned guiding principle, and Merkel in public remarks during her latest visit to China made only the slightest passing reference to human rights, although she claimed to have mentioned the issue privately. At the “China Meets Europe” summit in Hamburg, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, without mentioning concrete abuses, cited an “intensive rule of law dialogue” and a “human rights dialogue” as “build[ing] a solid foundation for a real partnership between Germany and China.” In France, President Nicolas Sarkozy, as he was about to welcome Chinese President Hu Jintao in Paris in November, did not even congratulate Liu Xiaobo for having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

With respect to Saudi Arabia, the US government in 2005 established a “strategic dialogue” which, because of Saudi objections, did not mention human rights as a formal subject but relegated the topic to the “Partnership, Education, Exchange, and Human Development Working Group.” Even that dialogue then gradually disappeared. While the US government contributed to keeping Iran off the board of the new UN Women agency in 2010 because of its mistreatment of women, it made no such effort with Saudi Arabia, which has an abysmal record on women but was given a seat by virtue of its financial contribution. Similarly, the UK has maintained a quiet “two kingdoms” dialogue with Saudi Arabia since 2005. Its



launching included only oblique references to human rights, and it has exerted no discernible pressure on the Saudi government to improve its rights record.

## Other Interests at Stake

Sometimes those who promote quiet dialogue over public pressure argue efficacy, although often other interests seem to be at play. In Uzbekistan, which provides an important route for resupplying NATO troops in Afghanistan, the EU argued that targeted sanctions against those responsible for the Andijan massacre were “alienating” the government and “standing in the way of a constructive relationship,” as if making nice to a government that aggressively denied any responsibility for killing hundreds of its citizens would be more successful at changing it than sustained pressure. In making the case for why human rights concerns should not stand in the way of a new partnership and cooperation agreement with severely repressive Turkmenistan, a country with large gas reserves, the EU resorts to similar stated fears of alienation. To avoid public indignation if it were to openly abandon human rights in favor of these other interests, the EU feigns ongoing concern through the medium of private dialogue.

A similar dynamic is at play in China, where Western governments seek economic opportunity as well as cooperation on a range of global and regional issues. For example, in its first year in office, the Obama administration seemed determined to downplay any issue, such as human rights, that might raise tensions in the US-China relationship. President Obama deferred meeting with the Dalai Lama until after his trip to China and refused to meet with Chinese civil society groups during the trip, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that human rights “can’t interfere” with other US interests in China. Obama’s efforts to ingratiate himself with Chinese President Hu Jintao gained nothing discernible while it reinforced China’s view of the US as a declining power. That weakness only heightened tension when, in Obama’s second year in office, he and Secretary Clinton rediscovered their human rights voice on the case of Liu Xiaobo, although it remains to be seen whether they will be outspoken on rights during the January 2011 US-China summit.

Western governments also have been reluctant to exert pressure for human rights on governments that they count as counterterrorism allies. For example, the Obama administration and the Friends of Yemen, a group of states and intergovernmental organizations established in January 2010, have not conditioned military or development assistance to Yemen on human rights improvements, despite a worsening record of abusive conduct by Yemeni security forces and continuing government crackdowns on independent journalists and largely peaceful southern separatists.

US policy toward Egypt shows that pressure can work. In recent years, the US government has maintained a quiet dialogue with Egypt. Beginning in 2010, however, the White House and State Department repeatedly condemned abuses, urged repeal of Egypt's emergency law, and called for free elections. These public calls helped to secure the release of several hundred political detainees held under the emergency law. Egypt also responded with anger—for example, waging a lobbying campaign to stop a US Senate resolution condemning its human rights record. The reaction was designed to scare US diplomats into resuming a quieter approach, but in fact it showed that Egypt is profoundly affected by public pressure from Washington.

### Defending Rights by Osmosis

One common rationalization offered for engagement without pressure is that rubbing shoulders with outsiders will somehow help to convert abusive agents of repressive governments. The Pentagon makes that argument in the case of Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka, and the US government adopted that line to justify resuming military aid to Indonesia's elite special forces (Kopassus), a unit with a long history of severe abuse, including massacres in East Timor and "disappearances" of student leaders in Jakarta. With respect to Kopassus, while the Indonesian government's human rights record has improved dramatically in recent years, a serious gap remains its failure to hold senior military officers accountable for human rights violations, even in the most high-profile cases. In 2010 the US relinquished the strongest lever it had by agreeing to lift a decade-old ban on direct military ties with Kopassus. The Indonesian military made some rhetorical concessions—promising to discharge convicted offenders and to take action against future offenders—but the US did not condition resumption of aid on such changes. Convicted offenders today remain in the military, and there is little reason to credit the military's future pledge given its poor record to date. Notably, the US did not insist that Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono authorize a special court to investigate Kopassus officers implicated in the abduction and presumed killing of student leaders in 1997-98, a step already recommended by Indonesia's own parliament. And the US did not insist on ending the military's exclusive jurisdiction over crimes committed by soldiers.

Trivializing the significance of pressure, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates justified resuming direct ties with Kopassus: "Working with them further will produce greater gains in human rights for people than simply standing back and shouting at people." Yet even as the US was finalizing terms with Indonesia on resumption of aid to Kopassus, an Indonesian general implicated in abductions of student leaders was promoted to deputy defense minister and a colonel implicated in other serious abuses was named deputy commander of Kopassus.

A similarly misplaced faith in rubbing shoulders with abusive forces rather than applying pressure on them informed President Obama's decision to continue military aid to a series of governments that use child soldiers—Chad, Sudan, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—despite a new US law prohibiting such aid. In the case of Congo, for example, the military has had children in its ranks since at least 2002, and a 2010 UN report found a “dramatic increase” in the number of such children in the prior year. Instead of using a cutoff of military assistance to pressure these governments to stop using child soldiers, the Obama administration waived the law to give the US time to “work with” the offending militaries.

Another favorite rationale for a quiet approach, heard often in dealings with China, is that economic liberalization will lead on its own to greater political freedoms—a position maintained even after three decades in which that has not happened. Indeed, in 2010 the opposite occurred—in its regulation of the internet, China began using its economic clout to try to strengthen *restrictions* on speech, pressing businesses to become censors on its behalf. In the end, it was a business—Google—that fought back, in part because censorship threatened its business model. GoDaddy.com, the world's largest web registrar, also announced that it would no longer register domains in China because onerous government requirements forcing disclosure of customer identities made censorship easier.

Despite these efforts, China still leveraged access to its lucrative market to gain the upper hand because others in the internet industry, such as Microsoft, did not follow Google's lead. Conversely, the one time that China backed off was when it faced concerted pressure—it apparently abandoned its “Green Dam” censoring software when the industry, civil society, governments, and China's own internet users all loudly protested. And even Google's license to operate a search engine in China was renewed, casting further doubt on the idea that a public critique of China's human rights practices would inevitably hurt business.

## Humanitarian Excuses

Some governments and intergovernmental organizations contend that promoting human rights must take a back seat to relieving humanitarian suffering. Humanitarian emergencies often require an urgent response, but this argument becomes yet another excuse to avoid pressure even when human rights abuses are the *cause* of the humanitarian crisis. That occurred in Zimbabwe during Operation Murambatsvina (Clean the Filth), when the government destroyed the homes of tens of thousands of people, and in Sri Lanka during the final stages of the civil war, when the army disregarded the plight of hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians who were trapped in a deadly war zone.

In Zimbabwe, the UN country team never publicly condemned the destruction and displacement caused by Operation Murambatsvina, and almost never spoke out publicly

about the extremely serious human rights abuses committed by Robert Mugabe's government and the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). In fact, during his four-year tenure in Zimbabwe, the UN resident representative rarely met with Zimbabwean human rights activists, never attended any of their unfair trials, and almost never spoke publicly about the widespread and severe human rights abuses being committed. Such silence did not translate into better access to the displaced civilian population—the Zimbabwean authorities and ZANU-PF officials continued to restrict and manipulate humanitarian operations in Zimbabwe, and frequently prevented humanitarian organizations from reaching vulnerable populations suspected of being pro-opposition. But by failing to publicly condemn the abuses in Zimbabwe, the UN country team lost key opportunities to use its substantial influence as the most important implementer of humanitarian and development assistance in the country. It also left itself addressing the symptoms of repression rather than their source.

By contrast, the special envoy appointed by then Secretary-General Kofi Annan to investigate Operation Murambatsvina issued a strongly worded report in 2005 citing the indiscriminate and unjustified evictions and urging that those responsible be brought to justice. The report led to widespread international condemnation of Mugabe's government—pressure that forced the government to allow greater humanitarian access to the displaced population.

Similarly in Sri Lanka, in the final months of the war with the Tamil Tigers, UN personnel were virtually the only independent observers, giving them a unique capacity to alert the world to ongoing war crimes and to generate pressure to spare civilians. Instead, the UN covered up its own information about civilian casualties, stopped the release of satellite imagery showing how dire the situation was, and even stayed silent when local UN staff members were arbitrarily arrested. UN officials were concerned that by speaking out they would lose access required to assist a population in need, but given Sri Lanka's complete dependence on international assistance to run camps that ultimately housed 300,000 internally displaced persons, the UN arguably overestimated the risk of being barred from the country. In addition, the government's use of an expensive Washington public-relations firm to counter criticism of its war conduct showed its concern with its international image. By not speaking out, the UN lost an opportunity to influence the way the Sri Lankan army was conducting the war and thus to prevent civilian suffering rather than simply alleviate it after the fact. By contrast, after the conflict, when the independent UN special rapporteur on the rights of the internally displaced spoke out about the lack of freedom of movement for the internally displaced, the government promptly began releasing civilians from the camps.

A comparable pattern could be found in the role played by Western development-assistance bureaucracies in dealing with Rwanda and Ethiopia. Both countries are seen as efficient, relatively uncorrupt recipients of development assistance. Western donor agencies, often finding it difficult to productively invest the funds that they are charged with disbursing, thus have a strong interest in maintaining warm relationships with the governments. (Ethiopia's role in combating the terrorist threat emanating from Somalia reinforces this interest.) Indeed, economic assistance to both countries has grown as their repression has intensified. Because it would be too callous to say that economic development justifies ignoring repression, the European Commission, the UK, several other EU states, and the US have offered various excuses, from the claim that public pressure will backfire in the face of national pride to the assertion that donor governments have less leverage than one might think. The result is a lack of meaningful pressure—nothing to change the cost-benefit analysis that makes repression an attractive option. Quiet entreaties are least likely to be effective when they are drowned out by parallel delivery of massive quantities of aid.

## Dated Policies

Brazil, India, and South Africa, strong and vibrant democracies at home, remain unsupportive of many human rights initiatives abroad, even though each benefitted from international solidarity in its struggle to end, respectively, dictatorship, colonization, and apartheid. Their foreign policies are often based on building South-South political and economic ties and are bolstered by reference to Western double standards, but these rationales do not justify these emerging powers turning their backs on people who have not yet won the rights that their own citizens enjoy. With all three countries occupying seats on the UN Security Council, it would be timely for them to adopt a more responsible position toward protecting people from the predation of less progressive governments.

Japan traditionally has resisted a strong human rights policy in part because Japanese foreign policy has tended to center around promoting exports and building good will, in part because the setting of foreign policy has been dominated by bureaucrats who faced little public outcry over their inclination to maintain smooth relations with all governments, and in part because Japan still has not come to terms with its own abusive record in World War II. However, in recent years, partly due to a change in government and partly due to growing pressure from the small but emerging Japanese civil society, the Japanese government has begun to be more outspoken on human rights with regard to such places as North Korea and Burma.

The Chinese government is naturally reluctant to promote human rights because it maintains such a repressive climate at home and does not want to bolster any international system for the protection of human rights that might come back to haunt it. But even China should not

see turning its back on mass atrocities—a practice that, one would hope, China has moved beyond—as advancing its self-interest.

## Conclusion

Whatever the rationalization, the quest for dialogue and cooperation is simply not a universal substitute for public pressure as a tool to promote human rights. Dialogue and cooperation have their place, but the burden should be on the abusive government to show a genuine willingness to improve. In the absence of demonstrated political will, public pressure should be the default response to repression. It is understandable when governments that themselves are serious human rights violators want to undermine the option of public pressure out of fear that it will be applied to them in turn. But it is shameful when governments that purportedly promote human rights fall for, or endorse, the same ploy.

Defending human rights is rarely convenient. It may sometimes interfere with other governmental interests. But if governments want to pursue those interests instead of human rights, they should at least have the courage to admit it, instead of hiding behind meaningless dialogues and fruitless quests for cooperation.

## This Report

This report is Human Rights Watch's twenty-first annual review of human rights practices around the globe. It summarizes key human rights issues in more than 90 countries and territories worldwide, drawing on events through November 2010.

Each country entry identifies significant human rights issues, examines the freedom of local human rights defenders to conduct their work, and surveys the response of key international actors, such as the United Nations, European Union, Japan, the United States, and various regional and international organizations and institutions.

This report reflects extensive investigative work undertaken in 2010 by the Human Rights Watch research staff, usually in close partnership with human rights activists in the country in question. It also reflects the work of our advocacy team, which monitors policy developments and strives to persuade governments and international institutions to curb abuses and promote human rights. Human Rights Watch publications, issued throughout the year, contain more detailed accounts of many of the issues addressed in the brief summaries collected in this volume. They can be found on the Human Rights Watch website, [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org).

As in past years, this report does not include a chapter on every country where Human Rights Watch works, nor does it discuss every issue of importance. The failure to include a particular country or issue often reflects no more than staffing limitations and should not be

taken as commentary on the significance of the problem. There are many serious human rights violations that Human Rights Watch simply lacks the capacity to address.

The factors we considered in determining the focus of our work in 2010 (and hence the content of this volume) include the number of people affected and the severity of abuse, access to the country and the availability of information about it, the susceptibility of abusive forces to influence, and the importance of addressing certain thematic concerns and of reinforcing the work of local rights organizations.

The World Report does not have separate chapters addressing our thematic work but instead incorporates such material directly into the country entries. Please consult the Human Rights Watch website for more detailed treatment of our work on children's rights, women's rights, arms and military issues, business and human rights, health and human rights, international justice, terrorism and counterterrorism, refugees and displaced people, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people's rights, and for information about our international film festivals.

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