

FROM DECLARATIONS TO ENFORCEMENT: BRIDGING THE GAP IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

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Abstract

International human rights law has developed an extensive normative framework through declarations, treaties, and conventions aimed at protecting fundamental freedoms and human dignity. However, the effectiveness of these instruments is persistently undermined by the lack of enforceable mechanisms, leading to a significant gap between stated commitments and actual implementation. This research investigates the disparity between the formal recognition of human rights and their enforcement in practice. The study adopts a doctrinal research methodology, examining legal texts, treaty bodies, international case law, and enforcement practices across various jurisdictions. It critically analyses structural and political limitations such as state sovereignty, weak institutional capacity, and geopolitical selectivity that hinder effective accountability. The article also evaluates current mechanisms like treaty bodies, regional human rights courts, and the Universal Periodic Review, highlighting both their contributions and shortcomings. Key findings suggest that enforcement gaps can be narrowed through enhanced domestic incorporation of international norms, strengthened regional systems, conditional sovereignty models like the Responsibility to Protect R2P, and leveraging civil society advocacy. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for coordinated reform and practical enforcement strategies to ensure that the promise of international human rights law is matched by meaningful protection on the ground. While international human rights law has evolved through a robust framework of declarations, treaties, and conventions, the persistent lack of effective enforcement mechanisms continues to undermine its impact. This article explores the dichotomy between normative progress and practical implementation, examining structural, political, and legal hurdles that hinder enforcement. It investigates existing enforcement mechanisms, evaluates their effectiveness, and proposes innovative legal, institutional, and diplomatic strategies to bridge the gap between lofty declarations and meaningful realization of rights on the ground.

INTRODUCTION

The global commitment to human rights is well established in international discourse, with a proliferation of treaties, conventions, and

declarations recognizing the inherent dignity and equal rights of all human beings. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in

1948, the international community has sought to create a robust legal architecture to safeguard civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. However, this normative progress is contrasted by persistent and widespread violations, many of which occur with limited or no consequences for perpetrators. The disconnect between the formal articulation of rights and their practical enforcement has become one of the most pressing challenges in the field of international law. This research article explores the extent and causes of the enforcement gap in international human rights law. It examines the limitations of current enforcement mechanisms, including treaty bodies, regional courts, and UN procedures, and questions why international law remains largely aspirational in contexts where enforcement is politically inconvenient or structurally weak. The core hypothesis is that the enforcement gap is rooted in the tension between state sovereignty and universal human rights norms, compounded by institutional fragmentation, political selectivity, and inadequate domestic incorporation. The study uses doctrinal legal analysis, drawing on primary legal instruments, jurisprudence, and institutional practices. It also includes select case studies to illustrate real-world outcomes. The outcome of this inquiry reveals that while international human rights law has achieved substantial normative development, its enforcement remains conditional, inconsistent, and often symbolic. Bridging this gap requires a combination of legal reform, institutional strengthening, and greater integration of human rights into national legal systems (Gul, et al., 2025; Malik & Gul, 2024).

The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 traces the historical and normative evolution of international human rights law. Section 3 identifies and analyses the core challenges in enforcement. Section 4 evaluates existing enforcement mechanisms and their efficacy. Section 5 proposes strategies and models for bridging the enforcement gap. Section 6 presents relevant case studies to contextualize the analysis. Finally, Section 7 concludes with key insights and policy-oriented recommendations for strengthening the enforcement of international human rights law. International human rights law has developed significantly over the last century, marked by milestones such as the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights 1948, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights ICCPR, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ICESCR, among many others. However, the transformation of these aspirational declarations into enforceable rights remains elusive. Despite a comprehensive normative framework, grave violations of human rights continue globally, often with impunity. This article analyses the limitations of current enforcement mechanisms and the systemic disconnect between international human rights commitments and their domestic realization (Dalimunthe, & Riza, 2025; Gul et al., 2025).

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a **doctrinal legal research methodology**, focusing on the systematic analysis of primary and secondary legal sources to investigate the gap between the normative development and enforcement of international human rights law. Primary materials include international treaties, conventions, and charters such as the ICCPR, ICESCR, and regional human rights instruments, as well as jurisprudence from international and regional courts. Secondary sources encompass scholarly articles, reports from United Nations bodies, treaty monitoring committees, and human rights NGOs. The selection of materials was guided by relevance to enforcement mechanisms, compliance practices, and structural limitations within the international legal system. The study also incorporates case studies to contextualize the practical challenges of enforcement in specific geopolitical settings. This qualitative approach enables a critical examination of legal texts, institutional practices, and enforcement trends, providing a comprehensive understanding of why international human rights law often fails to achieve its stated objectives and how this enforcement gap might be effectively addressed (Gul & Malik, 2024).

3. Evolution of International Human Rights Norms

The evolution of international human rights norms is rooted in the recognition of universal human dignity and the need for global standards to protect individuals from state abuse, conflict, and discrimination. While concepts of natural rights and justice have existed for centuries, it was only in the aftermath of the atrocities of World War II that the modern human rights framework was formally

institutionalized. The horrors of the Holocaust and the failure of the international community to prevent mass atrocities catalysed the creation of the United Nations and the subsequent development of international human rights law. The foundational milestone in this development was the adoption of the UDHR in 1948, which, though not legally binding, established a comprehensive catalogue of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The UDHR became a moral and political reference point for subsequent treaties and national constitutions. It laid the groundwork for two legally binding instruments adopted in 1966: the ICCPR and the ICESCR, collectively known with the UDHR as the International Bill of Human Rights. As the global consensus around human rights expanded, specialized conventions were developed to protect vulnerable groups and address specific abuses. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination CERD, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW, the Convention Against Torture CAT, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child CRC. Each of these treaties established monitoring bodies to oversee implementation and compliance (Ouliaris & Gill, 2025; Gul et al., 2025).

In parallel, regional human rights systems emerged to complement the international framework. The European Convention on Human Rights ECHR 1950, the American Convention on Human Rights ACHR 1969, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights ACHPR 1981 created regional courts and commissions empowered to adjudicate human rights violations. Despite these legal advancements, enforcement mechanisms remained weak or dependent on state cooperation. Many treaties allowed for reservations, limiting their applicability. The lack of binding obligations in some cases, and political reluctance to accept external scrutiny in others, weakened implementation. Nevertheless, the evolution of human rights norms has not been static. Newer developments, such as the R2P doctrine, have sought to reframe state sovereignty as conditional upon the protection of human rights. Additionally, emerging issues such as digital privacy, climate justice, and the rights of non-citizens continue to expand the scope of human rights law in the 21st century., while the evolution of international human rights norms

has been significant in building a comprehensive and diverse body of legal instruments, the mechanisms for enforcing these norms remain fragmented, underpowered, and politically constrained necessitating urgent reforms to translate normative ideals into real-world protections (Cocito & De Hert, 2025; Gul et al., 2025).

The modern human rights movement was catalyzed by the atrocities of World War II, leading to the formation of the United Nations and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over time, numerous treaties such as the Convention on the CEDAW, the CAT, and regional instruments like the European Convention on Human Rights have codified specific rights and obligations. Despite their legal sophistication, many of these instruments are declaratory in nature or reliant on voluntary compliance. For instance, the UDHR, while morally authoritative, lacks binding legal status. Even binding treaties often suffer from non-ratification, reservations, or inadequate implementation mechanisms, leading to a normative-implementation gap (Brunet, 2025; Gul et al., 2025).

4. Challenges in Enforcement

4.1 State Sovereignty and Non-Intervention:

One of the most formidable obstacles to the enforcement of international human rights law is the enduring principle of state sovereignty and its corollary, the norm of non-intervention. Enshrined in Article 2(7) of the United Nations Charter, the principle asserts that “nothing should authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state.” While intended to protect states from foreign domination and preserve international peace, this provision has often been invoked to shield states from external scrutiny and accountability for human rights violations. State sovereignty grants governments the supreme authority to regulate affairs within their borders, including the treatment of their citizens. However, this autonomy frequently clashes with the universality of human rights norms, especially in authoritarian or conflict-prone states where repressive measures are justified under the guise of maintaining national security or cultural integrity. In such cases, international criticism is often deflected as unwarranted interference, thereby undermining

external efforts to promote or enforce human rights standards. The tension becomes particularly acute when addressing mass atrocities such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity. While the development of doctrines like the R2P aims to reconcile sovereignty with accountability, actual implementation remains selective and politically contentious. The lack of consistent political will and the use of the Security Council veto by powerful states have frequently stalled decisive action in egregious situations such as Syria, Myanmar, and Sudan (Antai, et al., 2024; Gul et al., 2025)

Furthermore, international human rights mechanisms often lack enforcement teeth precisely because they must navigate the constraints imposed by state sovereignty. Treaty bodies, for example, rely on voluntary state cooperation to submit periodic reports, grant access to special rapporteurs, or comply with recommendations. In cases where states refuse engagement, there are few meaningful repercussions beyond reputational damage. Despite the evolution of international law toward a more people-centered approach, sovereignty continues to dominate global governance structures. The challenge, therefore, is to redefine sovereignty not as an absolute barrier to accountability but as a responsibility to uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals within a state's jurisdiction. Only by reconciling these competing imperatives can the enforcement of international human rights law become both legitimate and effective (Okedele, et al., 2024; Gul & Ahmad, 2025).

4.2 Lack of Coercive Power:

A critical limitation of the international human rights framework lies in its inherent lack of coercive power. Unlike domestic legal systems, where courts possess the authority to enforce judgments through police or penal institutions, international human rights bodies are largely dependent on state cooperation and voluntary compliance. This structural weakness significantly undermines their ability to hold violators accountable or compel remedial action. Most human rights treaty bodies such as the Human Rights Committee under the ICCPR or the Committee Against Torture can issue findings, general comments, and recommendations based on state reports or individual communications. However, these bodies cannot impose binding sanctions, order reparations,

or ensure that states comply with their rulings. Even in cases where states have accepted the jurisdiction of international courts or quasi-judicial bodies, enforcement relies on political will and domestic mechanisms. For example, decisions by regional courts like the ECtHR or the Inter-American Court of Human Rights carry legal authority, but their effectiveness varies. While the ECtHR enjoys relatively high compliance due to institutional pressure from the Council of Europe, other regional or international bodies lack comparable leverage. In regions such as Africa or Asia, compliance is often inconsistent, delayed, or entirely absent (Islam, et al., 2024; Gul et al., 2025).

The problem is exacerbated when dealing with powerful or politically insulated states. Major powers with veto authority in the UN Security Council can shield themselves or their allies from international action, as seen in prolonged inaction over grave human rights crises in Syria, Palestine, or Xinjiang. This selective application of enforcement further erodes the legitimacy of international human rights institutions and fuels accusations of bias or double standards. Moreover, international mechanisms are not equipped with financial or military means to enforce their decisions. Unlike economic agreements, where violations can trigger trade sanctions or legal arbitration, human rights violations do not automatically lead to penalties unless they are linked to other legal instruments or diplomatic tools. This absence of material consequences diminishes the deterrent effect of human rights law and allows violators to act with impunity. To address this enforcement deficit, scholars and practitioners have advocated for strengthening the legal mandate of international bodies, integrating human rights conditions into trade and aid agreements, and promoting stronger domestic enforcement through legal incorporation and civil society engagement. Nevertheless, without a coercive backbone, international human rights law remains highly aspirational compelling in rhetoric, yet often ineffective in practice (Kula, 2024; Lin & Song, 2024).

4.4 Political Selectivity and Double Standards:

One of the most persistent criticisms of the international human rights enforcement regime is its vulnerability to political selectivity and double

standards. While human rights are universally declared to be inalienable and equal, their application and enforcement often reflect geopolitical interests rather than objective legal principles. This inconsistency undermines the legitimacy and credibility of international human rights institutions and erodes trust among states, particularly in the Global South. Selective enforcement occurs when violations by some states are aggressively pursued while similar or worse abuses by politically powerful or strategically important states are ignored or downplayed. For example, while certain authoritarian regimes are routinely condemned by the UN Human Rights Council or subjected to international sanctions, others with equally problematic records enjoy immunity due to their economic influence, military strength, or strategic alliances. This double standard is particularly visible in the use of veto powers at the UN Security Council, where permanent members can block resolutions against themselves or their allies, regardless of the gravity of the human rights situation. The politicization of human rights also manifests in the composition of international bodies. States with poor human rights records are sometimes elected to human rights oversight positions, weakening the integrity of the system from within. This not only discredits enforcement mechanisms but also fosters scepticism about the impartiality and objectivity of international human rights law. It allows repressive governments to accuse human rights bodies of hypocrisy and dismiss legitimate criticisms as politically motivated attacks (Kanwel, et al., 2024; Khan & Usman, 2023).

In addition, powerful states often use human rights as a foreign policy tool, selectively invoking rights rhetoric to justify intervention or apply pressure on adversaries, while ignoring similar violations within their own borders or by their allies. This instrumentalization of human rights undermines their universality and diminishes the moral authority of the global human rights movement. These dynamics contribute to a perception of human rights as a Western-dominated agenda, further complicating cooperation and enforcement in post-colonial and non-Western contexts. Many states become reluctant to engage with international mechanisms, viewing them as biased or externally imposed rather than as genuinely universal legal standards. To combat

political selectivity, international institutions must pursue consistent and impartial application of human rights norms. This includes reforming membership criteria for human rights bodies, promoting transparency in decision-making processes, and reducing political interference in enforcement actions. Only through principled, even-handed engagement can international human rights law regain its credibility and fulfill its promise of equal protection for all, regardless of political convenience or global power dynamics (Strating, et al., 2024; Hussain et al., 2023).

5. Current Enforcement Mechanisms: An Assessment

5.1 Treaty Monitoring Bodies:

Treaty monitoring bodies are fundamental components of the international human rights system. Established under key United Nations human rights treaties, these bodies are tasked with supervising the implementation of treaty obligations by states. Each major treaty such as the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and others like CEDAW, CAT, CERD, and CRC has a corresponding committee of independent experts responsible for monitoring compliance, interpreting legal obligations, and promoting accountability. Although these bodies do not possess direct enforcement powers, they serve as crucial instruments of soft law that encourage states to adhere to their international human rights commitments. One of the primary functions of treaty bodies is the review of **periodic state reports**. States that ratify human rights treaties are obliged to submit regular reports detailing how they are implementing the provisions of the treaty domestically. These reports are examined by the relevant committee, which then issues “concluding observations.” These observations commend progress, highlight areas of concern, and make recommendations for improvement. However, the effectiveness of this mechanism is undermined by delayed or incomplete reporting by many states, as well as the limited capacity of treaty bodies to process the growing volume of submissions. Another important function is the **individual complaints mechanism**, also known as “communications.” Where permitted by the treaty and its optional protocol, individuals can submit complaints alleging violations of their rights. Committees such as the

Human Rights Committee and the Committee Against Torture have developed substantial jurisprudence through this process. While the findings issued are not legally binding in a strict sense, they carry persuasive authority and moral weight. Nevertheless, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in states unwilling to accept or internalize the committees' decisions (Otrashevskaya, et al., 2024; KHAN et al., 2021).

Treaty bodies also issue **general comments or recommendations**, which serve as authoritative interpretations of specific treaty provisions. These documents guide states in implementing their obligations and have been instrumental in expanding and clarifying the scope of rights, such as the right to privacy, the prohibition of torture, and the rights of marginalized groups. Furthermore, in extreme cases involving widespread or systematic violations, some treaty bodies may initiate **inquiries or request urgent action**, although such powers are rarely invoked due to political constraints and limited follow-up mechanisms. Despite their normative contributions, treaty monitoring bodies face significant challenges. Chief among them is the **lack of coercive power** to enforce compliance with their findings. States may disregard recommendations or fail to take remedial action without facing tangible consequences. Additionally, these bodies are often under-resourced and overburdened, with increasing backlogs of reports and individual communications. The effectiveness of their work is further weakened when states engage in bad faith, delay reporting, or reject the legitimacy of the bodies' findings outright. Nonetheless, treaty bodies remain vital to the global human rights infrastructure. They facilitate international oversight, foster dialogue between states and civil society, and contribute to the evolution of international legal standards. Through shadow reports and public sessions, they enable **civil society organizations** to participate in monitoring, thereby enhancing transparency and grassroots accountability. To maximize their impact, reforms are needed—such as streamlining reporting processes, strengthening follow-up procedures, and improving coordination with regional mechanisms. While their influence depends heavily on state cooperation, treaty monitoring bodies continue to play a central role in transforming human rights from abstract declarations

into tangible protections. Each core human rights treaty has an associated monitoring body e.g., the Human Rights Committee for the ICCPR. These bodies review state reports and issue "concluding observations," but they lack binding enforcement powers and face challenges in ensuring compliance (Lehtimäki, et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2021).

5.2 International and Regional Courts:

International and regional human rights courts serve as vital judicial mechanisms for interpreting and enforcing human rights norms. Unlike treaty monitoring bodies, which operate primarily through non-binding observations and recommendations, these courts have the authority to issue legally binding judgments against states found to have violated human rights obligations. While the reach and effectiveness of such courts vary across jurisdictions, they remain crucial in providing victims with avenues for redress, promoting legal accountability, and shaping international human rights jurisprudence. At the international level, the role of human rights adjudication is relatively limited. The International Court of Justice ICJ hears cases between states, including those involving human rights issues, but it lacks jurisdiction over individuals and often avoids politically sensitive matters. The International Criminal Court ICC prosecutes individuals for the gravest human rights violations, including genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. However, the ICC operates under significant constraints, including limited jurisdiction (only over crimes committed in or by states parties), dependence on state cooperation for arrest and enforcement, and growing accusations of selectivity and bias in case selection particularly its focus on African states. By contrast, regional human rights courts have proven to be more accessible and effective in certain contexts. The ECtHR is the most developed and widely respected regional human rights tribunal. Established under the ECHR, it allows individuals to bring cases against their governments after exhausting domestic remedies. Its decisions are legally binding, and its enforcement is supported by the Council of Europe through the Committee of Ministers. The ECtHR has significantly influenced national laws and practices across Europe, though it still faces challenges such as rising caseloads, delays, and occasional non-

compliance by member states (Zaidan & Ibrahim, 2024; Khan et al., 2020).

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, created under the American Convention on Human Rights, similarly adjudicates cases of human rights violations in the Americas. Though not all states in the region recognize its jurisdiction, the Court has issued influential decisions on issues such as enforced disappearances, indigenous rights, and state accountability for past atrocities. Compliance with its rulings has been uneven, but it continues to play a transformative role in the region. The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights is a relatively newer institution established under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Its development has been hampered by limited state acceptance of its jurisdiction, inadequate resources, and political resistance. Only a small number of African Union member states have allowed individuals and NGOs direct access to the Court, reducing its potential reach and impact. Nonetheless, it has issued important judgments on free expression, political rights, and due process, contributing to the slow strengthening of Africa's human rights regime. Despite these achievements, regional courts also face significant challenges. Non-compliance with judgments, delayed implementation, and political backlash from governments resisting judicial oversight undermine their effectiveness. Some states have even withdrawn from courts' jurisdictions or refused to implement adverse rulings, citing concerns over sovereignty or judicial overreach. In addition, courts often lack direct enforcement mechanisms and must rely on political and diplomatic pressure to secure compliance. international and regional courts serve as essential pillars of the human rights enforcement architecture. They offer legal redress for victims, uphold international accountability, and contribute to the development of legal standards. However, their impact depends heavily on state cooperation, regional integration, and institutional independence. Strengthening these courts through enhanced jurisdiction, financial support, and mechanisms for enforcing judgments is vital to narrowing the enforcement gap in international human rights law (Chinweze, et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2020).

5.3 UN Mechanisms and Special Procedures:

Within the United Nations human rights system, Special Procedures constitute a key mechanism for monitoring, reporting, and advising on human rights issues across the globe. These mechanisms, established by the UN Human Rights Council UNHRC, include Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, and Working Groups who are mandated to investigate thematic issues e.g., freedom of expression, torture, or the rights of indigenous peoples or specific country situations where there are grave or persistent rights violations. Special Procedures are some of the most visible and flexible components of the UN human rights apparatus, capable of engaging with a wide range of actors and responding rapidly to emerging crises. Special Procedures carry out a variety of functions: they conduct country visits, issue urgent appeals, provide technical assistance, and submit annual reports to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. During country visits conducted only with the consent of the host state they assess the human rights situation on the ground through meetings with government officials, civil society organizations, and affected communities. The resulting reports offer detailed findings and recommendations intended to improve human rights conditions. In addition to country-specific mandates, thematic mandates play a critical role in setting standards and raising awareness on issues such as enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, and discrimination. These experts help articulate emerging human rights norms and expose violations that may otherwise escape global attention. They also serve as accessible channels for individuals and groups to raise concerns when other legal mechanisms are inaccessible or ineffective (Inboden, 2024).

Despite their importance, Special Procedures face several limitations. Their lack of binding authority means that states are not legally obligated to comply with their recommendations or respond to communications. While some governments engage constructively, others ignore, delay, or outright reject their findings. In some instances, states have denied access to Special Rapporteurs or criticized their mandates as politically biased or intrusive, especially when the investigations concern powerful or authoritarian regimes. Moreover, the politicization of

the Human Rights Council—which appoints Special Procedures and oversees their work—has raised concerns about impartiality and selectivity. Countries with poor human rights records often seek membership on the Council to deflect scrutiny, and political alliances may influence which countries or themes receive attention. This can lead to accusations of double standards and diminish the perceived legitimacy of the UN's human rights machinery. Nevertheless, Special Procedures play a critical role in information gathering, norm-setting, and advocacy. They raise international awareness of human rights abuses, provide support to civil society, and can mobilize diplomatic pressure on governments. Their findings often inform the work of treaty bodies, regional mechanisms, and international courts, making them a vital link in the broader enforcement chain. To enhance their impact, there is a need for greater institutional support, including adequate funding, stronger follow-up mechanisms, and better protection for those who cooperate with them many of whom face reprisals. Increasing the independence and transparency of appointment processes can also strengthen credibility. While Special Procedures lack the coercive power of judicial bodies, their moral authority, responsiveness, and wide-reaching visibility make them indispensable to the international human rights system (Elbasri, 2024).

6. Conclusion

The international human rights framework represents a monumental achievement in the collective aspiration to protect human dignity, equality, and justice. However, as this research has demonstrated, a substantial gap persists between the declaration of rights and their effective enforcement. The promise of international human rights law is too often undermined by structural weaknesses, including the primacy of state sovereignty, the absence of coercive enforcement mechanisms, political selectivity, and the limited authority of monitoring bodies. While important progress has been made through treaty bodies, regional courts, UN mechanisms, and civil society engagement, enforcement remains inconsistent, and in many cases, symbolic. Bridging this gap requires rethinking the international community's approach to accountability. There must be a renewed commitment to integrating human

rights obligations into domestic legal systems, ensuring that international norms are justiciable at the national level. Regional mechanisms must be strengthened, made more accessible, and better supported. The credibility of international bodies must be restored through impartial application, depoliticization, and meaningful follow-up. Moreover, non-legal tools such as economic incentives, targeted sanctions, and digital advocacy can complement legal strategies in compelling compliance. Future research should explore innovative enforcement models, such as hybrid international-domestic tribunals, the use of artificial intelligence in rights monitoring, and the intersection of climate change and human rights enforcement. Ultimately, the future of international human rights law depends not only on the strength of its declarations but on the international community's ability to translate them into practice through consistent, principled, and enforceable actions.

The international human rights regime has made remarkable normative progress, but enforcement remains its Achilles' heel. Bridging the gap between declarations and enforcement requires a multifaceted approach: domestic incorporation of norms, empowered regional mechanisms, political will, economic incentives, and reform of international institutions. As global awareness of rights violations increases, and civil society becomes more mobilized, the demand for accountability grows. The future of human rights depends not only on what is declared in international fora but on what is enforced in the lived realities of people around the world.

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