

A New Human Rights Agenda for the United States: New Realism, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law

Bill Richardson*

Last July, as I shuttled back and forth in the cease-fire diplomacy between rebel forces and the Sudanese government, I flew to the troubled Darfur region to see first hand a few of the millions who had fled the genocide. As I walked through the As Salaam camp, dozens of children and mothers came up to me—carrying themselves with unbelievable grace considering their living nightmare.

They would ask: “When is America going to help?”

The refugees’ question goes to the heart of America’s identity as a nation. Our founding fathers believed our destiny was to be an example of government built on the values of liberty, equality, justice, and tolerance. Our destiny was never to stand in isolation, nor was it our destiny to rule as an empire. Rather our purpose was to inspire those around the world who sought to govern themselves, and who believed in freedom and human dignity and acted in accordance with those values.

Those values continue to inspire millions around the world—from imprisoned Burmese monks to struggling opposition leaders in Zimbabwe; from the anxious youth of Iran to the expectant widows of Darfur. Those who struggle for democracy in Pakistan and those around the world who fight for tolerance and for human rights are desperate for political leadership that only the United States can provide.

The Bush administration has turned its back on these people—because it has turned its back on our values. Behind its so-called “freedom agenda” lies a cynical contempt for democratic values. This President talks about democracy only as an after-the-fact justification for a failed invasion. His administration pays rhetorical tribute to human freedom and the rule of law—but it violates the Geneva Conventions, denies habeas corpus, tortures prisoners, and secretly taps the phones of its own citizens.

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Our principles are not luxuries that we indulge when we can—they are the essence of who we are and they are the source of our greatest strengths. Our strong economy and our remarkable military give us the power to lead, but it is our commitment to human dignity—including our willingness to struggle against our own prejudices—that has always inspired others to follow. We need a foreign policy that sees beyond short-term goals and illusory advantages, and understands that we defend ourselves and our interests most effectively when we are true to ourselves. This is not dreamy idealism—it is a realism for our time: a New Realism that addresses the challenges of the 21st century not with naïve hopes, and not with cynical calculation, but rather with effective, principled and strong action.

CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS: RESPONSIBLE POWER AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

America must rediscover its traditional commitment to the rule of law and to multilateral cooperation. We must put aside the failed unilateralism of the Bush administration and reengage our leadership role in institutions like the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Organization of American States. Above all, we must reform and strengthen the United Nations, so that it can meet its responsibilities in an era of grave and worsening global problems. This means rigorous ethical reform and a renewed American commitment to the organization and to the norms of multilateral cooperation. This also means expanding the Security Council's permanent membership to reflect today's realities, by including Japan, India, Germany and one country each from Africa and Latin America.

The United States needs to return to our tradition of respect for international law and human rights. Prisoner abuse, torture, secret prisons and evasions of the Geneva Conventions must have no place in US policy. We must be impeccable in our own human rights behavior, and this should begin with immediately closing Guantanamo prison and all secret detention facilities, and providing all prisoners everywhere with access to legal counsel. If the U.S. expects others to take us seriously, we need to take ourselves seriously by honoring our own values and all international treaties, including the Geneva Conventions.

Once we have reestablished ourselves as a nation that honors human dignity, we can begin once again to promote it worldwide. We must join and support enthusiastically the International Criminal Court, so that leaders who engage in or allow crimes against humanity know they will be held accountable. We should reward countries that respect the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and negotiate, constructively but firmly, with those who do not.

The U.S. also has a special role to play in stopping genocide, especially in Africa where the two most horrendous recent human rights abuses have taken place, in Rwanda and now Darfur. History teaches that if the U.S. does not take the lead on ending these abuses, no one else will. The U.S. should have sent a special envoy as soon as the mass killings began in Darfur. We still could stop the killing if we made it a priority, by enlisting global support to sanction Sudan, and by pressuring China, which has considerable influence there. The norm of territorial sovereignty must give way when national governments partner with those who rape, torture, and kill masses of people. The U.S. should lead the world toward a global norm of respect for basic human rights—and toward enforcing that norm through international institutions and multilateral measures.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS: A 21ST CENTURY MARSHALL PLAN

In the 21st century, more than ever before, we need to recognize that human rights include economic and social rights. No one can be free if he or she lacks food, water, shelter and safety. To promote these rights, and to build goodwill, the U.S. should propose a multilaterally-funded 21st Century Marshall Plan comprised of four components.

The first component should be a global fight to eradicate extreme poverty. The United States must meet its Millennium goal commitments, and then work to ensure that other rich nations meet theirs. A Commission on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, composed of world leaders and prominent experts, should be created to advise all countries on how to realize their Millennium commitments.

We need to go even further, however. I commend the efforts of the ONE Campaign, which is increasing awareness of AIDS and extreme poverty. The ONE Campaign is asking the United States to double our development assistance to two percent of our federal budget. I wholeheartedly support this goal. I also believe that our aid efforts should be guided by the principles of good governance and protection of human rights.

The U.S. should lead global efforts for more debt relief, for shifting aid to poor countries from loans to grants, and for better primary health care and affordable vaccines. We need the World Bank to focus on sustainable poverty reduction, and the IMF must be flexible on the social safety nets that are so important to social stability, human development and economic growth.

Our aid efforts should increase funding for micro-lending and micro-entrepreneurship in poor countries, because we know it works. Muhammad Yunus has shown us the way. It is now up to us to focus our resources on building a new generation of small entrepreneurs in the developing world.

We also need to focus aid on education. 115 million of the world's children—sixty percent of them girls—do not receive *any* schooling. In too

many countries, a virtual apartheid exists, where women are frozen out of the workforce and civic life. Unleashing the economic power of women through education can make every other social problem easier to fight. Public education in Islamic countries is essential to providing people with educational alternatives to madrassas, some of which teach jihad.

We must step up our efforts in the fight against global disease. We need big increases in medical research, an area in which the U.S. has always excelled. We also must make sure that new cures are available to all. It is morally unacceptable that people die of curable diseases because they lack access to medicine and vaccines.

The second component of the 21st Century Marshall Plan must be a reinvigoration of the United Nations so that we can confront global problems like climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation. As a former UN ambassador, I know the problems of the institution, and I have worked to solve them. I also know the power that a UN sanction can impart to peacekeeping, to humanitarian relief, and to collective efforts to address problems.

Climate change may well be the greatest challenge to our generation, and we need the UN as a forum to negotiate global emissions caps, and to prepare to mitigate the effects of global warming. The UN will be essential to prepare for climate-related humanitarian crises, such as the possibility that millions of people could be displaced as a result of global-warming-related flooding of deltas and coastal areas. Mitigation challenges will also include:

- Shifting infrastructure and food production to new regions
- Developing crops that are more resistant to heat and drought, and distributing these new crop strains to vulnerable regions of the world
- Developing cost-effective methods for harvesting fresh water and cleaning up polluted rivers and streams
- Aggressive reforestation programs and protection of tropical rainforests
- Developing new international treaties to prevent over-fishing and species loss

The third component of the Marshall Plan must be a massive global initiative to develop clean energy. The foundation for our international strategy must be our own domestic efforts. While I no longer am a candidate for President, I stand by my comprehensive energy program, which the Sierra Club and the League of Conservation Voters called the most aggressive of any candidate. It would institute a nation-wide, market-based "cap and trade" system that reduces carbon emissions in the U.S. by eighty percent by 2040.

We must lead the world in the development of clean, alternative energy, and we must work with other governments and private businesses to make

sure that these technologies are adopted worldwide. Above all, we need to make sure that China and India develop using clean energy.

In my book, *Leading by Example*, I outline a specific and comprehensive path domestically and internationally to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stop the devastation of climate change.

We need to accelerate research into cellulosic ethanol and other low-carbon input bio-fuels, and we need to construct distribution networks so that retailers can offer ethanol and bio-based fuels alongside traditional fuels.

As the mandatory national emission cap declines, the market will decide which fossil fuel uses are no longer efficient or should be converted to new technologies. I am already working on a regional "cap and trade" system in the western United States, along with Governor Schwarzenegger and other governors. This system will limit the amount of greenhouse gases produced in western states. The Bush administration rejected the Kyoto Protocol, making the U.S. the laggard on climate change. My state is on track to exceed the Kyoto goals, and our next president must make the United States the leader, not the laggard, in facing up to global warming.

Along the way to making New Mexico the Clean Energy State, I have learned some lessons. The most important is that Americans are ready to act. What they need is a president who is ready to lead. Once you lead, you find allies in corners that you never knew existed. Businesses. Non-profits. Activists. Former enemies and future friends. With the right leadership, we can build a true global coalition for clean, sustainable energy.

Finally, a 21st Century Marshall Plan must fight cross-border crime, and break up the sophisticated criminal networks running black market trade in arms, drugs, endangered species, counterfeit goods, and human beings. In an era of Jihadist terrorism and nuclear proliferation, such international criminal networks gravely threaten the security of us all. Breaking up these mafias will be essential to ending slavery. There are more slaves in the world today than ever in history, and some of them are here in our own country, where an estimated 50,000 women and children are trafficked each year. Once again, we must lead by example: the United States needs to show the world that it can be done by ending slavery here, with a concerted national program led by the federal government and involving all levels of government. To free slaves in poor countries, we must condition financial assistance upon demonstrated progress toward the eradication of human trafficking and bondage.

America can and must do more to promote human rights, beginning at home. The Bush administration's greatest failure has been its inability to see that without values, we have only narrow interests. With values, we have friends and allies. To lead other nations in the pursuit of common goals, we must rediscover our common democratic values and live up to

them. The next administration must embrace a realistic, principled foreign policy, so that we can answer with optimism the Darfur widows' question—and once again be a great force for peace and prosperity in this world.