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AIUSA High School Essay Contest

How Has the Promotion or Defense of Human Rights Changed Our World?

Our world has been shaped by so many evil events—war, mass rape, torture, racial apartheid. With horrific abuses of humanity a terrible, yet common, theme throughout the histories of all nations, it can be difficult to harbor hope for the future. But this horrific past is, strangely, what should convince us that a new day is dawning. The people of the world have seen enough child soldiers and young prostitutes. They've seen far too many jailed activists. They've sickened of bloodshed, grown weary of living and seeing others live in fear. The people of the world are calling out—crying out—for a far better way of life. And these cries are exactly what is required to change our world.

The coupling of history lessons with modern technology has allowed the citizens of the world to become increasingly aware of the inequalities that surround them. Teachers remind their students of the carnage of the Holocaust and horror of the more recent Rwandan genocide. Meanwhile, various news outlets—television broadcasts, constantly-updated internet sites, current events blogs—provide continuous updates on world affairs. The melding of knowledge of past events with information about present concerns has created a generation that is attentive to the happenings of its world. Wielding an understanding of past genocides, individuals have reacted to the current bloodbath in Darfur, the western region of Sudan, with passionate efforts. Darfur has seen countless villages housing ethnic minorities raided and burned, thousands of villagers raped and killed, and approximately three million residents displaced (“What Has Happened in Darfur?”). Organizations such as the “Save Darfur” coalition have been

created in order to raise global awareness and agitate for the U.S. government, other countries' governments, and the United Nations to become involved with the protection of the persecuted villagers' basic rights ("Unity Statement").

Similarly, the increased scope of today's media has served to highlight the global problem of human trafficking. This problem is terribly difficult to actually see. Human trafficking is a shady, shameful business, in which women and children are shuttled across the borders of nations in order to be sold for sex. The U.S. State Department's conservative estimate puts the yearly number of trafficked individuals somewhere between six and eight hundred thousand. UNICEF places the number much higher, asserting that a shocking 1.75 million people are smuggled in a single year ("Estimating"). But as this problem continues to grow, it becomes impossible to ignore. Individuals and groups throughout the world have become incensed by the psychological and sexual abuse that trafficking victims undergo. The media has provided an outlet for these groups to let their mission be known and to gain support. Recently, CNN named Anuradha Koirala one of its Top Ten Heroes of 2010. This extraordinary woman turned her own experience with domestic violence into the fuel that drives her to help victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking in her native Nepal. Koirala began a rehabilitative home for these women in 1993, offering a safe place to live and to heal. To date, her group, Maiti Nepal, has rescued over twelve thousand girls from the sex trade ("Rescuing"). The media coverage of the CNN Heroes has increased awareness and support of her cause.

As the world's atrocities have accumulated, its people have wept. But mourning has given way to action. Human rights violations—from genocidal killings to selling

humans into sex slavery—have created awareness of the heartbreaking cruelty humankind is capable of. The combination of understanding the tragedies of the past and learning about human rights violations of the present facilitate this awareness. Those that have heard of these abuses have been inspired to *do* something. The efforts of human rights activists and compassionate people around the globe have amplified each other, creating a world where awareness of rights violations has much increased. This awareness is what changes the world. This awareness motivates those with resources to offer assistance. This awareness helps subjugated peoples realize their dreams for a better future. This awareness, then, is what changes the world.

Works Cited

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