

# Global Issues: Human Rights

*Understanding Ethics: A Christian Perspective*

# A five step approach

- 1) What is the issue and why is it relevant?
- 2) How can we understand the issue better?
- 3) What are the key principles and values at stake?
- 4) What is the distinctive contribution from a Christian ethical perspective?
- 5) How should the ethical response be – e.g. from (a) Christian journalists in mainstream news media? (b) Christian communication workers in church media? (c) Christian local churches?

# Step 1: *Identifying the issue*

## **What is the issue and why is it important?**

- Definition/ description:
  - “Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.” (UN)
- The importance and relevance of the issue - illustrations:
  - The freedom of conscience / belief and the persecution /discrimination /marginalization of Christians (and others)
  - The basis for journalism / media: Freedom of expression (art. 19)
  - A focus in journalism: Exposing violations of human rights

# Step 2: Understanding the issue

## ***How can we understand the issue better?***

- The historical background:
  - The American Declaration of Independence (1776)
  - France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens (1789)
  - World War II & Roosevelt's State of the Union Speech (1941)
  - United Nations (1945)
  - Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- The different levels of human rights language:
  - Moral language
  - Political language
  - Cultural language

## Step 3: Analysing the issue

***What are the key principles and values at stake in this issue?***

1) Why human rights?

- The ethical foundation for human rights in human dignity

2) What kind of human rights?

- The global tension between civil rights and welfare rights

3) Which human rights are most fundamental?

- Cf. clashes between different rights, e.g. freedom of conscience / belief and freedom from discrimination

## Step 4: Contributing to the issue

### ***What is the distinctive contribution from a Christian ethical perspective?***

**Firstly**, we affirm *human dignity*.

- Because humans are created in the image of God (and loved by God in Jesus), they must be respected.

**Secondly**, we affirm *human equality*.

- Because human beings have all been made in the same image by the same Creator, we must behave without partiality to all.

**Thirdly**, we affirm *human responsibility*.

- Because God has asked us to love and serve our neighbours, we must fight for their rights, while being willing to renounce our own rights.

## Step 5: Responding to the issue

***How should our ethical response(s) to the issue be?***

Three case studies:

*(a) Christian journalists in mainstream news media?*

- To what extent would that response be different from other journalists?

*(b) Christian communication workers in church media?*

*(c) Christian local churches?*

The ethical responses should be both in terms of (1) reflections, (2) attitudes, and (3) actions.

# *Reflections / discussions*

*What is the relationship between the following rights?*

- freedom of conscience and belief (art. 18)
- freedom of expression and opinion (art. 19)
- freedom of assembly and association (art. 20)

# Reflections / discussions (cont'd)

- **Article 18.**

- **Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;** this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

- **Article 19.**

- **Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression;** this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

- **Article 20.**

- (1) **Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.**
- (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.