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**Human Rights:
Four Generations of Practice and Development ¹**

by
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Introduction

The past two centuries have constituted one of the most turbulent periods in human social and political development. Efforts by historians to capture the essential character of this era invariably resort to the use of terms such as ‘revolution’, ‘imperialism’ and ‘extremes’. ³ (Hobsbawm, 1962; 1975; 1987; 1994) Transformations in the structure and distribution of wealth and power, accompanied by the emergence of new paradigms competing for intellectual dominance and ideological hegemony, led ultimately to various forms of totalitarianism and, in terms of the real lives of ordinary people throughout the world, mass repression, suffering and genocide.

At the same time, the democratic and humanist movements of this period established the moral basis and philosophical framework for the development of a common vision of human dignity. Through a wide range of struggles – such as the campaigns to abolish slavery, to establish child welfare and labour standards, to achieve electoral enfranchisement, the early de-colonization movements in Latin America and parts of Asia, and the efforts to elaborate rules governing the conduct of war – “human rights” were increasingly recognized, defined, and extended to include ever wider sectors of the human family. Further, the legal, social and political standards required to implement and protect newly secured rights were increasingly put in place, particularly following the Second World War. ⁴

Of course, the notion and valuing of human dignity, or even more specific principles like equality, were not new. These ideas have found fundamental expression and even practical support in various forms in all cultures and spiritual traditions through several millennia of human history. However, the notion of these moral assertions or values being defined and described legally as “rights” – universal entitlements that should be both realized and guaranteed – is quite new. As a global concept and undertaking, human rights in this sense has been part of our experience as a species only for the past three or four generations – the historical period present within the living memory of humanity – since the adoption of the UN Charter in 1945.

So pervasive is this “rights consciousness”, and so powerful in shaping not only what we do but also how we understand and define ourselves both as individual persons and societies, defining our society, that it is easy to forget how recent a development the “rights revolution” has been⁵ (Ignatieff, 2000). Indeed, the revolution is on-going as our understanding of and approach to human rights continues to evolve and challenge us, both in terms of theory and in relation to practical implementation. This essay will offer a conceptual framework for understanding the evolution of human rights theory and practice during the past half century, and examine some of critical practical human rights challenges that will need to be addressed in the coming decades if the revolution is to survive and succeed.

Taking the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 as our starting point, the conceptual framework proposed will use the word “generation” in two different ways that will inter-weave somewhat. In one sense, “generation” refers to *historical transitions* – as in the changes that occur because of the passage of time from a passing generation to an emergent one. In another sense, we sometimes use “generation” to refer to deepening layers or significant *qualitative shifts* – as in the computer industry when a new approach to the shape or design of a processing system fundamentally alters the scene, and we speak of a fourth generation personal computer. That is the case also in the field of human rights – people speak of first, second, third, and fourth generation rights to refer to different types or categories of rights. In the case of human rights, these shifts tend to be inclusive as well as developmental – that is, emergent rights depend on and expand the overall framework, rather than make the former set of rights obsolete.

The First Generation: Establishing Principles

Thinking in terms of historical transitions to begin with, the first generation consists of an approximately twenty year period beginning with the end of the Second World War and the founding of the United Nations. This may be regarded as a period focused on establishing basic principles which are reflected in a number of key documents, notably the UN Charter itself.⁶ which established that all member states undertake to “*reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small*” and, through the UN, to promote “*universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion*”.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 carried these general provisions further by specifying what was actually understood to comprise these fundamental rights. Although only 30 articles in length, the UDHR is by any standard an astonishing document and a significant achievement; it is also a real pity that it is not read more widely, and that it does not appear more regularly as part of our public discourse. Part of its power rests in its unambiguous clarity:

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. (Article 5)

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. (Article 9)

Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. (Article 23)

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (Article 26)

In setting out these fundamental rights, the Declaration never uses the words “unless” or “except” to qualify or restrict their application – as in, unless you are suspected of being a terrorist, except if you are a woman, or except if you are poor. In the world of human rights, the term “universal” does not simply mean everywhere, but also is meant to include everyone.

This first generation was very conscious that it was working to establish human rights as a new language and ideology in an international context emerging from the rubble of global war and mass genocide. Because of this, they tended to focus on rights that asserted the dignity, integrity and equality of the person – what are sometimes referred to as individual civil and political rights. These are also commonly referred to as “first generation rights”⁷ (Waltz, 2001).

Aside from the Charter and the Declaration, the other developments during this period tended to be elaborations of them (such as the Genocide Convention, which accompanied the Declaration in 1948, or the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952) or previous standards (such as the Standard Minimum Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners in 1957, building on the Geneva Conventions). Perhaps most importantly, the work of this period established three principles that have guided all future human rights developments – or at least shaped the debate:

1. OWNERSHIP: that human rights belong to us, and to all of us – the ordinary people, individually and collectively. Just as the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration are not treaties agreed to by states, but are proclamations made in the name of “We the Peoples”, so the rights set out are to be understood not as gifts bestowed or privileges granted by governments, but as entitlements that we possess as – and simply because we are – human beings;
2. OBLIGATION: that states or governments have an obligation to actively promote and protect these rights, and a responsibility to act to prevent violation of these rights internationally, and to be accountable to each other for their achievement and performance. Fulfilment of their obligations in relation to human rights is understood as the fundamental criterion for membership in the international community of nations;
3. INTEGRATION: that respect for human rights is the basis of peace and justice, that there is no hierarchy of rights, one more important than another. Rather, all

rights set out in the UDHR are deemed to be fundamental, and the various forms of human rights are to be understood as “inter-dependent and indivisible”.

The Second Generation: Standard-Setting

These principles were significant achievements, but their practical effect in concrete situations was very limited. The character of the Universal Declaration as a moral statement of the “human family” may have been one of its virtues in some respects, but it also meant that it expressed only an “aspiration” and lacked any force of law to back it up. The work of the second generation was standard-setting, translating the moral force of the UDHR into legal instruments that “We the People” could not only believe in but could actually use to realize and protect our rights and those of our neighbours.

The language of declarations and charters gave way to covenants, conventions and treaties. During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the bulk of what is now referred to as “international human rights law” was formulated, and the organization of movements and systems to begin to address real human rights cases and concerns emerged. Means were established through the UN Commission on Human Rights and its specialized mechanisms to enable people throughout the world to participate directly in claiming and defending their rights, and to support others in doing so. Largely through the building of regional and global Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, ordinary citizens began to find a place at the tables traditionally reserved for states and diplomats, demanding opportunities to hold their governments accountable to the standards of the international community.⁸ Indeed, many of the key legal safeguards developed during this period, such as the Convention Against Torture, were the result of campaigning initiatives, both in terms of substance and the generation of impetus, launched by NGOs.

The most significant components of the new statutory framework were the two covenants adopted as legal treaties in 1966: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). From these additional, more specific standards and instruments emerged (such as, respectively, the Convention Against Torture – 1984, or the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women – 1981). Although originally envisioned, according to the principle of integration, as a single, unified “Covenant on Human Rights”, a decision was taken in the back rooms of the UN to produce two separate standards, a “Political Covenant” and an “Economic Covenant”. The usual explanation of this development is that the treaties needed to be treated separately in order to facilitate gradual or progressive implementation, as it was deemed impossible to establish systems for guaranteeing economic rights. However, this appears to be more of a post-facto justification, and the actual reason is probably that many governments found it more politically convenient or ideologically comfortable not even to try to do so.

As with the first generation, context is important in understanding and assessing the achievements of the second. This was the time of the Cold War, the dismantling of

colonialism, and the construction of a new polarized division of power based on proxy dictatorships allied with either the East or the West. The two covenants came to represent the competing sides – the United States and its allies championing the supposedly individual rights of the ICCPR; the Soviet Union and its allies championing the supposedly collective rights of the ICESCR.

Despite the significant progress made in formulating standards, human rights remained largely a theoretic proposition for many people around the world. Whether by design or chance, the two sides in the Cold War conspired to denigrate the very notion of human rights, turning it into simply another ideological weapon with which to assert their superiority, attack their enemies and, worse, to shield, excuse and encourage the increasingly vicious repressions of their friends – both at home and throughout the ravaged and repressed “Third World”. This tacit conspiracy between the super-powers also resulted in an undermining of the integration principle of the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights by:

- establishing fundamentally different approaches to understanding and implementing the two sets of rights;
- establishing, for all practical intents and purposes, the pre-eminence of the individual, civil and political rights;
- marginalizing the whole field of social, economic and cultural rights from international scrutiny and accountability just as famine, poverty, and the struggle for survival of unrecognized national groups increasingly became prevalent and even predominant characteristics and sources of crisis for the international community.

Perhaps ironically, or perhaps because the challenge they presented had become increasingly unavoidable, these economic, social and cultural rights are also referred to as “second generation rights”.

The Third Generation: Coping with the “New World Order”

Earlier we suggested that these two ways of thinking about the “generations” of human rights would weave together, and we have just seen that even considering only the historical progression is not a discrete undertaking. Matters of principle are not just a matter of the first generation, but are continually emerging as issues of struggle. It serves to remind us that we cannot take anything about human rights for granted – any achievements have been secured, and continue to be sustained, only through continuing vigilance and dedicated effort. It also forces us to recognize that the issues of principle are not abstractions. They have real consequences for real people, and compel us to take seriously the concrete and changing realities of human rights in our situation: What is the emerging nature of violations? What are the characteristics of the perpetrators? Who is being targeted? What forms of protection will be effective?

The decade of the 1990s was a period of massive change in the field of human rights. It has become commonplace for our society to point to September 11th, 2001 as a pivotal moment when the world changed. For most of humanity, the world really did change in significant ways in recent times, in the period immediately following the collapse of another iconic structure of Western architecture in 1989 – the Berlin Wall. It is true that we live in a radically different political environment than that in which most of us were born and in which our attitudes were shaped; however, it would appear that 9/11 marks the end of this transformation more than its beginning (Evans, 2004).

The end of the Cold War created a vital opportunity to remove the ideological barriers that had served as the great excuse for not moving forward in the practical implementation of human rights and realizing a safer and healthier world for all humanity. In some ways, the so-called “peace dividend” did make a meaningful contribution to fulfilling these hopes. A range of positive measures were initiated: a formal reaffirmation of the Universal Declaration (Vienna Declaration – 1993); the reform of the UN and other international agencies on the basis of “human rights mainstreaming” and the strengthening of civil society; a commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of women (Beijing Action Plan – 1995); and movement towards addressing impunity, through the creation of the establishment of an International Criminal Court (Statute of Rome – 1999). The international community began to open up some important new fields for policy debate and decision-making, such as the question of the responsibility and accountability of business, trans-national corporations, armed opposition groups and other non-state actors in relation to the promotion of human rights and the protection of the environment. Some nations, such as the post-Apartheid South Africa, began to explicitly include elements of social, economic, and cultural rights, such as the right to education, within their constitutional frameworks.

The end of the Cold War also meant, however, that whole regions of the world – such as sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia – ceased overnight to hold any strategic interest for those with political and economic power, and were summarily marginalized and then abandoned. Just as suddenly, warlords and dictators who had served as superpower surrogates – created, sponsored and to some extent controlled by either the Soviet Union or the United States – were loosed upon their peoples to pursue their own interests or private grievances without restraint, sometimes acting as agents of convenience for corporations and other forces of globalization in an increasingly unregulated world. Although the “cold” international war was over, the number of “hot” domestic conflicts proliferated from about 30 to more than 80 within the first five years of the decade.

These developments brought a significant change to the nature of the human rights violations experienced by ordinary people around the world. The pattern of violations no longer tended to be primarily one in which individuals were targeted by repressive governments because of their ideological beliefs or political involvements to be punished with arbitrary imprisonment and torture. Over the course of the 1990s, human rights violations escalated in severity and scale, and changed from being focussed

on the repression of beliefs to an assault on identities – whether gender, language, religion or ethnicity. Violations occurred less as a strategy to achieve political hegemony or institutional control, and more as a characteristic of situations of social and structural and environmental breakdown.

In the war that increasingly defined the lives of more and more people, the key question changed from being “what side are you on?” to simply “who are you?” (Huntington, 1993). Instead of attempting simply to control or repress their enemies, the perpetrators of human rights violations increasingly sought to eliminate them. The forms of mass terrorism that the whole body of international human rights law was created to ensure would “never again” be part of the human experience erupted again throughout the world: genocide in Central Africa, ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe, the slavery of women and children in large parts of Africa and Asia. For most people in much of the world, the world of the “peace dividend” turned out to be a much harsher and more dangerous place at the beginning of the new millennium than it had been at the beginning of the 1990s.

The decade between the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the collapse of the Twin Towers in 2001 brought into effect a fundamental reorganization of the structure of power internationally, and of the experience of suffering. Since 1991 a peculiar and dangerous “new world order” took shape in which direction was based almost entirely on the interests of the sole remaining super-power. There was no alternative vision or competing authority to balance or restrain the will of the USA. Often described as “globalization”, many people became disillusioned with traditional politics, especially at the national level, because they felt it offered little opportunity to really make an effective difference. Globalization means, fundamentally, not some faceless blending into a worldwide cultural conformity but that the repressions, exploitations and conflicts that may previously have been seen as characteristics of a distant “Third World” have become shared realities for communities everywhere. Concerned citizens increasingly focused their efforts either in their local communities, or at the level of global movements. It was left to ordinary people around the world to form networks of local initiative, such as the anti-globalization movement or the World Social Forum, to try to express or “constitute” an alternative basis of power⁹ (Lukacs, 2005).

Every age is guided by a dominant cultural ideology or social myth. Though it is usually easier to recognize in retrospect, the dominant social myth reveals the key, assumptions, preoccupations, and perspectives of an era. A hundred years ago, the social myth reflected a vision of inexorable progress and might have been something like: “every day in every way things are getting better and better”. During the 1960s and 1970s, a period of creativity and activism, it might have been a hopeful blend of “give peace a chance”, “the global village” and “think globally act locally”. We seem to have just passed from a time when the dominant social myth, at least in certain places, was reflected in phrases like “having it all”. How would we name the dominant social myth in the world we share today? It would appear that we are increasingly presented with and persuaded to adopt a view of the world as “a place of scarcity, threat, and isolation”.

Interestingly, in the human rights field the term “third generation rights” refers to collective, environmental and development rights.

The Fourth Generation: Making Rights Real

A decade ago, the international community gathered in the largest human rights conference ever convened in the history of the UN. The purpose of the conference was, ostensibly, to examine the current status and challenges facing the development of human rights and to agree a strategy for overcoming them. The formal outcome of the Vienna Conference was that the international community joined together to reaffirm its unanimous commitment to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the principles that underlie it. This was no small achievement or mere diplomatic formality; the very survival of the UDHR, in fact, was under serious threat.

As in the case in 1966 when the political and economic covenants were set apart in the back rooms of the Cold War, the conference in 1993 was a behind-the-scenes battle ground of serious attempts to either ditch or significantly dilute the UDHR and the definitions of human rights that are available to us. Strange, perhaps uncomfortable and certainly temporary, alliances were formed. Governments such as those of the United States, Cuba and Iran sought to undermine the authority of the UDHR, apparently because they wanted to limit the role of activist human rights defenders in civil society. Governments such as that of India sought to restrict the UDHR, purportedly in order to assert the pre-eminence of social and economic rights over individual and political rights. Governments such as that of Indonesia, at the time, sought to reduce the influence of the UDHR in order to assert the predominance of particular religious or cultural values in interpreting universal standards such as the prohibition of torture. Some governments, such as that of China, sought to undermine the UDHR because they wanted to assert the priority of state sovereignty over any form of international accountability for human rights practices.

Just as with the 1966 events, very little of this information will be found in the official histories, and the lesson we must derive, yet again, is that we can't take anything for granted. Indeed, that is the essential lesson represented by the UDHR – that human rights are inherent, not granted. The UDHR came into existence in 1948 and survived intact in 1993 only because concerned people from around over the world came together, educated themselves, mobilized their neighbours, and exposed and confronted the efforts of many governments to undermine the UDHR. They raised their voices and shamed governments to recognize that the UDHR and the rights it proclaims are not theirs to bestow or to cancel. In what may come to be recognized as one of the first of the globalization confrontations, a broad popular movement of NGOs demonstrated that human rights belong to “we the peoples”, and that we are determined to hold onto them.

One of the things we have learned from our experience of human rights violations during the past three generations is that persons who have suffered and survived severe trauma, such as torture, tend to experience and express specific behavioural dysfunctions. We also know that if they are not effectively addressed, these behaviours are transferred

within family and community systems for at least four generations, and that this is the case even in situations where there has been no direct contact between the ones who experienced the torture and the latter generations. We know it is at least four generations because that is the current extent of the research base, but the effects are probably, in fact, much longer.

The period of massive change continues, and the international community is faced with some major challenges if human rights are to become a meaningful reality in this decade. In the historical sense, we are at the threshold of the fourth generation of the human rights movement. We are presented with the challenge of breaking the cycle of human rights violations, of the behavioural dysfunctions that mark our human family – and that are increasingly extending their devastating effects on all political, social and natural systems. In the thematic sense, in a world characterized by mass terror – state sponsored or otherwise – it is vital and urgent that we learn how to break the cycle of perceived mutual victimization.

Human Rights is a commitment and a vision that is constant development – both in theory and in practice. Despite serious threats, the core principles originally set out in the UDHR in 1948 have survived; despite obstacles and set-backs, the trend over the decades has consistently been to seek to achieve greater universality – extension of the scope and application of rights. There are at least four concrete priorities that need to comprise a human rights agenda for this generation.

- A. We must come to terms seriously and definitively with the issue of impunity, that is, that we break the cycle by which those who commit violations continue to do so because, fundamentally, they know they can get away with it. The International Criminal Court must become a fully operational agency enjoying universal cooperation and application.
- B. We must begin seriously to address the issue of responsibility for human rights in an inclusive manner. While recognizing the fundamental responsibility of government authorities for the promoting and protecting human rights, at the same time we must begin to frame as legal obligations the responsibilities accountabilities of the various non-state agencies which increasingly, whether legitimately or not, exercise quasi-state powers, such as corporations, commercial cartels, armed opposition groups, regional warlords, religious authorities, and the like.
- C. We must come to terms with the need to define, set standards, and agree measures of accountability for social, economic, and cultural rights – including environmental sustainability – in a manner similar to that by which previous generations engaged the challenge of individual, civil, and political rights.
- D. We must make education on human rights, including fundamental principles as well as actual entitlements, a persistent concern and perennial commitment. We should renew the understanding and vision of the pioneers of the first generation

that human rights are fundamental prerequisite for peace by placing an emphasis on learning the practice of reconciliation. That it, we need to adopt as an urgent priority for education the development of skills for building peace – not simply by pulling conflicted peoples apart and separating contending entities, but by learning how to practice respect and tolerance because we recognize that we share the planet and that – whether we like it or not – we are in each other’s future.¹⁰

The challenge facing the fourth generation is to make the coming decade the era of implementation, the era of making rights real – for ourselves, and for each other. The good news is that most of these things are within our grasp, if we have the will and the determination to address them.

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NOTES

¹ Material for this essay was drawn from two keynote addresses: “Making Rights Real” at *Seeking Justice: Human Rights in Our Communities*, a public symposium held at Simon Fraser University (Vancouver, November 2003); “The Principle of Universality”, *Human Rights for All*, an international law conference convened by Amnesty International (Sana’a, Yemen, April 2004).

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³ For an insightful and accessible treatment of the period see, for example, Eric Hobsbawm’s four volume study of the period from the French Revolution in 1789 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991: *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1975); *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1962); *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987); *The Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Penguin Group, 1994).

⁴ Some of the first organizations with an explicit understanding of themselves as “human rights” campaigning agencies operating with a global consciousness were formed during the early part this era. Typically, they were motivated by broad humanitarian concerns, though usually focused on a particular issue or mandate. Some of these first human rights organizations continue to function today, such as the Anti-Slavery Society (formed in 1823) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (founded in 1863). Non-Governmental Organizations dedicated to working on the promotion and protection of human rights as a defined field of concern emerged only during the latter part of the period, notably the International League for Human Rights (1941), Amnesty International (launched as a campaigning movement in 1961), and Human Rights Watch (formally established in 1988).

⁵ Canadian philosopher and historian Michael Ignatieff used the term “rights revolution” in his 2000 Massey Lectures to describe the way human rights have become, since the late 1940s, “the dominant language of the public good around the globe” – the surviving and defining ideological formulation of our time. Michael Ignatieff, *The Rights Revolution* (Toronto: Anansi, 2000).

⁶ Most key UN Documents concerning human rights, including the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, are easily available at: <http://www.un.org/aboutun/index.html>.

⁷ Because of the initial focus on individual civil and political rights, and the subsequent tendency to restrict or identify the definition of human rights to this aspect during the Cold War, many over the years have expressed the criticism that the UDHR lacks “universality” in that it predominantly represents Western cultural values and fails to adequately reflect Asian, Islamic or other perspectives. It is clearly the case that the modern language of human rights derives largely from the political experience and legal traditions of America and Europe, and that these were the primary influences guiding the principal drafters of the UDHR. Context, of course, needs to be taken into consideration but, even given the limitations of thinking and the composition of the UN

at the time, the UDHR is remarkable for the extent to which its contents were shaped by the representatives of small nations from all regions of the world. Although Eleanor Roosevelt of the USA and Rene Cassin of France were recognized as the prime movers behind the UDHR, the actual text was largely drafted by Canada's John Humphrey. Peng-chen Chang of China, Hernan Santa Cruz of Chile, and Charles Malik of Lebanon were recognized, among many others, as significant contributors. See Susan Waltz, "Universalizing Human Rights: The Role of Small States in the Construction of the UDHR", *Human Rights Quarterly* 23.1 (February, 2001)

⁸ The awarding of the Nobel Prize for peace to Amnesty International in 1977 may be seen as a recognition of the significance of this new dynamic – the significant and legitimate role of NGOs in mobilizing public opinion to shape public policy. Similarly, the awarding of the Prize in 1999 to Medicins Sans Frontieres may be seen as recognition of the importance of renewing efforts to promote the integration for human rights and social and economic development.

⁹ The historian John Lukacs has observed: "The world is governed, especially in the democratic age, not by the accumulation of money, or even of goods, but by the accumulation of opinions. History is formed by, and politics dependent upon, how and what large masses of people are thinking and desiring, fearing and hating." Lukacs, *Democracy and Populism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). A key element in being a "super-power" rests in whether the opinions of the people of a country matter on the international level. The campaigns of the anti-globalization movement, and the challenge of human rights education more generally, may be understood as efforts to engage and influence public opinion to support peace, justice, sustainability, and the other positive values.

¹⁰ The issue of humanitarian intervention offers a clear example of both the evolutionary nature of human rights and the integral relation between peace and human rights – and one that is particularly relevant to Canadians. It also demonstrates the contextual inter-weaving of theory and practice in human rights development. Although not originally conceived as a method of human rights protection, Lester Pearson basically invented UN military intervention as an application of the principles reflected in the UN Charter and practical component of international relations in 1958, and in so doing made it a defining element of our national identity for the past two generations. It played a growing role in maintaining peace and protecting human rights until the strategic shifts of the early 1990s. Romeo Dallaire has rubbed our collective noses in the conspiracy of duplicity, double standards, and dereliction of duty that led to the abandonment of humanitarian intervention as an active component of the international human rights system, and that arguably resulted in the betrayal and extrajudicial killing of almost 100,000 people a week in Rwanda in the late Spring and early Summer of 1994. One of the more important developments signalling the emergence of the "fourth generation" has been the work of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, in which Lloyd Axworthy has played a leading and instrumental role. Since 2001, the Commission has laid a groundwork for reviving humanitarian intervention by rejecting the notion of national sovereignty as an absolute and re-casting it as constrained by the obligation to actively protect human rights – an obligation creating responsibilities on both national governments and the international community.