



The Human Rights Movement: Past Achievement, Future Priorities
A program in commemoration of the Dag Hammarskjöld Centennial

Sponsored by
The International League for Human Rights (ILHR) and
The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights (JBI)

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Opening Statement
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Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, died in a tragic air crash over Katanga province in Congo. His legacy is commonly associated with the striving to advance peace and diminish armed conflict. He operated in an era when the UN's human rights efforts were at their infancy, muzzled by the cold war, and highly controversial within the organization.

Hammarskjöld is widely credited with transforming the world body into an independent, impartial international organization with a professional secretariat, launching peacekeeping operations as a new conflict prevention tool of the UN unforeseen by the Charter, and engaging in effective preventive diplomacy. Many remember how Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev denounced him, and demanded his resignation as Secretary General, to be replaced by a "troika" of civil servants. Hammarskjöld refused to step down.

In 1956, Dag Hammarskjöld addressed the 50th Anniversary Dinner of the American Jewish Committee on the subject of human rights. There, he declared that human rights were fundamental to all he was engaged in as Secretary-General, explaining that, "we know the question of peace and the question of human rights are closely related. Without recognition of human rights, we shall never have peace, and it is only within the framework of peace that human rights can be fully developed."

While the UN could not demand specific human rights be implemented, he argued in those pre-human rights treaty days, it could certainly promote human rights, just as it could promote peace.

Inspired by Hammarskjöld's commitment and example, Jacob Blaustein famously called for a High Commissioner for Human Rights in his 1963 Dag Hammarskjöld Memorial Lecture at Columbia University. It was time, he argued, "to strengthen the executive powers of the United Nations in the field of Human Rights." He emphasized that this would not require a treaty, but it would require commitment to the UN Charter principles – including in particular the human rights principles he had personally worked to embed in the Charter at the UN founding conference in 1945.

The human rights movement has come a long way since those days and, on the subject of human rights, so has the United Nations. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote in his recent plan for UN reform that there can be no security without development; no development without security, and *neither* without human rights – an expansion of the Hammarskjöld formula. Annan is calling for a new Human Rights Council to restore the credibility of the United Nations in the field of human rights. He has called for affirmation of the universality of human rights, and he has appointed three of the four High Commissioners for Human Rights who have served in that post since it was created in 1993. Funding for the human rights programs has increased. He has denounced antisemitism and has dedicated Raoul Wallenberg memorials all over the world. He has sent investigative missions to a variety of hot spots, including, most recently, Darfur – and—another reminder of Hammarskjöld's legacy—to Congo.

Our meeting today is inspired by the example of Dag Hammarskjöld as an idealistic international civil servant who was a world leader who looked for new ways to use international organizations to promote principles; and by the commitment of Jacob Blaustein, a businessman and AJC president, who saw human rights protection as a practical matter of security.

During the course of this day, we will explore core principles that shaped the human rights movement, new challenges that are changing it, and specific situations where human rights are under threat. We will also consider the role of international institutions and national governments in our human right advocacy efforts today as compared to ten, twenty, or even sixty years ago.

It is our hope that this will help us better understand the road ahead and the priorities we must adopt along the way. As the Pirke Avot, the Jewish Sayings of the Elders, remind us, "The day is short and the work is great...It is not your duty to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it..."

Thank you all for participating. And thank you – we know that you who are present today do not desist from this vital effort to advance human rights protection.