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Human Rights Index

University of Iowa Center for Human Rights

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HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX

Prepared by the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (UICHR)*

“Of, by, and for the people,” democracy is grounded in respect for fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. Democracies generally have free and fair elections, autonomous political parties, a system of checks and balances, independent judiciaries, civilian control of the military, and free media. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for protection of the rights that make democratic governance possible, including the right to speak and assemble freely, to vote and participate in government, to fair and impartial trials, and to non-discrimination in these and all other respects. There is much still to be done.

- 1 Number of persons of African descent elected as head of state in countries with majority populations of white European heritage (UICHR, 2009)
- 18 Number of national parliaments having at least 30% female representation, in contrast to many other democratic countries such as the United States where, since 1789, only 2% of members of Congress have been women and no woman ever has been elected to Congress from Delaware, Iowa, Mississippi, or Vermont (Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics, 2008)
- 30 Number of countries reported to be “full” democracies in 2007—compared to 56 said to be “flawed” democracies and 55 (representing nearly 40% of the world’s population) characterized as “authoritarian” (Freedom House, 2007; *Economist*, 2007)
- 76 Number of seats won by the Hamas Party in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary election, an election urged by the United States, declared to be fair by international observers, and giving Hamas legitimate governing authority, but quickly met by Israel’s imprisonment of 54 Hamas officials and refusal to release Palestinian tax revenues which, compounding massive international aid cuts, subverted the Palestinian Authority’s ability to pay 160,000 civil servants, leading to a deadly power struggle between Hamas and its rival Fatah Party (*Vanity Fair*, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2006)
- 6,000 Number of secret cremations by police officials in India’s Punjab State in the 1980s when the Indian government, resisting a Sikh insurgency, resorted to police-orchestrated pogroms, dismissed the democratically elected Punjabi government, and imposed direct “President’s rule” for five years, during which time tens of thousands of Sikhs were disap-

peared, an atrocity the Indian government refuses even to acknowledge (Human Rights Watch, 2007)

- 10,000** Number of Nicaraguan peasants—called “Contras”—armed and trained by the United States in a 1980s attempt to oust Nicaragua’s democratically-elected leftist Sandinista government, resulting in the death of some 1,400 civilians and the displacement of 113,000—a situation made worse by the U.S. mining of key Nicaraguan harbors, later ruled by the World Court to be a violation of international law (ICJ, 1984)
- 370,000** Number of persons displaced in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2006 due to armed conflict (currently threatening to overwhelm 18,000 UN peacekeepers) between rebel leader Laurent Nkunda and the government of Joseph Kabila, elected in the country’s first free and fair elections in forty years (BBC, 2008; Freedom House, 2008)
- 5,300,000** Estimated number of Americans (one in every 41 adults) who, as of September 2008, lacked voting rights due to felony convictions, including 1.4 million African Americans disenfranchised at a rate seven times the national average, in part because state voting rights reinstatement procedures are cumbersome and exclude certain classes of offenders (Sentencing Project, 2008)
- 9,000,000** Number of paper ballots ordered by the Mugabe government for Zimbabwe’s 2008 presidential and legislative elections, exceeding the 5,900,000 eligible voters and thus creating suspicions of election fraud which, in addition to provoking violence before and after the elections (death and torture allegedly at the hands of Mugabe supporters, government-backed youth militias, and war veterans), greatly detracted from the chance for a free and fair election (BBC, 2008)
- 70,000,000** Dollars paid by Iran in compensation for the 1951 nationalization of a consortium of eight large, foreign-owned oil companies, an event that, in conjunction with a rising fear of Communism, prompted the CIA to engineer and execute the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, using Iranian armed forces and Iranian media to turn the tide in favor of the Shah—a coup that resulted in the deaths of 300 Iranians and set the stage for the Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini some 20 years later (NY Times, 2008)

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