



Bertrand Ramcharan

Dans le cadre du 70^{ème} anniversaire de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme, Monsieur Bertrand Ramcharan, anc. Haut-commissaire aux droits de l'homme a donné une conférence au FSPI le 6 décembre 2018. Cette interview fait suite à sa conférence.

FSPI: Your time as High Commissioner for Human Rights came at a crucial period in world politics. For example, the Iraq War was in its first year and the world marked the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. What were some of your goals and priorities entering into the position?

Bertrand Ramcharan: Entering into the position of High Commissioner, one strives for justice to the extent that one can help prevent or ameliorate gross violations of human rights and to promote justice in the spirit of the Universal Declaration. I attached importance to re-establishing branches of OHCHR dealing with Petitions, and with Fact-Finding (Special Procedures). These were central areas that had been down-graded previously. I gave priority to the establishment of the position of Special Rapporteur on the problem of human trafficking and took the lead on that. I sought to promote the enhancement of national human rights institutions inside Member States because, at the end of the day, human rights must be protected at home, inside each country. I also asserted the 'right of initiative' (droit d'initiative) of the High Commissioner and investigated and published reports on human rights situations in Iraq (following the Coalition invasion), Ivory Coast, Darfur, and Liberia. I presented the reports on Ivory Coast and Darfur to the Security Council. I was the first person to have published a report on human rights in Iraq after the Coalition invasion.

FSPI: In December of this year the Universal Declaration of Human Rights turns 70. Recent years have uncovered new challenges that could never have been foreseen by the framers of this monumental document. Digital privacy, artificial intelligence, climate change, and refugees are realities of the modern age that change the way we approach human rights. In your opinion, does the Universal Declaration provide a solid and adequate foundation for the evolving concepts of freedoms and the challenges they face?

Bertrand Ramcharan: Indeed, the Universal Declaration does provide a solid foundation for the evolving concept of freedoms and the challenges they face. The great merit of the Universal

Declaration is that it provides the central core of values for humanity world-wide. New problems are dealt with through supplementary instruments. But people everywhere attach importance to the core norms of the Universal Declaration: human dignity and equality, the integrity of the human person, justice, governance based on the will of the people, solidarity and tolerance.

FSPI: In addition to the abovementioned challenges of the 21st century, the international community is also facing an increase in isolationist or nationalist sentiments with surging level of racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination and open conflict across the world with mounting cruelties and crimes. What must the UN system do to push back against these forces that threaten human rights?

Bertrand Ramcharan: The historic role of the UN system is to be the leading advocate of the international community for the values of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There will always be adverse currents, but the UN system must keep reminding the world that, in the Millennium Declaration, the international community, invoking the Universal Declaration, reaffirmed a set of values for the 21st century grounded in freedom, human dignity, equality and solidarity. The UN Secretary-General must take the lead in advocacy in support of the universality of the Universal Declaration. More than ever before, the moral voice of the UN Secretary-General must be heard, with the UN High Commissioner in support.

FSPI: The universality of human rights is being contested across the world while under assault from authoritarian regimes or terrorists. This fact highlights that the interpretation of human rights is not uniform and that different states or non state actors often take different approaches to enforce human rights norms. What mechanisms provide the best guidance for the implementation and enforcement of these concepts?

Bertrand Ramcharan: Historically, the UN human rights treaty bodies have been the most principled and steadfast voices in support of the universal applicability of human rights. The human rights fact-finders (Special Procedures) have also contributed in good measure. The Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council are all political bodies that see issues through political lens. I said above that the UN Secretary-General has a crucial leadership role to play in support of universality. The International Court of Justice can play a pivotal strategic role as the upholder of universal values. The Court is the highest judicial organ of the international community and it is destined to be the authoritative voice in support of legality and human values. We have to study ways and means of strengthening the authority of the Court as the decisive organ when it comes to pronouncing on the content of international law and of universal human rights.. The fact that flaky, aberrant, leaders or self-serving entities express this or that view is not decisive in the long-term. What is decisive is that the authoritative organs of the international community speak out steadfastly in support of universality and legality. The Universality of human rights resides in the people. At the end of the day, the peoples of the world will choose not to be enslaved, tortured, arbitrarily detained or killed, They will vindicate universality, notwithstanding the depravities of transient despots.

FSPI: The global youth population has exploded in recent years, with people under 30 now accounting for more than half the world's population. Such numbers create unprecedented potential not only for economic and social progress, but also progress in human rights. How can the current system draw on young peoples' energy, views, and commitment to further the concept of universality?

Bertrand Ramcharan: I have argued in a recent book, **Modernising the UN Human Rights System**, that the UN Secretary-General, using the Department of Public Information, should launch an annual Youth Assembly for Human Rights. The key aim of such an annual Youth Assembly for Human Rights would be to provide young people with an opportunity to mobilize in support of the universality of human rights. As I said above, the universality of human rights resides in the people. At the end of the day, it is young people who will vindicate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose 70th anniversary we commemorate this year. We must remain steadfast in our faith in the Universal Declaration.