

# **The Atlanta Declaration**

**A Consensus Document from  
“Human Rights Defenders on the Frontlines of Freedom”  
The Carter Center, Atlanta, GA, USA  
November 12, 2003**

History reveals that there have been moments in time when the world’s leaders and peoples made fateful choices and embarked on paths that were sometimes beneficial to humanity and sometimes catastrophic. Mindful of this we, human rights defenders from 41 nations, have gathered in Atlanta because of our alarm at the direction and implications of what has come to be known as the “war against terrorism.”

While recognizing the responsibility of states to secure peace and security for their peoples, we believe strongly that these goals can only be achieved by addressing the root causes of the problems that afflict humanity.

Today there is a global deterioration in respect for human rights caused by poverty, war, injustice, occupation, colonialism, racism, violence and suppression of democratic, economic, social and cultural rights.

There is overwhelming evidence from the participants at this meeting that emergency laws, violations of international human rights standards and departures from the rule of law do not create security. The best way to build security is to respect and protect human rights.

Participants reaffirm their commitment to the universality of human rights and express their concern at the lack of consistent application by states. The implications of the “war on terrorism” for the stability of all states, including that of established and emerging democracies, are a source of serious concern.

Finally, we are particularly disturbed by the growing dangers for human rights defenders and humanitarian workers and growing tendencies toward state action that are designed to criminalize dissent and that threaten a dignified and secure existence for religious and ethnic minorities, and a pluralistic civil society.

We call upon governments to reaffirm their commitment to the realization of the rights enumerated in the 1998 Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and to put an end to censorship, arbitrary detention, oppressive administrative measures and all other actions that undermine the protection of human rights.

Accordingly,

We call upon all States to:

1. Repeal all laws that infringe upon human rights, and bring all legislation into conformity with internationally recognized human rights standards. We are

particularly concerned about an expanded internal security role for the military in some countries facilitated by resumed military cooperation with powerful nations. Any powers granted to the police, military, and other security forces must be entirely in line with international human rights standards and/or international humanitarian law. If governments invoke exceptional measures, this should be done in full accordance with international instruments for a specific purpose and limited duration. Such actions and their implications should be made transparent to the wider public.

2. Create an enabling environment for human rights defenders to carry out their work and ensure their protection from all forms of retaliation, threats and violence. States should pay particular attention to the following rights contained in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders
  - (a) freedom of thought, speech, expression, communication and the right to information;
  - (b) freedom of association;
  - (c) freedom of assembly;
  - (d) freedom of movement;
  - (e) the right to receive funding;
  - (f) the right to privacy.
3. End impunity by ensuring that members of the military and security forces and civilians responsible for human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law are brought before ordinary civil and criminal courts and prosecuted for their crimes. Furthermore, states should immediately ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court without reservations, as well as other relevant international human rights treaties.
4. Strengthen judicial systems by ensuring independence in the appointment and functioning of judges and ensure adequate judicial training in the area of international human rights law and mechanisms.
5. Address the root causes of social, political, economic and cultural problems to find and implement long-term solutions to violence, insecurity and human rights violations.

We call upon the wider civil society and the private sector to:

1. Develop regular opportunities for human rights defenders to meet, build capacity, share experiences, and support each other on a regional and global basis. Specifically, we have agreed to create a Human Rights Defenders Policy Forum, which will work on an ongoing basis and meet periodically to assess particular challenges facing defenders in their work. This forum will provide a vital support system and an opportunity for developing strategic thinking on key issues. One goal of the forum will be to build channels of communication between defenders and policy makers in the United States and abroad as well as in important organizations such as the United Nations and regional multilateral organizations as well as international financial institutions.

2. Highlight best and worst practices by both governments and corporations in the human rights field.
3. Make every effort to educate the wider public, especially young people, about the importance of human rights protections and the work of human rights defenders.
4. Review their traditional strategies to ensure that they are maximizing their ability to respond to the challenges of the changing environment.
5. Establish a fund for the support and legal defense of persecuted human rights defenders and those who are forced into exile.

We call upon the United Nations and regional multilateral bodies to:

1. Strengthen international human rights protection mechanisms of the United Nations and regional bodies in order to ensure the autonomy, objectivity and impartiality necessary for carrying out their mandates. Member states have the obligation to enable the effective functioning of such bodies and provide avenues of access to them for civil society. States also should ensure that these are provided with necessary and adequate resources to carry out their mandates.
2. Raise the profile of reports and recommendations submitted by the Special Procedures and Mechanisms of multilateral bodies that highlight pressing human rights concerns.
3. Strengthen the human rights Treaty Bodies so that they can more effectively encourage states to implement the provisions of the treaties they have ratified, with specific attention to the recommendations issued by the Treaty Bodies aimed at correcting rights abuses.
4. Incorporate a commitment to human rights into all agencies and departments of multilateral bodies, in particular the United Nations Development Program.
5. The UN Counter-Terrorism Committee and similar regional bodies, charged with monitoring the implementation of national counter-terrorism legislation, should cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and similar regional institutions, for the prompt and thorough review of the government reports by its Special Rapporteurs and experts, to ensure that policies designed to combat terrorism are consistent with internationally accepted human rights norms.
6. Pay particular attention and give full support to the conclusions and recommendations of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders in her reports to the General Assembly, as well the recommendations made by other multilateral bodies.