



Significance of Individuals to Defending Human Rights: Meet Four Human Rights Defenders

Grades: 9-12, Social Studies

Time: 1 class period (45 minutes)

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson is to demonstrate to students that defense of human rights, particularly in developing countries, cannot occur without the leadership and example of individual advocates.

Content Standards: Georgia Civics/Government – SSCG7; SSWH20

Objectives:

1. Students will learn how Gerard Jean-Juste, Saad Ibrahim, Helen Mack, and Jessica Montell provide the necessary leadership skills for an effective defense of human rights in their respective countries.
2. Students will answer questions about the importance of individuals to a movement based on their learning or readiness level.

Key Words:

human rights
democracy
justice

impunity
policy-maker
Egypt

Haiti
Guatemala
Israel

Materials:

1. Overhead with copy of *The Significance of Individuals to Defending Human Rights*
2. Student handout: *Defender Profiles*
3. Student handout: *Bloomed Questions*
4. (Optional) Primary source material for each defender

Procedure:

1. Warm-up Activity (5 Min.): On the board, brainstorm with students to develop a class definition for “human rights.”
 - a. Ask students to give specific examples of human rights they possess.
 - b. Ask students for historical examples of times/situations when human rights have been violated. How were those rights restored (if ever)?
2. Topic Overview (5 Min.): Place the transparency on the overhead and use it to introduce students to four human rights defenders.
 - a. Provide students with definitions of key terms, as needed.



3. Breakout Session (20 Min.): Divide students into four groups and ask them to read the profile of a human rights defender. (You may also distribute the optional corresponding primary source excerpts as time and reading level permit.)

Have them consider the following questions as they read:

- What human rights is this person defending?
- Describe his/her experience as a defender. What most interests you?

4. Debrief & Discussion (15 Min.): After reading the profiles and considering the questions, students may answer *Bloomed Questions* as a class, in small groups, or independently. Questions are tiered and designed for teachers to distribute among students based on their learning styles or readiness levels.



The Significance of Individuals to Defending Human Rights



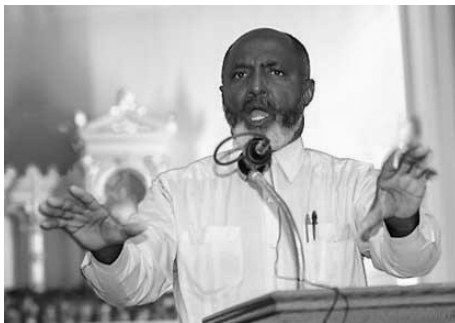
Dr. Saad Ibrahim
Egypt

His call for democracy and human rights in the Middle East has risked his life and health, but Ibrahim's persistence continues to spark dialogue for advancement of democratic principles.



Jessica Montell
Israel

Her passion for justice and truth inspires her work of exposing rights abuses in the Occupied Territories, holding policy-makers accountable for their decisions.



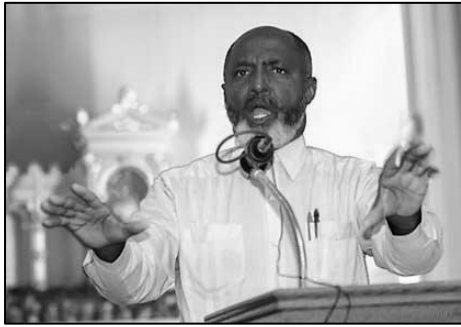
Gerard Jean-Juste
Haiti

His tireless message of nonviolence has challenged unjust political and economic policies of the Haitian government, which has largely been indifferent to human rights violations.



Helen Mack
Guatemala

Her patient persistence in the name of justice has slowly altered the culture of impunity that dominates the Guatemalan judicial system.



Gerard Jean-Juste

“Carry Me Home To Haiti”

South Florida may seem an idyllic location for a political prisoner living in exile.

But not even a debilitating case of leukemia and the possibility of persecution at home are enough to stop Gerard Jean-Juste from heading back to his native Haiti again.

“I expect to return as soon as my medical staff allows me,” says the 61-year old priest and human rights activist.

The volatile storms of Haiti’s political fortunes have tossed Jean-Juste between his island homeland and the U.S. for the better part of the last 35 years, and along the way he has earned considerable respect in both countries for his efforts to improve the civil liberties of Haitians regardless of where they live.

Jean-Juste still has charges of weapons possession and conspiracy to kill Haitian police officers outstanding against him. But the fact that he is so eager to return home underscores the improvements made under the current Preval government after the humanitarian disaster that marked the previous U.S.-installed regime.

He gained fame in Haiti for preaching liberation theology on the radio after a military coup in 1991 – for the longest time, the military junta running the country sought intelligence on the mysterious rabble-rousing rector but failed to stop his activities because they had no idea what he looked like.

The last time Jean-Juste was in Haiti he was dumped in jail - twice - after rebels overthrew the government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. “The illegal, de facto government always brought some trumped-up charges that could not hold,” he says.

The first arrest was on charges of inciting violence and harboring pro-Aristide soldiers. Jean-Juste had close ties with Aristide, a former Catholic priest. The second was for the murder of his cousin at a time when Jean-Juste was out of the country – a charge that was eventually dropped.

Under the regime that was installed in 2004 by the “council of the wise” set up by France, the U.S. and Canada, thousands of people were killed in one of the worst spasms of violence the Caribbean has seen in recent years. During this period, Prime Minister Gerard Latortue – a former radio talk-show host from Boca Raton – was accused of being largely indifferent to a surge in human rights violations and corruption.

“What was happening was that former military personnel who should have been subject to prosecution for crimes ended up becoming members of the local police force,” says Professor Irwin Stotzky at the University of Miami, an expert in Haiti politics. “It was basically a failed state,” he says.

In the run up to the elections to replace the discredited interim government, Jean-Juste was considered by many a potential presidential candidate despite the fact that he was in prison. Indeed, his incarceration made him something of a Nelson Mandela figure and served to highlight his years of work in Haiti to support the poor and feed homeless children. In the end, however, Jean-Juste endorsed the eventual winner Rene Preval from behind bars.

“I support President Preval even though we disagree on some key issues,” says the ailing priest. His main reason for optimism is that the democratic process is moving forward. “I love the voters - as long as they stay committed, awake and aware, the political situation must go forward in the right direction.”

Jean-Juste was released in January 2006 to be treated for leukemia in Miami, where he enjoys an equally celebrated status as a far-sighted social reformer. In the U.S., he has been active in social issues since 1978 when he helped set up the Haitian Refugee Center to assist refugees, protest U.S. immigration laws and fight local discrimination. He is



a hero to many in Little Haiti, and signs in shop windows around Miami demanding his freedom were a common sight after his arrest in 2005.

He says his battle with leukemia has slowed him down, but also serves as a source of reverence for the human condition. He likens the sickness and treatment process to a near-death experience, and says he has had many questions answered about such problems as the pain of torture, imprisonment, poison, and rejection. “I understand the Bible and the biblical martyrs better,” he says.

Jean-Juste’s personal aura is almost palpable to those who know him. “I first met him many years ago, when he set up the refugee center. He’s just an incredibly brave guy, and very peaceful,” says Professor Stotzky.

Unsurprising for a priest, Jean-Juste’s main source of strength is his faith. Yet in addition to the teachings of the church, he says his inspiration for his activism also partly comes from what he calls his “debt as a member of the human race.”

Yet while his faith gives him the power to serve people without discrimination, the rules of the Catholic Church have blocked him from exercising his charge. When it appeared that Jean-Juste might run for president – an activity prohibited by the Vatican – the archbishop of Port-au-Prince suspended the imprisoned priest from his duties as rector of St. Claire Catholic Church in Port-au-Prince.

“I haven’t even been able to pick up my personal belongings at the church,” he says. “Recently, I asked Archbishop (Joseph Serge Miot) to allow me to return to the parish for a visit, but he denied me this right.” Unable to qualify for social security assistance, Jean-Juste turned to the Archbishop of Miami and asked to perform duties in order to survive on stipends – but was shunned again.

Despite such setbacks, Jean-Juste remains optimistic. He sees securing basic human needs, in particular education, as the key to boosting civil liberties in Haiti, and suggests using more interactive media to make education about humanitarian and civic issues more appealing. “We need to nourish the culture of life and democracy though all means possible,” he says.

In terms of what the international community and the U.S. ought to be doing to help Haiti get on its feet, Jean-Juste sees much room for improvement. “I disagree with the present administration’s approach. The U.S. helped the Europeans through the Marshall Plan, and yet it cannot give the proper assistance to its sister nations in the Americas.”

Indeed, dissatisfaction with Washington’s Haiti policy is common among experts on the topic. “I’ve studied Haiti for over 30 years now, and I still have no idea what the U.S. policy toward the nation really is,” says Professor Stotzky. “I don’t think anyone does really – if you find out, let me know.”



Dr. Saad Ibrahim

“Setting An Agenda For Arab Democracy”

Being thrown in an Egyptian prison for a few years along with 20 co-workers would be enough to convince many people that a change of approach was needed.

Not Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim.

Indeed, the leading human rights activist and founder of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies brushes off the experience. He sees his incarceration and the recent rollbacks in civil liberties under the Mubarak regime as mere temporary setbacks in the creation of a stronger civil society throughout the Middle East.

“Twenty years ago when we first started out promoting civil liberties, no one was even aware there was a problem,” he says on his way to an Al Jazeera interview in the evening Cairo traffic. “Today, there are over 100 groups like ours in Egypt and between 300 and 400 across the Arab world – some of them inspired by us. We have made a lot of progress, and we are still advancing.”

Dr. Ibrahim founded The Ibn Khaldun Center in 1988 with seed money from an academic prize awarded for his pioneering work in sociology. Before armed guards dragged away its employees in the summer of 2000, around 30 people worked at the center in programs ranging in everything from democracy promotion to training for non-governmental organizations on public policy issues.

Despite oppression at home and increasing wariness from Western governments over Arab politics, Dr. Ibrahim sees ample reason to be optimistic about the future of democracy in the Muslim world. “We now have the ability to shape the agenda and are starting to get a pan-Arab debate. The very fact that dictators in the region have to go through the motions of the democratic process is testimony to the fact that the language of democracy is becoming prevalent,” he says.

He points out that in some parts of the Arab world, leaders are doing much more than just going through the motions. One such example is the first free and democratic elections held earlier this year in Mauritania. The small North African nation may not be a major player on the global stage, but the success of the polls there shows that Islam can be compatible with democracy, he says.

Another positive development is the establishment of the Arab Foundation for Democracy under the auspices of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al-Missnedin of Qatar. The foundation was created in May at a pan-Arab conference partly organized by the Ibn Khaldun Center, and aims to provide material and organizational support for groups pursuing democracy in the region.

These recent steps toward restoring momentum to Arab democracy movements are significant given that a key driving force in Egypt’s secular civil liberties movement was left in tatters for several years by the imprisonment of Dr. Ibrahim and his colleagues.

Many say that it was the Ibn Khaldun Center’s focus on election monitoring that most irked the Mubarak regime. The trial was seen an attempt to muzzle civil society groups and prevent Dr. Ibrahim and the center from scrutinizing upcoming polls.

“Mubarak wanted to send a warning and shut up his operation in order to avoid publicity on electoral irregularities,” says Michael Dunn, editor of The Middle East Journal and former professor at Georgetown University.

Dr. Ibrahim was convicted in May 2001 for preparing slanderous reports about Egypt and receiving unauthorized funds from overseas, a ruling that sparked a storm of condemnation from the West. The case became a cause celebre



for both domestic and foreign human rights groups that threw the spotlight on the poor political reform record of the Mubarak government. This, along with the threat of the U.S. cutting off aid were key factors in the acquittal of Dr. Ibrahim on all charges in 2003, says Dunn.

Around the time of his release, it appeared that liberal democracy was gaining more of a foothold throughout the Arab world not only within a secular context but also among religious groups. A party of Muslim democrats won power for the first time in Turkey, while a similar political organization made substantial progress in Morocco.

Both men and women voted in Bahrain's first elections since 1975, and Egypt held its first multi-party polls in 50 years in 2005. Dr. Ibrahim says the West can take some of the credit for this period of liberalization.

"After 9-11, there was a push from the U.S. and Western Europe to promote democracy in the Middle East as part of the war on terror," he says. "We think democracy should be supported for its own sake, but the initial effect was to give added energy to our cause."

But the long-awaited Cairo Spring was to prove elusive. Part of the reason was that the message being disseminated by such people as Dr. Ibrahim had struck a chord with Islamic-oriented groups who had long suffered under the rule of authoritarian governments. The banned Muslim Brotherhood won 20% of seats in the 2005 election to form the largest opposition bloc, prompting the Mubarak regime to quickly clamp down by throwing their leaders in prison and stifling political dissent.

In a recent example of the growing atmosphere of oppression facing civil society groups, the Egyptian Secret Service arrested in May members of a group working to promote human rights and democracy from within a Muslim perspective known as the Quranists.

"The Mubarak government has taken advantage of the gains made by the Muslim Brotherhood and used them as a pretext for rolling back democracy," says Dr. Ibrahim. The government recently passed a series of constitutional amendments, which analysts say remove civil liberties and increase the risk of vote-rigging by removing the judicial monitoring of elections.

Dr. Ibrahim says the West is guilty of double standards when it comes to supporting democracy in the Middle East. A typical example is the case of Ayman Nour, the secular opposition leader who polled second to Mubarak in the 2005 elections. Policymakers such as U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have condemned the imprisonment of politicians like Nour who may pose a threat to the Mubarak regime, but remain conspicuously silent on the persecution of Egyptian opposition groups which are Islamic.

"The West ought to be consistent and stay the course by continuing to promote democracy regardless of which groups gain political power – there should be nothing episodic," says Dr. Ibrahim. "Human rights and democracy are a matter of principle and they should be supported across the board."

Indeed, the recent waning of enthusiasm for Arab democracy on the part of the West poses a danger to secular organizations like the Ibn Khadun Center. Such intransigence "undermines the credibility of the democracy message and has the unintended result of making pro-Western groups fighting for civil liberties in the Middle East end up looking like agents of the West," he says.

Warning about the hidden costs of ill conceived foreign policy is a point that Dr. Ibrahim has been making for years. At a conference held at The Carter Center in 2003, he stated that Guantanamo prison and other abuses of civil liberties by the U.S. had granted dictators around the world a carte blanche to continue violating human rights themselves.

And in a New York Times column by Thomas Friedman in May 2006, Dr. Ibrahim was quoted as saying that the U.S. needed to "get back on the moral high ground it has slid down since 9-11" in order to stabilize the fallout from its Iraq policy.

Despite such obstacles, Dr. Ibrahim is hopeful that both the Arab world and the West can put their houses in order. "I'm confident that we will prevail in the end."



Jessica Montell

“Taking A Neighborly Interest”

Many in Israel would simply prefer not to know about human rights abuses occurring in the Occupied Territories.

So when an Israeli organization demands an investigation into the fatal shootings of suspects in the West Bank, or a halt to the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields by Israeli soldiers, the accusations of betrayal sometimes fly.

“We have been called traitors, Arab-lovers and much worse,” says Jessica Montell, executive director of Jerusalem-based human rights group B’Tselem. “But despite the pervasive mentality in Israel that anything is justified in the name of security, polls still show around a quarter of the population support our goals.”

Documenting abuses in the Occupied Territories is crucial not only to bringing rights violations to light, but also in terms of the propaganda war for the hearts and minds of Israeli and foreign audiences confronted with the spiral of violence in the Middle East.

Around 30 people work at B’Tselem, either in its main office or in the field, to collect and verify information on issues including torture of Palestinian detainees, the fallout from unlawful restrictions on freedom of movement, and the debilitating effects that the separation wall in the West Bank has on local communities. B’Tselem also directly lobbies policymakers in the Knesset to build a stronger agenda for rights protection.

“We focus on casualties, and recording the testimony of eyewitnesses to abuse,” says Ms. Montell. The organization doesn’t take the task lightly. “We have to be super-careful about accuracy” because one of the goals of information gathering is to pursue those who may be responsible for rights violations, she says.

After the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) complete an operation in the Occupied Territories, it normally issues a stock press release version of events in the hopes that the matter won’t be pursued further. This document usually sheds little light on the details of what actually occurred, says Ms. Montell. B’Tselem seeks to challenge the official sanitized portrayal of incidents and create a more accurate and detailed record through gathering first-hand evidence.

Such efforts are seen as important part of exposing the true situation in the Occupied Territories, and a process that may one day help form a base for better understanding and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

“Groups like B’Tselem do a magnificent job in terms of documenting abuses and recording the human rights problems in the Occupied Territories,” says Dr. Saliba Sarsar, a professor of political science at Monmouth University specializing in the Arab-Israeli conflict. There is a certain numbness when it comes to the litany of tragedies involved, but there are also people on both sides who are deeply affected when there is a suicide bomb or a fighter strike that kills innocent people, he says.

B’Tselem not only seeks to document abuses but also to affect situations on the ground in the hopes of mitigating suffering. A key tactic of the IDF is to restrict the movement of Palestinians in need of medical attention during periods of crisis – a strategy that has reportedly resulted in the deaths of people in need of lifesaving medicine or crucial regular treatment such as kidney dialysis.

But when the Islamist group Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in June, this tactic was countered due to local rights groups such as B’Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights demanding that the border be opened for the sick and wounded to go to hospitals for treatment. “The very high profile of that case and the fact that everyone was under a magnifying glass helped us achieve our aim,” says Ms. Montell.



Indeed, the fact that groups like B'Tselem can influence the way that Israel is portrayed in both domestic and international media often ends up affecting the dynamics of the conflict itself. "Israel won't engage in policies it can't get away with," she says.

Ms. Montell grew up in Northern California in a Jewish family that was politically active on such issues as the environment and human rights. "I never saw a contradiction between my Zionist perspective and my respect for human rights. I came to Israel for the first time when I was 16 and only then realized that some of Israel's policies didn't mesh with my basic beliefs."

Her faith also provides something of a moral reference point in Ms. Montell's work, although she considers her Jewish heritage to be more of a cultural influence than an overtly religious one. "A lot of Jewish law is quite supportive of basic human rights. For example, the Torah has a prohibition on collective punishment and states that the son ought not to be killed for the sins of the father."

B'Tselem applies this maxim in condemning punitive house demolitions, a practice employed by Israel to deter potential attacks. A report by B'Tselem on such house demolitions showed that 3,983 Palestinians had been left homeless due to the policy since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000. The report also found that the IDF deliberately destroyed adjacent houses in 295 cases, upending the lives of people far removed from suspected potential radicals.

"Israel's policy not only infringes the right to housing, it also breaches one of the most fundamental principles of justice: the prohibition on punishing a person for acts committed by another," says the November 2004 report.

Still, Ms. Montell says she is an optimist. Continued foreign involvement in monitoring the Arab-Israeli conflict is needed to make sure that Israel can't violate basic international law and codes of conduct, she says. But such monitoring should only be considered a stopgap to a more permanent solution. "Over the long term, the occupation has to end and some situation established whereby everyone in the region enjoys the same basic rights," she says.

Part of the reason that groups such as B'Tselem struggle to find a wider sympathetic audience in Israel is because many in the nation are stuck in a psychology of encirclement and have shut their eyes to what is happening to Palestinians, says Dr. Sarsar. This is combined with the mentality that what is occurring in Gaza is the Palestinians own fault, and the idea that terrible measures are justified in the name of national security.

This is a point with which B'Tselem fully concurs. Allowing terrorists to dictate the agenda means that they have won, says Ms. Montell. "I firmly believe that when security interests alone are pursued above all else, it actually works against the state."



Helen Mack

“Sister Activist”

What’s the definition of patience in Guatemala? Answer: Helen Mack.

Some 14 years after the military murdered her sister Myrna, Ms. Mack brought the authors of the crime to justice despite the fact that only 5% of crimes committed in the Central American nation ever go to trial and less than 1% ends with a conviction.

Along the way, Ms. Mack also transformed from an apolitical businesswoman into Guatemala’s leading judicial reform activist. She runs the Myrna Mack Foundation, a group of around 40 workers who lobby for change to the legal system, fight impunity for military crimes, promote human security and empower local communities to stand up for their rights.

The organization has had some success in rolling back the culture of impunity that dominates the Guatemala military. One favorite trick the army used to employ was to claim jurisdiction in military courts over incidents such as car accidents and rape in order to pass off executions of civilians as accidental deaths. To counter this, “we said if the military were involved in (such cases) then they should be judged by civilian tribunals not military ones. We created a debate about this issue and proposed reforms which were adopted as part of the peace agreement” in Dec 1996, says Ms. Mack.

Ms. Mack says there have been two distinct sides – the political and the personal – to the journey that began when the police told her late in the summer of 1990 that Myrna had died in a traffic accident. Despite the eventual guilty verdict passed down in 2004, both aspects of her battle remain far from resolved.

On the personal level, she has doubts about whether closure is ever possible. “In a personal process of reconciliation, sometimes we have to learn how to forgive ourselves,” she says. “When you focus too much on legal justice, the system can make you a victim.”

Faith is the fuel that sustains Ms. Mack. “Seeking justice for 14 years with all the threats and tensions – it’s not what I call justice, and the only way to stay strong, keep moving forward... and try to build hope is through faith,” she says.

On the political level, the fight to improve governance in Guatemala has a long way to go. There are deep-rooted institutional problems in the political and legal systems that make any progress excruciatingly slow, says Dr. Rachel Sieder, senior lecturer in Latin American politics at the University of London. “Helen Mack certainly gets a ten for effort, but the political reality is that results are very slow in coming,” she says.

Ms. Mack is all too aware that her battle is an uphill one and points out that the situation in recent years has worsened despite the efforts of groups like hers. She harbors grave fears for her country after an election due in September. “I think that our democratic institutions have been weakened from some years ago... I don’t know if the people will have the maturity to discuss the results of the election.”

Experts are decidedly unimpressed by the quality of the two leading candidates, Alvaro Colom and Otto Perez Molina. Funding corruption charges dog the Colom campaign, while the right-wing Molina, a retired general, wants to strengthen the hand of the army to deal with unrest. Such a move could create the political leeway for further crimes by the military and a return to extra-judicial killings as unofficial state policy.

Even today, the state still avoids investigating deaths of human rights defenders and is highly wary of those fighting the culture of impunity in Guatemala. “Military officers feel that they are threatened because human rights organizations are working on cases such as executions, genocide or massacres,” says Ms. Mack.



The nexus where the personal and political come together for Ms. Mack is in how to deal with improving the security in people's lives. Her experience with the Myrna Mack Foundation has made it clear that any society at risk needs to focus on more than just safeguarding freedom from fear. "When we talk about discrimination or marginalization, it has to do with poverty and all the economic, social and cultural rights. These rights are equally as important as civil rights if you want to have political reconciliation."

A landmark United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report in 1994 set out a model that sought to expand the security paradigm from its traditional focus on the state to a broader definition that also included the security of people's lives within national borders. Another report by the Commission on Human Security in 2003, co-chaired by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, reiterated that economic, social and cultural rights were equally as vital as civil rights in securing human freedoms.

This concept of human security is central to Helen Mack's fight in terms of empowering communities to ask for the full spectrum of their rights – civil, economic, social and cultural. Her approach to justice is equally comprehensive. Focusing on narrow legal remedies is only half the story, she says. "I see justice as something more holistic – that is, not only justice from a legal point of view or fighting impunity, but also social justice."

Her personal faith backs up this broader approach to security. As a Catholic, Ms. Mack sees the social doctrine of the church as something that also involves the right to such public goods as education and health. During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Western powers emphasized civil rights over economic and social rights due to the ideological battle between Communism and capitalism. Today, the West uses the demon of terrorism to promote civil rights at the expense of social rights, says Ms. Mack.

"It's a case of if you are not with me you are against me. But in this world we cannot be just black and white – there are many grays in between that do not make you an enemy of the state, and that concept is still not (well understood) by politicians here and in the U.S.," she says.

The lack of effort in recent years by Western nations to improve the quality of governance in Latin America is frustrating for many who work in the region.

"It was an important area during the Cold War, but now that most of the countries in the region are nominal democracies, the main policy toward the region appears to be one of neglect," says Dr. Seider.

Ms. Mack says that Guatemala has been left largely to fend for itself at a time when social and political structures in the country are still extremely fragile. She says powerful groups – including those in organized crime – are increasing their sway over weak institutional processes. "We are not going to survive as a country unless those responsible in government – and we are talking about political parties, the business sector, the civil servants – sit down and really talk about what is best for the nation."



Gerard Jean-Juste, *Haiti*

- *The following is an excerpt from Jean-Juste's interview with Democracy Now in December 2004, following his release from Haitian prison.*

AMY GOODMAN: Why were you arrested?

REV. GERARD JEAN-JUSTE: There was no motivation that I know that could stand, and I was [inaudible] why I was feeding hundreds of children and young adults. They told me that I am under arrest, while I was inside the rectory at the moment. I told them, no, according to the concord — the agreement between Haiti and the church — you cannot arrest me that way. I told them that. They refused to listen. They really grabbed me forcefully and threw me into their vehicle and ran away with me, arriving at the police station in Petionville, where I was in jail for over a week. And they told me that — I saw them writing on the book, arrested for disturbing the public peace. That's what was written at the police station. But what was hurting me the most that day, why some of us in Haiti are trying to help the most desperate people, they came — the police, the repressive forces from the government, from the de facto government — came and shot at our people. Three children have been shot, one girl and two boys. That's hurt so much. So, I hope that all of us who are trying to appease the communities, to appease the people, I think instead of brutalizing us, instead of arresting us arbitrarily, they could congratulate us for helping them, because I think that by feeding the people, by taking care of the children, by educating them, we are helping the government. We are helping. We are helping the country, and instead, the government is going after those providing basic human needs to the people. This is crazy.

AMY GOODMAN: What do you think is the motivation of the government to have you silenced? You were in jail for seven weeks. What ultimately got you out?

REV. GERARD JEAN-JUSTE: I went through the court system after a month staying in jail without seeing a judge, and the judge looked at the file and thought it was frivolous. There was nothing. They said, hey, you have been accused of plotting against the government. I said what? Plotting against the government? Of the state, even worse. I said, what did I do? Where is the proof? There was no proof. I couldn't see any proof. At that time, the judge said, hey, I have to order your release. The judge did order my release, and then the commissioner, the one who is responsible for signing — approving the judge's decision — stayed about two weeks before he — it is supposed to take five days — he stayed two weeks before accepting the reality that I should be free. So, finally, by November 29, I was freed, while I was arrested on October 13.

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For the complete text:

<http://www.democracynow.org/print.pl?sid=04/12/20/154247>



Dr. Saad Ibrahim, *Egypt*

- *The following is an excerpt from the Seymour Martin Lipset Lecture delivered by Dr. Ibrahim on Nov. 1, 2006, entitled “Toward Muslim Democracies”*

Our concern must not be with a supposed incompatibility of freedom and Islam or, for that matter, democracy or liberal values and Islam. There is a universal hunger for all three, and Muslims are part of that universality. Two-thirds of the world’s Muslims already live under democratically elected governments. The one-third who are not yet enjoying participatory governance find themselves in that situation, not because of Islamic or Arab cultural exceptionalism; rather, it is because of autocratic regimes and external challenges to their territory and identity, all of which have been rampant in the last 50 years. Patriotism, nationalism, and now Islamism are variations on the same theme of existential resistance. Arab autocrats have amplified and manipulated those genuine fears to xenophobic levels in recent years.

In an earlier period, those same autocrats deluded their people with a populist bargain of national liberation, development, and social justice in exchange for giving up basic freedoms and democracy. Present day autocrats are continuing to bargain with their people: their very existence and identity in exchange for yet again forgoing freedom and democracy. With the same cynicism, Arab autocrats are trying to strike another bargain with the West: either you support us (autocrats) or face the deluge (Muslim fanatics).

Of the three forces competing for Arab public space, autocrats have a monopoly of state coercive powers and resources and have used them brutally. Theocrats have the monopoly of the mosques and the claim of virtue and have used them shrewdly and loudly. Democrats are squeezed in between, outgunned by the autocrats and outnumbered by the theocrats, but with claims of legitimacy and the support of a silent majority.

So, on balance, where does this leave us? Seymour Martin Lipset and his disciples had a favorite cheer: “We are not rough; we are not tough; but boy are we determined.”

If I may conclude by paraphrasing that great political guru and speaking as a front-line activist, I would say: “We Arab democrats are not as brutal as our autocratic rulers; we are not as numerous as their theocratic challengers, but we are determined to activate our silent majority, and we shall prevail.”

For the complete text:

http://www.ibnkhaldun.org/english/publications/saadarticles/2006/muslim_democracies.htm



Helen Mack, *Guatemala*

- *The following is an excerpt from Ms. Mack's address to the University of Notre Dame Kellogg Institute in 2005.*

Painful circumstances in the life of my family led me to take part on an unexpected struggle and to become a protagonist in the implementation of justice. It was not something that we planned. My family and I woke up with the need to unmask a crime committed by the state and with the resolution to test a system of justice that for many years has been underpinning impunity, which still covers up a cruel policy against insurgency and was responsible for transforming us into a nation of victims.

As you all know, on September 11, almost 15 years ago, one of the structures from the presidency illegitimately executed my sister, because they considered her an “enemy of the government.”

....

Myrna's case concluded last January when the Supreme Court sentenced former Chief Juan Valencia Osorio, but who unfortunately remains fugitive from the justice and, evidently, protected by the national structures of power. At the international level, we achieved a historical sentence, because not only the Inter-American Court established the responsibility of the state in similar cases, but also it clearly exposed the process in the denial of justice and those judiciary structures responsible for this. In order to diminish the denial of justice and impunity, the court demanded to the government the implementation of a series of political, judicial, and social measures. Of course, this can only be reachable if the governmental entities are willing to change the prevailing conditions.

I fought 14 years for justice; those were 14 years of facing the military power and the clandestine structures that promote impunity, violence, and crime. In my personal journal, I keep special gratitude to the police investigators, judges, attorneys, and witnesses who risked their lives and permanence in the country only to take part on this search for justice. I express my special gratitude to the investigator Jose Merida Escobar. The result of his inquiries showed that Myrna was a victim of an institutional crime, and even though he was intimidated, he was not afraid to declare the truth before the court.

....

Now that the case is closed, I cannot go back to where I started. I cannot remember my life before this event; either forget what I have learned in all these years. I keep a commitment with justice and have decided to confront a pending process with myself: reconciliation. I must face the fear and embark myself on the tunnel, which will lead me to discover my most intimate fears. I would like to work to combat falsehood, injustice, and the institutional weakness. This goes beyond the personal level and could be the beginning of a shared effort toward the reconciliation. I must say that everyone, and not only the victims, should take part in this process; the communities, the government, the society, and the powerful groups.

For complete text:

<http://kellogg.nd.edu/events/ndprize/hmcspeech.shtml>



Jessica Montell, *Israel*

➤ *The following is an editorial written by Ms. Montell for the Los Angeles Times, May 26, 2004.*

Demolishing Houses, and Lives **By Jessica Montell**

Throughout the last week, a macabre exercise has been running through my head. I imagine I have five minutes to get out of my house, never to return. What will I take with me? My wallet and checkbook, a change of clothes for the kids, the photo albums, my daughter's favorite doll, diapers, bottles. In five minutes, I'd never get it all out.

In my quiet neighborhood in West Jerusalem, this exercise seems absurd. No one is going to evict me at a moment's notice. Yet just an hour away, in the Rafah refugee camp on the Gaza-Egypt border, this scenario has been played out hundreds of times over the last week.

On May 15-16, the army destroyed 116 houses in Rafah, rendering more than 1,100 people homeless, according to our organization's estimates. It then began Operation Rainbow, in which it demolished an additional 67 houses over the last week. Since January, the army demolished 284 homes in Rafah, leaving 2,185 Palestinians homeless.

The demolition of houses generally takes place in the middle of the night, without any warning to residents. Dozens of Palestinians have told us of awakening to the sounds of tanks and bulldozers at their doorstep. They grab their children, leaving all their possessions behind.

Israel says these demolitions are necessary and that, in the last six weeks, army tunnel-busting units have uncovered and destroyed eight arms-smuggling tunnels around Rafah. Had they not done so, Israel claims, more civilians would have died in escalating Palestinian attacks. Certainly Israel has the obligation to protect its citizens, but even the most legitimate ends do not justify all means. International humanitarian law — formulated for the most extreme circumstances of war and occupation — must govern Israel's actions in Gaza. This body of law allows destruction of private property only in exceptional cases.

Now the military is seeking approval to demolish up to 2,000 more houses to widen the road along the border. Such an expansive strip probably would make life easier for the army, but it is hard to argue that the destruction of each one of these houses is absolutely necessary (or proportional to the benefit to be gained).

Clearly, armed Palestinian groups must be unequivocally condemned. Attacks against civilians are grave breaches of the laws of war. Yet no wrong against us can justify the suffering of thousands of innocent people.

Jessica Montell is director of the Israeli human rights organization [B'Tselem](#).

For complete text:

<http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views04/0526-04.htm>



Discussion Questions: The Significance of Individuals to Defending Human Rights

Knowledge:

- What is the name of the leader you are studying?
- Can you identify his/her home country on a map?
- What basic human rights is this person defending? How?

Comprehension:

- What challenges has this leader faced in defending human rights?
- How do you think the leader feels about violent vs. nonviolent intervention to promote his/her cause?

Application:

- Given what you've read about this individual, how would he/she respond to attempts by some contemporary governments to infringe on human rights in the name of national security or fighting terrorism?
- Read the First and Fourth amendments of the Constitution. How would this individual interpret these amendments as they relate to times of war or perceived threats to national security?

Analysis:

- Describe leadership qualities you admired in the leader you studied. Read background information on a second leader from this lesson and compare their leadership skills. How are their efforts similar? How are they different?
- Describe life experiences that inspired the leader to fight for his/her cause.

Synthesis:

- Think about the leadership qualities each of these individuals possessed and their unique life experiences that inspired their passion for their cause. Based on this information, create a brief biography or character sketch for the ideal leader to champion one of the causes listed below:
 - Literacy programs
 - Health care reform
 - Fight against poverty

Evaluation:

- After the discussion of these four individuals, ask students to theorize about whether or not defense of human rights in the respective countries would have been honored without them.
- How does the leader's commitment to nonviolence impact the strength of the movement?
- Do you think the leader is being effective?