

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute  
Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill

**Bringing Human Rights Home**  
**A Conference Marking**  
**The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**  
Hyde Park, NY  
December 5 and 6, 2008

To commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute (FERI) and the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill (ERVK) are organizing a conference entitled “Bringing Human Rights Home.” The conference will create a human rights action agenda for the United States in six key areas: international law, counter-terrorism, criminal justice, health care, employment, and education. It will be held in Hyde Park, NY on December 5 and 6, 2008.

Americans often think of human rights as an issue affecting other countries. This conference will lift the veil of this misconception and demonstrate how many of the domestic and foreign policy challenges and opportunities we currently face are in fact human rights issues. The conference seeks to focus attention on some of the areas in which the United States can creatively lead the way in upholding human rights both domestically and internationally.

The conference will be two days long. The first day will involve a larger number of participants and audience who will attend plenary sessions in the morning, then separate into breakout sessions in the afternoon to address the six issues on which we have chosen to concentrate. A rapporteur will guide the work of each of the breakout sessions. On day two a smaller group, comprised of the key participants and the rapporteurs from the day before, will utilize the insights generated in the first day’s discussions to craft an agenda for action. This agenda will serve both as a set of goals for the new administration and Congress taking office in Washington in January 2009, and as a guide to action for individuals, communities, and organizations over the course of the next ten years.

We recognize that there are many areas in which the United States could improve its human rights record, but we believe the six areas we have selected deserve particular attention at this time. We have grouped them under three broader headings: **International Human Rights Law; Upholding Civil and Political Rights Abroad and at Home;** and **Upholding Economic and Social Rights at Home.**

***Part 1) International Human Rights Law***

The United States lags behind other nations in agreeing to abide by international human rights law. It is the only nation, except for Somalia, that has not ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and one of the few nations not to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It has not yet signed or ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

### **Session One: Ratifying Human Rights Treaties**

This session will examine U.S. resistance to ratifying United Nations human rights treaties, specifically the UN conventions on women, children, and disabilities.

### ***Part 2) Upholding Civil and Political Rights Abroad and at Home***

Over the past eight years, the government of the United States has engaged in practices that violate international agreements banning torture and denied terror suspects the rights of due process normally accorded to prisoners of war. It has also spied on its own citizens without warrants. On the domestic side, the United States maintains the largest prison population in the world and that population is heavily weighted toward the nation's Hispanic and, especially, African-American minorities. The United States is also one of the few democratic nations that permit the imposition of the death penalty.

### **Session Two: Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism**

Here we will explore the issues of torture, extraordinary rendition, surveillance of American citizens without warrants.

### **Session Three: Criminal Justice**

This session will explore sentencing, prisons, and the death penalty.

### ***Part 3) Upholding Economic and Social Rights at Home***

“We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. ‘Necessitous men are not free men.’”  
FDR, Message to Congress, 11 January 1944.

The UDHR proclaims that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including . . . medical care” (Article 25) “Everyone has the right to work” (Article 23) and “Everyone has the right to education” (Article 26).

Many Americans do not recognize economic and social rights as rights. What role can the UDHR play in helping to secure recognition and implementation of economic and social rights in the United States?

### **Session Four: Access to Health Care.**

This session will explore how to convince Americans that health care is a right, not a privilege

### **Session Five: Access to Employment and Job Security**

In this session we will explore the rights of immigrants, the right to organize, and impediments to union organizing.

### **Session Six: Access to Education**

This session will focus on the right to a good education, particularly among the economically disadvantaged.

## **DAY TWO**

On day two key participants and the rapporteurs from the six groups that met on Day One will meet in the morning to craft agenda items for the issues they discussed on the previous day. In the afternoon, the groups will report on their work at a plenary session at which all the participants in Day Two will discuss and then ratify the full, final agenda. The plenary group will then discuss the production of white papers, and the agenda's implementation.

We anticipate that the agenda and white papers—which will form as core program of action for the next ten years—will be presented to the new Administration and Congress early in 2009.