

Human Rights and the US (13 May 2019)

Among the sobering facts I encountered in my years (roughly 1995-2005) involved in international environmental politics, is that although the US often plays a determinant and progressive role in the drafting of international agreements, and becomes signatory to them, it frequently doesn't follow through with ratification by the Senate and signing by the President as required for the US to become a full party to the agreements.

That is, the measures of the agreements do not become the law of the land (in effect codifying human rights as civil rights) as they would if ratified and given the Presidential imprimatur.

A case in point: though the Clinton administration was a significant and progressive participant, and then a signatory to, the POPS Convention (the 2000 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants), the Senate has never ratified it. Hence, the US is not obligated to observe the stringent control and destruction measures (for PCBs, dioxin, DDT and the other nine named chemicals) required of the (currently) 182 parties to the treaty.

This, I've learned to my discomfort, is typical US behavior in regard to international agreements.

Although I and others have argued that environmental rights (clean air, water, food etc) are human rights, even more disturbing to me than our refusal follow through on specifically environmental agreements like the POPS Convention (the Climate Accords, etc), is our failure to ratify such fundamental humanitarian agreements as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Bill of Human Rights (which subsumed the Declaration).

This, and related failures (consistent with US insistence that it is not subject to rulings of the World Court) are especially troubling -- but also eye-opening and thought-provoking -- in light of the current administration's blatant racism and inhumane policies in regard to, for instance (to pick one example now in the news), immigration.

In fact, the US has ratified only four of the ten international agreements usually considered to be the fundamental documents of international humanitarian law: the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention against Torture.

(Interestingly, all four of these were adopted in the mid-60's, but then --again, typically for the US -- not ratified for over a decade, in 1977, 1992, 1994 and 1994, respectively.)

As recently as 2017, there were 45 treaties in the Senate backlog awaiting action (some, like the Universal Declaration, languishing there since the 40s).

Among other international humanitarian agreements never ratified by the US are the 1976 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. The US is one of only six of the 193 UN members who have not ratified

the first, one of only two who have not ratified the second.

Anti-immigration, white supremacy, sexism, kids in cages, family separations, visa rejections, jailing of humanitarian aid workers, environmental degradation While we may turn away from the White House with heads bowed (in shame, or to spit), we should note that the rot is not confined to that part of the superstructure.