

Intercultural Encounters: The Fundamentals of Intercultural Communication

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Universal Protection of Human Rights: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Introduction

There is no denying the fact that the multiple processes of 'globalisation', which are taking place these days on a large scale, have caused significant transformations in almost all life aspects of millions around the world. There are now more interactions and exchanges not only within the same cultures but also among different cultures due to the increase in information flows across the globe, migratory movements, demographic changes and transformations in social structures and institutions.

The increased intercultural and cross-cultural communication has clearly enhanced intercultural exchange and learning. However, these growing intercultural encounters have also given rise to rhetorical and actual confrontation and defensiveness amid many groups that feel threatened by the external developments associated with the sweeping processes of globalisation. This situation highlights the importance of cross-cultural dialogue as a means to constructive communication among individuals and communities.

It is in this broad context that we intend to discuss the vital issue of universal protection of human rights. The proclamation of a set of universal human rights recognising the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family was a significant milestone in the pursuit of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

However, after sixty years of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the promulgation of a growing number of international conventions and treaties as well as domestic legislations, human rights are still violated on a global scale. A quick examination of recent reports released by human rights organisations, national and civil society groups and watchdogs show a dramatic surge in human rights violations in many countries around the world.

The persistence of violence against women, children and other vulnerable social groups, the consequences of the 'war on terror' on fundamental human rights and liberties, the high priority accorded to the state security vis-à-vis the security and rights of individuals and the punitive responses to 'unlawful' migration are just a few of the many challenges to the universal application and protection of human rights.

It may be argued that many cases of human rights violations, notwithstanding the failure of states to honour their international commitments, are due to the inadequacy of the measures or political tools designed to ensure the respect for and protection of human rights. This insufficiency of implementation and enforcement measures, the argument goes, entails the rethinking of the whole instruments and policies adopted so far for the promotion and protection of human rights globally.

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