



Periodical Profile

Main dossier introduction **Social dimensions of human rights**

Dr. Ahmed Zayed
Professor of Political Sociology
Faculty of Arts, Cairo University

The research on the social dimensions of human rights invites us to explore the emergence of the idea of rightness. This idea, I believe, enabled communities to coexist, to cooperate, and to extend bridges to live together. Many ancient societies have survived forms of conflict and fighting. Numerous philosophers have portrayed man's natural state as a huge and wide-ranging conflict. One of the most prominent of these philosophers was Thomas Hobbes, who explained in his famous book, "Leviathan," that man's natural state of was founded on both scarcity and fear, which led people to pushiness and conflict that drove societies into a situation called "the war of all against all". This is a case in which the right is robbed, and success in such a war is based on the ability to deny and rob rights.

Communities have transcended such conflict which was based on denying rights. The discovery of the idea of rights itself was one of the basic pillars upon which the social organization of societies was based. Despite the multiplicity of entries to the study of right and its definition, there is a consensus that the right is related to the freedom that the individual must obtain in his natural, cultural and moral existence. Man reached this idea with his intellect and will, so man's right to live, to have faith and culture, must not be taken away, and the entire human existence must be based on respecting these rights. The idea of right was not to straighten up as such except through the balance with the



idea of duty; the right must be met by a duty, stemming from the moral and responsibility of the individual to perform his duties in return for the rights obtained.

Through the concepts of right and duty, humanity has been able to reach formulas for life based on social contracting. The authors of the social contract have presented different versions of what a society that preserves and protects the rights of individuals must have. But these formulas have agreed, despite their differences, on the importance of law in the preservation and protection of rights, the importance of common will of the population in the community and their unanimity on general common principles. The theory of social contract has transferred societies from the stage of domination and oppression that can lead to the denial of rights, just like the stage of chaos, to a stage of mutual recognition of rights, within the framework of the rule of law, which stands independently of individuals and binding them by unified frameworks of punishment in cases of deviation. Societies strive to apply these ideals, but actual circumstances may lead to differences and divergence from this ideal pattern of social contracting.

After the Second World War, universal human consciousness turned to the development of global frameworks for granting, respecting and preserving human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1945 was the beginning. The Declaration provided a general framework for human rights and the importance of their preservation by States. Since then, international organizations and many countries around the world have competed in producing multiple speeches on human rights and the importance of monitoring methods of preservation and developing forms of punishment in case of violation.

As a result of this, the concept of human rights broadened considerably and covered all the fields in which man moves in search for his living and stability. These fields are limited to four basic fields: the political field; human rights in opinion and positive participation in political life, and protecting his will and political choices. The economic field; the right of decent living in a clean environment, the right to engage in economic activities matching his capabilities, the right to own property



within the limits of the law and social rights related to the right to work, the right to housing, the right of education and the right of civil participation. And finally the cultural field; which points to the right to preserve the cultural heritage of human beings, respect cultures and other languages, the right of knowledge and access to information, and the right to freedom of cultural creativity.

This dossier focuses on the social aspects of human rights. This would never be possible without addressing a comprehensive approach to the concept of human rights, its historical development and its manifestations in international covenants. Such an approach would pave the way to provide a background on the universal interest in human rights and to what extent the concept of right expanded to include too many aspects of human life. This dossier after dealing with legal historical background will focus on the different dimensions of social rights, first and foremost the right to development. This is one of the general rights related to the context in which human beings must live. It is this context that provides rights and opens the horizons for achieving them and protecting them. It also provides human with the permanent capacity to develop himself and the continuous compatibility with his various life conditions and his choices. The right to development opens the door to other social rights, the most important of which is the right to work. Work is the main social pillar in human life. It is the bedrock of his living and stability. It is the path through which he realizes himself and dedicates his various creations to serve his society. This is the broader field in which the ability to achieve, to cooperate and achieve self-fulfillment appear. Work is not only a source of income, but a fount for self-fulfillment, and for the provision of social and psychological security sources. The right to housing comes at the top of the list of social rights. Housing is the source of real shelter for the social self, which enables man to have a family and to achieve social stability. If work is the economic face of human security, so the house is the social face, it is a haven of stability and tranquility, the starting point of every activity and every endeavor, the place where the family is reunited, and the sons and daughters are raised, so it is correct to say that it is stability and resting place.



Social rights develops then to include three types of important rights, the right to education, the right to health and the right to social welfare. These three rights constitute triples of social rights related to human construction, health and safety, and protection from any form of risk. It is education that qualifies man to occupy his various roles in life, and to build a skilled framework that enables him to communicate creatively in different social and cultural circles. The right to health care relates to the human right to physical, Psychological and mental health, to be able to work, to give and to participate effectively in society. Then comes the third rib in the triangle, which is the right of care and social protection, which guarantees the person to face any form of life risks such as poverty, physical disability, and to face special status such as: divorce, Family breakdown, deviation, and dealing with the different stages of growth such as childhood, adolescence and aging.

Finally, the circle of Social Rights will not be complete without talking about civil society. Therefore, this dossier is keen to end with the contributions of civil society and its role in protecting rights. Man, as it is said, is a civilian by nature, and civilian life is the most comprehensive and general fount in which human rights crystallizes. Civil society is concerned with the issue of human rights in two ways; the first is the right to civil participation. This is an inherent right on which all social rights are based. Participation here means a pattern of active and positive citizenship in the life of society. The second is that civil society organizations that are a powerful source of human rights advocacy.