

GLOBAL COMMUNITY & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Questions and Answers

Q: Do humanists think it's really possible to reform the UN and the Security Council?

A: Yes. We know that change won't come overnight to the UN, and that there are always those who want to maintain the status quo. However, that should not mean that we give up on the cause of reform. For the UN to remain relevant and an effective global institution, it must evolve to reflect geopolitical realities of today, and not yesterday. Change and reform are in the best interests of the UN, as well as the world.

Q: Can there truly be objectivity and universality in human rights?

A: Yes. Though cultural tastes and norms can be relative to the society they evolved in, overtime, humanity has developed a basic set of ethical norms in terms of the rights and dignity of the individual. Though these norms themselves will occasionally be revised and expanded (recall the evolution of rights for the disabled, women and children), it is possible to establish a standard that crosses all cultures, nationalities and ethnicities. These standards are currently embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Q: Does humanist support for humanitarian intervention mean that it supports war?

A: No. The doctrine of humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect are meant to protect the lives of the innocent, not provide justification for invading a sovereign nation. Once all other peaceful options have been exhausted, and if genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity are still occurring at the hand of a nation, or with the tacit approval of that nation, it may become justifiable to intervene, with military force. Though nonviolent and peaceful means are prerequisites, we cannot escape the reality that sometimes we must use violence to protect the lives of those who are unable to protect themselves.

Q: What does "balanced development" mean, and how is it different from the development that is implemented today?

A: Balanced development is partially a change in mindset of the aid-givers, and partially a change in the focus of what aid goes to in poor countries. The lifestyle of the Western world may be what people in poorer countries aspire to, however, beneath the "glamour" is an unsustainable lifestyle that we continue to pursue at our own peril. Though it would be wrong to deny the poorest in the world the opportunity to raise their standard of living, it would benefit the world if they focused on a more sustainable, less consumption-orientated approach. Similarly, the rich world needs to reevaluate its own lifestyle and work on curbing the excesses that are bringing the planet closer to environmental ruin. This new focus creates a balanced development that would allow the rise of the poor, without leaving them with nothing once they reach a more middle-class lifestyle.