

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The duties of the committees, however, tend to be narrowly defined, and their publicizing of violations of human rights has been uneven in impact due to the political forces at work. The procedures for investigating allegations, moreover, are time-consuming and cumbersome, and rarely yield wholly satisfactory results. Serious examinations of allegations are frequently hindered by the provision that missions of enquiry to a given country cannot be authorized without the approval of that country. For example, a working group established to report on allegations of torture in Chile was refused entry to Chile, with the result that its ability to collect evidence was seriously hampered.

In addition, the Commission on Human Rights is split by a basic division of view that prevents the fulfilment of its functions objectively and effectively. The majority of members tend to regard human rights in social or racial terms, while a minority (mainly of Western members) puts the emphasis on individual rights. Thus states in good standing with the majority tend to be protected from scrutiny of their records on political liberties, while others are subjected to constant criticism. This double standard is a matter of serious concern. Apart from its effects on the credibility of the Commission, it has delayed discussion of further international mechanisms for the enforcement of human rights standards. Obviously the Commission, and other UN human rights bodies, cannot be exempt from political disagreement. But ways of mitigating the effects of such disagreement on the procedures for investigating and conciliating complaints must be found. One way is to attack and eliminate racial discrimination where this exists.

On December 10, 1973 -- the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- the General Assembly proclaimed a Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. The original goals of the Decade were to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of any kind on grounds of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin, to discredit fallacious and mythical racist beliefs, policies and practices, and to weaken and eventually to end racist régimes. The goals were to be achieved through programs of action at the domestic and international levels.

To implement the Decade domestically, a multi-faceted co-operative program involving the federal and provincial governments was established, under the co-ordination of the Department of the Secretary of State.

Internationally, the programs of the Decade were designed to concentrate heavily on the evils of apartheid, the policy of separate racial development followed by South Africa. They included: a world conference on combating racial discrimination, to be held in 1978; the organization of research projects and seminars; the production of information materials; an international voluntary fund; and the submission to the UN of reports of national activities during the Decade.