

and issues surrounding humanitarian intervention have witnessed a departure from the strict notion of state sovereignty over the last fifty years, generally issues involving the promotion of human rights and investigations into human rights violations have revolved around nation-states. "The politics of rights, legal protection of rights, and most philosophical treatments of human rights all posit nations as the primary actor."<sup>22</sup>

Realism as the dominant conception of international relations has come under scrutiny in recent decades. The evolving nature of the international political and economic system has developed new theories that challenge the core propositions of realism, the inordinate attention to issues of war and peace, and the nation-state as the central actor in global relations. As the international system becomes increasingly interdependent, the high politics of war and national security are no longer the only sources for states motivation and action. The low politics of transnational issues such as trade, the environment, human rights, and welfare have penetrated the agenda of states. Coinciding with the widening agenda of states is the proliferation of non-state actors who have a profound effect on the global system. While some may contend that states are still important international actors, one cannot deny the cumulative influence of non-state actors in developing and promoting issues on the international agenda. There is evident "a devolution of power not only upward towards supranational bodies and outwards toward commonwealths and common markets but also downward towards freer, more autonomous units of administration."<sup>23</sup> A new actor that has emerged on the international scene is multinational corporations. The physical size and financial assets of MNCs have enabled them to wield tremendous economic power and impact in shaping the contemporary global system. The interdependence of the international system implies that the activities of large and increasingly internationalized multinational corporations affect the lives not only of individuals in their home country, but in various other nations as well. Corresponding with the changing nature of power of states comes responsibilities that were at a time only legitimated to governments. The debate arises whether MNCs, as one of the most powerful actors on the international scene, have an implied moral and ethical responsibility to promote and protect human rights in conflict situations. While the nature of international power has evolved making MNCs important in their own right, two changes in the international system also denotes a correlation between their power and an ethical responsibility to the community.

Firstly, globalization has not only affected areas of communication, technology and trade and investment, but also human rights and political crises. The subject of human rights is no longer the exclusive preserve of states and international organizations. The global community that encompasses individuals, social, political, religious, and cultural organizations have taken responsibility to develop norms, provide humanitarian assistance, monitor human rights abuses, and lobby governments. Human rights have broken national boundaries and become a transnational issue. Besides global trends, the changing nature of conflicts has served as a

---

York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pg. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Meyer, Human Rights and International Political Economy. Pg. 83.

<sup>23</sup> Kegley, Jr., Charles W., "The Neoliberal Challenge to Realist Theories of World Politics: An Introduction," in Charles W. Kegley Jr. Controversies in International Relations Theory. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pg.