

II. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

At the end of the twentieth century, while international human rights standards and their ratification have greatly proliferated, serious problems of compliance remain. The papers and discussions, which focussed on the problem of implementation, evidenced a number of underlying principles and assumptions.

1. Human rights are universal, and their universality is reflected in the principal human rights treaties.
2. Universality is diluted to the extent that the treaties are subject to widespread and radical reservations, and by failures to comply. Ratification is not an end in itself, but must be linked to performance.
3. There is an essential relationship between the adequate protection of human rights and the institution of democracy, good governance and the rule of law.
4. The non-discriminatory application of human rights standards to all UN member states is a fundamental strength of the treaty system, all UN member states having ratified at least one of the six major treaties.
5. International human rights law and institutions are designed to complement national human rights systems and to make them more effective.
6. Access by victims to the process of state reporting and to the potential for individual complaint is a necessary element of successful implementation.
7. The credibility and effectiveness of the treaty regime depends upon the treaty bodies obtaining accurate, current information on compliance.
8. Non-governmental organizations play a vital role in the treaty enforcement system.