

ADVANCING SAFETY AS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT

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The Montreal Declaration: People's Right to Safety is a timely declaration that recognizes the increasing magnitude, devastating consequences, and structural antecedents of violent injuries internationally. It provides an additional impetus for the safety-promotion sector to address the physical, psychosocial, cultural, and economic conditions that have a fundamental impact on safety, especially within low-income contexts, and to facilitate the recognition of safety as a basic human right. Moreover, the Declaration directs the promotion of safety and other sectors toward consciously tackling armed conflicts, human security, and development of sustainable livelihoods throughout Africa, with specific focus on marginalized groups, minorities, women, and children. This is particularly important, given that, by 2020, wars, civil conflicts, and interpersonal violence are expected to account for a significant proportion of injury, morbidity, and mortality in Africa.¹

Similar to many existing international human rights-based documents, the Montreal Declaration raises important possibilities for coalescing the promotion of safety with a range of other human rights on common, international goals. It offers the potential to engage in "universal" criteria that extend beyond safety as it is embodied implicitly in civil liberties—the right to bodily integrity and the right to social stability—to generate a "minimum gold standard" for safety in and of itself. In this regard, the Declaration is a

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judicious development that not only acknowledges and builds on existing rights-based initiatives but also recognizes that safety as a right comprises more than the sum of existing rights.

In its preamble, the Montreal Declaration implicitly locates violence as a priority within North-South inequalities and the differing standards, costs, technologies, social responses, and capacities associated with promoting safety across this divide. It also outlines the basis for an international charter that distinguishes key elements necessary for making safety a human right. The embedded emphasis on the needs of developing nations in Africa and elsewhere takes into consideration the 10/90 debate on global health research and contributes to a greater moral, intellectual, political, and financial potential for shifting the international priorities of health research away from the current 10/90 gap and toward a more equitable direction.² In addition, the Montreal Declaration incorporates the fundamental principles of equity and social justice within safety promotion, thereby contributing to the regeneration of a human rights culture that has been threatened on the African continent. This is critical because the recently formed African Union does not recognize either health or safety as a fundamental human right but rather as a precondition for economic growth.³

The Declaration therefore bolsters social movements that advocate safety not as being contingent on other factors but rather as a fundamental human right. What remains, however, is the challenge of translating the Declaration from glib political rhetoric into concrete forms of action that can infuse a more overt ideological understanding that uses equitable forms of social development in the international violence-prevention sector.

Although broadly recognizing the overwhelming role of national and international forces that produce risk, proponents of the Montreal Declaration will, of necessity, have to critically engage organizations, such as the G8 and the Bretton Woods Institutions, that actively contribute to global economic policies that encourage trade liberalization and facilitate high levels of debt and loan dependence with-

in developing countries. These economic policies frequently contribute to social destabilization, by inducing poor conditions for social welfare, increased privatization, and commodification of health services, making them inaccessible to most people and a general obstacle to safety in many instances.^{4,5} In addition, state-sponsored violence, ongoing militarization, and proliferation of legal and illegal arms industries, as well as the role of multinationals in environmental degradation, must be addressed as an ongoing extension of this Declaration, especially in Africa.

The Montreal Declaration therefore not only raises the possibility of greater political visibility for setting priorities for safety promotion on continents such as Africa, but it also provides a historical point of reference from which to evaluate the safety-promotion sector and international organizations mandated with facilitating global safety, as we consider transformation into an international safety promotion social movement. Finally, the Declaration acknowledges the competing ideologies that must be negotiated between countries of the North and South as we attempt to mutually commit to its translation into a functional component of a human rights culture in Africa and elsewhere.

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