

RESPONSE TO THE DISCUSSANTS

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Alice M. Miller, Adnan A. Hyder, Garth Stevens, and Mindy J. Roseman have contributed to the discussion on the People's Right to Safety from their feminist, public health, African, and human rights perspectives, respectively. All of them raise very valid points on the concepts and the details of the Montreal Declaration. Although the issues they raise are valid, they may not be entirely relevant or terribly important at this stage of the formulation of the right. I believe that human rights are universal in character and, therefore, transcend gender, age, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and region. I do understand that specific groups of people may suffer greater denial of rights than other groups. That does not, however, change or favor the application of rights preferably on one group over another. I therefore believe that some of the issues raised in the comments do not apply to the current Declaration.

Not only is the concept of rights a "moral" vision; it is also a relatively new vision. That vision has evolved considerably since the adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.¹ I agree with Dr. Roseman that, "the meaning and understanding of human rights—what they comprise and what governments are obliged to do to ensure them—are neither fixed nor static. Indeed human rights have evolved." It is precisely this understanding that has prompted us to push for a right to safety—to add to the understanding of a right to life. While many states are legally bound under international human rights law, the concept of human rights is no longer state centric. States and corporations may violate these rights, and most do. This no longer means that the rights do not exist. It is important that individuals and communities

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know what their rights are and then force governments and corporations to respect those rights through enacting and enforcing relevant rules and regulations.

Reference

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly on 10 Dec. 1948, UN Doc. GA/RES/217 A (III).