

## I n t r o d u c t i o n

*The First International Conference on Health and Human Rights was an effort to bring the worlds of public health and human rights together to exchange ideas, air differences, learn from one another, identify issues for future research, and begin to develop a language that will facilitate communication across disciplines. The following pages contain a report from the Conference, along with two speeches from the final plenary session on September 24 that summarize the work of the conference while reflecting its inspirational spirit, and detail the challenges that lie ahead for health and human rights workers.*

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*La Primera Conferencia Internacional sobre la Salud y los Derechos humanos fue un esfuerzo para reunir los mundos de la salud pública y los derechos humanos para intercambiar ideas, airear diferencias, aprender el uno del otro, identificar tópicos para futura investigación y empezar a desarrollar un lenguaje para facilitar la comunicación entre las disciplinas. Las siguientes páginas contienen además del reporte de la Conferencia, dos pláticas de la sesión plenaria final del 24 de septiembre que, al mismo tiempo que compilan el trabajo de la conferencia, reflejan su espíritu inspiracional y detallan los desafíos porvenir para los trabajadores de la salud y los derechos humanos.*

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*La première Conférence Internationale sur la Santé et les droits de l'Homme a été organisée pour que les personnes engagées dans la promotion et la protection de la santé et des droits de l'homme puissent échanger des idées, faire connaître leur divergences, apprendre les unes des autres, identifier les problèmes sur lesquels doit se concentrer la recherche, et enfin établir un langage commun au-delà des barrières propres à chacune de ces disciplines. On trouvera dans les pages suivantes un compte rendu de la conférence ainsi que deux allocutions prononcées lors de la séance plénière de clôture, le 24 septembre dernier. Ces textes résument le travail effectué durant la conférence, traduisent l'esprit qui l'a animée et énoncent les défis posés à ceux qui oeuvrent pour la santé publique et les droits de l'homme.*

Conference Report

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

*September 22-24, 1994  
Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts USA*

**T**he First International Conference on Health and Human Rights was held at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts (USA) from 22-24 September 1994. This Conference brought together more than 350 individuals from the health and human rights fields from 42 countries for three days of intense discussion.

The goal of the Conference was to illustrate, catalyze and expand understanding of the complex interactions between health and human rights in the modern world. In this manner, the Conference sought to stimulate creative and collaborative work in health and human rights advocacy, education, and research.

The Conference was organized by the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health. The program was designed with the help of the International Program Committee (72 individuals from the health and human rights fields from 23 countries) and 21 "affiliated organizations" including local, national and international health and/or human rights groups.

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*Copies of the Conference Report can be obtained by writing to the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, 8 Story Street, 5th floor, Cambridge, MA, 02138, USA.*

## Plenary Topics and Speakers

PLENARY I *Health and Human Rights: The Critical Connection—  
Conceptual and Practical Dimensions*

**Hina Jilani**, Advocate, Supreme Court of Pakistan; and **Jonathan Mann**, François-Xavier Bagnoud Professor of Health and Human Rights, Harvard School of Public Health, USA.

PLENARY II *Health and Human Rights: Genesis of a New  
Paradigm*

**H. Jack Geiger**, Arthur C. Logan Professor of Community Medicine, City College of New York, USA; and **Eka Esu-Williams**, Secretary General, Society for Women and AIDS in Africa, Nigeria.

PLENARY III *From Concepts to Action: Health and Human  
Rights in Practice*

**Shulamith Koenig**, Executive Director, Organizing Committee, People's Decade for Human Rights Education, Israel, USA; **Slobodan Lang**, Professor of Public Health, University of Zagreb, President, Croatian-American Society, Croatia; and **Kenneth Roth**, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch, USA.

PLENARY IV *From Health or Human Rights to Health and  
Human Rights: Where Do We Go From Here?*

**Nahid Toubia**, Associate Professor, Columbia School of Public Health, Executive Director, Rainbow Outreach Action Information Network for Bodily Integrity of Women, Sudan; and **June Osborn**, Professor, University of Michigan School of Public Health, USA.

## Themes

The program was organized around three themes.

- Theme 1: **The impact of health policies, programs and practices on human rights.**

Discussions included: how policies for prevention and control of injecting drug use violate human rights; recent

discoveries concerning the extent of race, class and gender discrimination in health care settings; and how to negotiate the optimal balance between public health goals and respect for human rights norms in designing public health interventions.

- **Theme 2: The impact of human rights abuses on health.**  
Discussions included: how to document health impacts of human rights violations in conflict and in peacetime; health effects resulting from violations of the right to information; and health consequences of rights violations in prisons.
- **Theme 3: The deeper and fundamental connections between realization of human rights and health promotion and protection.**  
Discussions included: the right to health and to health care; how the health of people of diverse sexual orientation is linked to respect for their rights; the relationship of poverty to health and human rights; and how violations of dignity affect health.

### **Objectives:**

The formal and informal activities of the Conference were intended to promote three objectives: exchange of information; enhancement of personal “literacy”; and bridge-building, or solidarity.

**Exchange of information** was quite broad (especially given the wide range of topic areas) and extremely lively. The discussions on issues such as adolescent health and rights, rights and workers’ health, and violence against women brought health and human rights workers together to discuss approaches, and share lessons and perspectives learned from experience.

To build strong bridges between health and human rights, the Conference sought to **strengthen personal “literacy”** in both fields. Recognizing the extremely diverse backgrounds of Conference participants, two sets of skills-building sessions were organized. The “Human Rights Primer,” intended primarily for health workers, presented core concepts and documents and discussed the institutions and practices of modern human rights. In tandem, the “Health Primer,” intended for human rights work-

ers, examined current concepts of health, medical care, and public health, including the challenges and strategies of modern public health.

Finally, **solidarity** among people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives arose spontaneously as people came together to share and develop common understandings in an open setting. Boundaries of culture, nationality, and (perhaps the most difficult of all) disciplinary background were crossed easily! Participants commented on the successful “bridge-building” value of the Conference—both for them as individuals and for the entire field.

### Next Steps

A networking meeting was held early on Friday evening, 23 September, after two days of Conference activities. More than 200 people gathered together to propose and consider suggestions and activities to promote health and human rights advocacy, education, and research.

Participants agreed that the field of health and human rights is dynamic, forward-looking and pioneering, and that many types of work—including advocacy, education and research—are important and mutually enriching.

Five important tasks were identified during the discussion, and actions and follow-up were proposed for each.

- **Task 1: Expand and facilitate communication among health and human rights workers and organizations.** Specific actions/follow-up:
  1. create a health and human rights electronic bulletin board;
  2. determine ways of ensuring that developing country health and human rights workers can be connected with global communication systems.
  
- **Task 2: Collect and disseminate information (experience, practices, concepts) that advances understanding of each of the three health and human rights themes.** Specific actions/follow-up:
  1. collect examples of successful actions linking health and human rights;
  2. publish such examples in journals and magazines, including the journal *Health and Human Rights*;
  3. develop and provide concrete suggestions to promote health and human rights concepts and approaches.

- **Task 3: Promote the concept of linkage between health and human rights, including education of health and human rights workers.** Specific actions/follow-up:

1. develop and disseminate a registry of health and human rights educational programs, courses and seminars;
2. develop model curriculae and materials for education of health workers about human rights and for human rights workers about health;
3. publish articles on health and human rights in medical, health, and human rights journals.

- **Task 4: Advocacy, education and research on specific health and human rights issues.** Specific actions/follow-up:

1. "interest groups" should form around specific issues and inform others about their work; examples of issues cited include: access to services for injecting drug users; censorship and denial of information on reproductive services/rights; and rights and health of children;
2. focus on methodology for action: human rights monitoring, "enforcement" and "promotion"; how to best engage the international human rights system;
3. focus on methodology for documenting each of the three dimensions of health/human rights interaction;
4. develop and disseminate methods for negotiating an optimal balance between public health goals and human rights norms;
5. identify gaps, especially in emerging areas such as environmental health and rights;
6. identify and disseminate information on funding sources for advocacy, education and research.

- **Task 5: Organize the Second International Conference on Health and Human Rights.** Specific actions/follow-up:

1. Second Conference to be held in two years to provide a forum for new experience, knowledge and progress;
2. obtain resources to broaden participation at the Conference;
3. expand participation of national and international agencies and organizations;

4. consider suggestions on topics to be included in the program, such as: cultural and institutional diversity; discrimination based on sexual orientation; women and war; right to die with dignity.

It was agreed that participants would consider their potential contributions to achieving these objectives. In addition to committing itself to working on several of these objectives (see below), including organizing the Second International Conference on Health and Human Rights in 1996, the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center requested that it be informed of progress in realizing objectives so that it can contribute to sharing the information as widely as possible.

### **Conclusion**

The closing plenary provided an eloquent summary of the meaning of the Conference:

"This is the beginning of sustained dialogue and fruitful discussions between and among many of us who have newly or freshly recognized our common resolve in maintaining the connectedness of health and human rights. Those ongoing collaborations will be revitalized, at intervals, by the Second—and then the Third—International Conference on Health and Human Rights...such that, years hence, we can look back at a record of accelerating progress."

The Conference recognized, acknowledged and in many ways celebrated the work of those who have been true pioneers, and who have continued to expand and catalyze an increasingly broad understanding of health and human rights.

### **Annex: Next Steps for the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights**

1. Organize Second International Conference on Health and Human Rights May 1996, in association with an International Program Committee and Affiliated Organizations;
2. In collaboration with the Human Rights Internet, develop a health and human rights electronic bulletin board;

3. Develop a registry of health and human rights courses, and work with interested organizations on model curriculae and materials for diverse health and human rights audiences;
4. Solicit articles and promote distribution of the journal *Health and Human Rights*;
5. In collaboration with interested organizations, focus on methodology for documenting each of three proposed dimensions of health and human rights interaction;
6. Develop and disseminate methods for negotiating an optimal balance between public health goals and human rights norms;
7. Collect and disseminate information about successful examples of health and human rights advocacy, education, and research;
8. Work to promote health and human rights concerns at the inter-governmental level.