



UNDERSTANDING HUMAN RIGHTS ENSURING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL

Presenter: Peter Sampson, Mediation Advisor to the Special Representative to the Secretary General for West Africa

Lesson Description

Advocating for human rights requires educating oneself on the principles of human rights and how the principles are being applied within your community. It starts with thinking not only about your own rights, but also about the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized. This lesson looks at ways individuals and groups can support the cause of human rights and stand for all.

Lesson Overview

1. How to think rationally about human rights globally and in your own country.
2. What are the ways you can push back against the efforts to violate the human rights of others?
3. How to advocate for the human rights of yourself and others.

Discussion Questions

1. What personal and cultural biases do you hold or have ever held? Where did you learn them? Do you have any that could lead to the marginalization of individuals or groups? How can you go about eliminating these biases?
2. Who are some of the human rights defenders you know and admire and why? What characteristics do you believe are essential for someone who defends the rights of themselves and others? Is fame a requirement for effective human rights defense? How can ordinary citizens protect human rights? Remember, a human rights defender is someone who works to stop the abuse of another. They need not be someone famous.
3. How might you engage with a human rights violator? How can you find common ground to stop abuses? Can you think of a situation, large or small, where intervention was warranted to stop a human rights abuse? How was it handled? What was the outcome?

Developmental Actions

(Special note: Any actions, communications or activities taken on behalf of human rights very much depend on the context of the status of human rights in individual countries. YALI Network members should make a personal assessment of their ability to engage in these activities.)

1. Consider creating a mechanism to document human rights abuses in your community. Develop a means for sharing incidents of bias and human rights violations in your community along with a plan for addressing the bias. Collaborate with others who are interested in working on the same issues. Be sure to listen to and include in a prominent position those who are or are likely to be victims of abuse.
2. Identify the human rights defenders in your country and community. Consider ways to support them.
3. Engage with your elected and government officials on the subject of human rights. Consider how to engage civil society and nongovernmental organizations in the effort.

About the Presenter

Peter Sampson has worked for over 16 years throughout Africa on mediation, peacebuilding, human rights and political analysis with governments, civil society organizations and international partners. He currently works at the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) as the head of mediation support and mediation advisor to the Special Representative of the Secretary General. Prior to working for the United Nations, he served as country director for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in the Central African Republic and as Director of the Forum on Early Warning and Response (FEWER) supporting national and local dialogue processes between armed and non-armed groups. He continues to work with local peacebuilding and human rights groups, in addition to teaching at various universities and research centers. Peter graduated with honors from the University of California at Berkeley, B.A. and holds advanced degrees from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Sciences Po) Lyon and the University Of Lyon III (School of Law). He is fluent in English and French.

