

**American University in Cairo
Department of Political Science
Spring 2017**

**Professor Mustapha K.Al-Sayyid
E-mail: mustapha@aucegypt.edu**

**Teaching assistant: Yasmina Elazazy
E-mail: yasminaelazazy@aucegypt.edu**

**Politics of Human Rights
Pols.4470
Course Outline**

This course addresses the question of politics of human rights from a multi-disciplinary perspective, emphasizing in particular both political and legal dimensions of this question.

This course is taught at a specific moment in the history of the Middle East. The post revolutionary situation in Arab countries ,marked by setbacks of the Arab Dignity Revolutions is taken as a useful context for the analysis of the state of human rights in the region.

Objectives:

An important objective in this course is to get students to realize the multidimensional character of the concept of human rights, and more particularly that it is not limited to civil and political rights, nor could it be reduced to individual rights.

Another objective is to seek accommodation of the cultural specificity of human rights with claims of their universality.

A third objective is to master basic concepts and theories of human rights and use them in the analysis of the human rights situation in the Arab world in comparative and historical perspectives.

A fourth objective is to get students to appreciate the grave consequences of continued violation of human rights on a massive and systematic scale.

Another objective is to familiarize students with reliable sources that would be indispensable for any in-depth study of the human rights situation in the Arab world.

Major themes discussed in the course:

I-The concept of human rights:

What is the definition of a right? Why certain rights are human rights, or fundamental human rights? What are the historical sources of human rights? What are the human rights instruments worldwide and regionally

What is the value of regional instruments of human rights such as the African Charter of Peoples and Human Rights and the Arab Charter of Human Rights?. How do they relate to the universal instruments of human rights

Discussion of this notion would provide an occasion to delve into the debate on universalism versus cultural specificity of human rights.

II-Debating the universal concept of human rights:

What is the credibility of the notion of human rights generations?

Do certain rights take priority over other rights?

Which side we should take on the question of universality vs.cultural specificity of human rights?

II- The situation of Human Rights in Arab countries:

A general survey of the state of human rights in Arab countries in the aftermath of the Arab Dignity Revolutions would set the stage for a more focused examination of problems surrounding the exercise of specific civil and political rights, including:

i-The right to life in situations of civil war and “war on terrorism”

ii- Freedom of conscience and religion,

iii- Freedom of expression: Selected cases including legal aspects of the cases of Nasr Hamed Abou Zeid and Yusuf Shahein,

iii- Women rights in Islam and in the universal instruments,

iv-Minority rights in Arab countries: specific cases of Yezidis ,Christians and Amazighs.

v- Rights of refugees.

III- Peoples’ Rights

. Students should define what is meant by “ People” and “ Minority” and suggest conditions under which the right to self-determination could be exercised and the difficulties surrounding claims to the exercise this right. A most relevant case in this context could be opposed claims of parties to civil wars in Arab and non-Arab countries.

IV-Methods of protection of human rights:

What are the formal and informal methods for the protection of human rights? ?How effective are these methods under the state of emergency which has endured for a long time in many countries?.

V- Human Rights Movements internationally and regionally?

What are the most important civil society organizations concerned with defense of human rights at the international level?.Which rights are they concerned with?

Are they all concerned exclusively with defense of human rights?

Is there a human rights movement in Arab countries? Is it one movement or many? What are the relationships between the Arab Organization for Human Rights and country-based human rights organizations? What are the constituent parts of the human rights movement at the Pan-Arab level? How does such movement relate to the Arab inter-governmental organization, particularly the Arab League and its specialized agencies? How does it relate to international human rights organizations?. Finally, how effective has been this movement so far, and what are its future prospects? . Students would be called upon to study specific cases of such movements.

VI- Human rights in international politics:

A-Which inter-governmental organizations address human rights issues: The Human Rights Council , the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner and the Human Rights Commission,

Other UN Bodies: High Commissariat for Refugees,ILO and other agencies.

Other inter-governmental bodies: European Parliament.

The notion of humanitarian intervention and the “responsibility to protect”

B-Human rights and foreign policies of major powers:
Human rights in US foreign policy

Human rights in European foreign policies and of the EU?

VII-Impact of massive and systematic violations of human rights:

How does such situation impact individual psychology?

How does it impact levels of political participation?

What its impact on legitimacy of the government?

How does it impact economic and political stability?

Could massive violations of civil and political rights hinder economic development in the short run? In the long run?

Does such situation give grounds for foreign intervention?

Course organization:

This course stresses very much student participation and even their activism and initiative. Some guest speakers would be invited to address specific issues of the syllabus. Visits to certain human rights organizations are envisaged. The course includes a visit to one human rights organization.

Course requirements:

The course organization is guided by the participatory approach. Students' involvement in discussions is an integral element of it. For this participation to be most fruitful, students are expected to acquaint themselves with class readings before hand. The readings are meant to stimulate a meaningful debate on the major issues raised in the syllabus. They are not intended to be memorized, but only to enable students to grasp the major arguments related to each of these issues. Students are expected to approach the readings with a critical mind, and to think of the counter arguments that could be possibly put to their authors.

Students would be expected to :

- 1- present a brief summary of the readings on the major seven themes of the course,
- 2- lead the discussion of one of the themes by undertaking a thorough review of the readings before the session in which a specific theme is to be discussed,
- 3- act as a discussant of one of the major seven themes, by commenting on the presentation of a theme by a fellow student and suggest questions for debate.
- 4- write a term paper of fifteen double spaced pages (3500-4500 words), using no less than fifteen sources. A list of proposed topics for the papers follows below. It is only a suggestive list, and students are free to choose other topics, if they so wish, after consultation with the professor. Papers must be fully documented, using whatever consistent method of bibliographical citation., and deal with both legal and political aspects of the issues under consideration, and must include a theoretical introduction to guide the analysis. Both the outline and a short summary of the papers should be discussed orally in class. Presentation of the short summary or any part of the paper would be a good occasion to debate central issues in the paper This is not expected to be a full presentation of the paper, but rather a brain-storming session in which the paper writer leads the discussion offering his colleagues "food for thought". The paper should include a theoretical discussion of its major theme, analysis of the situation with regard to a particular right in one or several Arab countries, and should conclude by suggesting ways of alleviating or even eliminating the specific human right violation. No paper should be limited to one country. Three Arab countries should be examined in any paper.
- 5- Write a comprehensive report on the course using class readings, discussions and any other readings.
- 6- Participate actively in class discussions.
- 7- Undertake other brief assignments by the professor,

Grade Distribution:

Students' performance in the course would be determined by both their written work as well as participation in class discussions.

Leading a discussion of a major theme in the course 5%

Acting as a discussant	5%
Mid-term	15%
Two short papers	20%
Weekly reaction essay on the readings	15%
Final exam.	30%
Attendance and participation	10%

Important dates:

Monday February 6	Fix date of your leader and discussant sessions
Monday February 20	Define in writing topic of your term paper,
Monday March 6	Mid-term,
Monday March 13	Present an outline and a bibliography of first paper,
Monday March 27	Submit first paper,
April 4	Submit an outline and bibliography of 2 nd paper,
Thursday April 27	Submit second paper

Schedule of courses and recommended readings:

You are expected to read at least one of the suggested readings for each lecture. You are encouraged to lead the discussion of at least one topic by undertaking an oral presentation of the topic of the lecture, offering critical remarks, and proposing major points for the discussion. Your participation in this exercise would be rewarded by a good grade.

Readings would be made available on Blackboard. Books available at the library would be set aside as library reserve

Recommended General Readings

Donnelly, Jack. International Human Rights. Boulder, San Francisco & Oxford. Westview Press. 2012

Donnelly, Jack. Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice. Cornell University Press. 2013.

I-Introductory lecture: Monday Jan.31
Definition of a right and human rights,

Reading:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN Covenant on Civil and Political rights
UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
To be accessed on UN Website.

Thursday February 2
Concept of human rights

Read:

Donnelly, International Human Rights. Chapter 2, p.19-38

Second week, February 6-9

Other instruments of human rights:

European Convention on Human Rights 1950

European Social Charter 1961

African Charter of Human and People's Rights 1981

The Arab Human Rights Charter 2004,

Other instruments and international treaties.

Criteria for Comparison.

Read texts on the internet.

Third week: February 13-16

Debating the universal concept of human rights:

The notion of generations of human rights

Human rights between universalism and cultural specificity:

read Donnelly: International Human Rights.

Chapter 3 & 4

Fourth week, February 20-23

The situation of human rights in the Arab world.

Read Introduction. Arab Human rights organization. Report on the situation of human rights in the Arab World. Most recent report.

Relevant chapters in most recent reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch.

Fifth week: February 27-March 2

People's rights.

Summers, James. Peoples and International Law. Brill. 2013 Brill online books. Chapters 1 & 9

Case study of people's rights in Arab countries.

The rights to self-determination

Rights to peace, development and balanced environment.

Dweik, Musa. "Settlements and the Palestinian right to self-determination." Palestine-Israel Journal. 2012.

Sixth week: March 6-9

Mid-term March 6

Methods of protection of human rights.

Legal methods

Donnelly, Jack. Universal Human Rights. Chapter 11.
Moustafa, Tamir "Got rights? .Public litigation and the Egyptian human rights movement"
In Chase and Hamzawy. Human Rights in the Arab World. Philadelphia. Pennsylvania
University Press. 2006. p153-173.

Seventh week, March 13-16

Protection of human rights.

Human rights Movement

Case studies: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Amnesty International. History of Amnesty International. www.amnesty.org

Human Rights Watch. "Our History" www.hrw.org

Eighth week; March 20-23

Arab Human Rights Movement

Sonia Cardenas and Andrew Filbbert, National Human Rights institutions in the Middle East,
Middle East Journal, vol 59 no.3, summer 2005, article available online:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/4330156?origin=api>

**.Chapters by Neil Hicks and Hany Megally in Chase and Hamzawy in Chase, Anthony and
AMr Hamzawy. Human Rights in the Arab World. Independent Voices. Philadelphia:
University of Pennsylvania Press. 2006**

.

Ninth week. March 27- 30

Human Rights in international politics.

Hurrell, Andrew. "Power, principles and prudence: protecting human rights in a
deeply divided world" in Dunne, Tim and Nicholas J. Wheeler. Human Rights in
Global Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999. 277-302.

Falk, Richard. Human Rights horizons. The Pursuit of Justice in a Globalized World.
New York and London. Routledge. 2000. P. 37-56

Gillies, David. Between principle and Practice. Human Rights in North-south
Relations. Montreal & Kingston .McGill-Qween's University Press. 1996. p.257-280.

Ninth week, April 3-6

UN and Human rights

Davies, Mathew "Rhetorical inaction? Compliance and the Human Rights Council of
the United Nations" Alternatives: Global, Local ,Political. Vol35, no.4 (Oct.-Dec. 2010),
pp.449-468

Tenth week April 19

Human rights and foreign policy.

Donnelly, Jack. Universal Human Rights. Op.cit.pp.229-249

The notion of humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect.

Orchard, Phil. "The evolution of the responsibility to protect: at a crossroads?".

International Affairs. Vol. 88, No.2 (March 2012) (pp.377-386).

Eleventh week April 19

US foreign policy and human rights.

Forsythe, David. "US Foreign Policy and Human Rights: Situating Obama" Human Rights Quarterly. Vol.33, No.3 (August 2011) (pp.767-789).

Twelfth week April 24-27

European policies on human rights and the question of refugees

De Burca, Gianne. "The Road not taken: The European Union as a Global Human Rights Actor". American Journal of International Law. Vol.105, No.4 (October 2011) ,Pp.649-693.

Thirteenth week: May 4

A visit to a human rights organization

Impact of human rights violations

Fourteenth week May 8-11

Impact of human rights violations

Read stories of victims of human rights violations.

Rise of militant groups and armed resistance

Relate human rights violations to the Arab Dignity revolts and their consequences

Fourteenth week: May 15-

How to improve respect for human rights in Arab countries.

General debate.

You may read Richard Falk. "The Future Prospect" in Human Rights Horizons. Op.cit.pp.189-234

,

