



HUMAN RIGHTS

Dignity, liberty, equality and brotherhood – these principles underpin the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written by the international community in the wake of the horrors of the Second World War. The concept of human rights has become central to the basic laws and constitutions of many different countries throughout the world. Those that do not share these values can expect to face criticism for any abuses. There has also been much debate in recent years about the extent of human rights: in 2009, for example, broadband access became a legal right in Finland.

The power to protect (or abuse) human rights used to reside almost exclusively with nation states, but now sits more and more with multinational corporations, which increasingly wield substantial direct power and practical influence. They employ thousands across the globe – Walmart has 700,000 workers outside of the US – and extend their reach further via partnerships and supply chains. Respecting the rights of workers can be challenging: labor practices vary significantly between countries, and achieving “acceptable working conditions” requires considerable investment.

Where’s the heat?

- / Labor rights
- / Child labor
- / Supply chains
- / Diversity
- / Democracy
- / Freedom of expression

/ Labor rights

In the developed world, the big debate has been whether labor rights have gone too far, cramping business competitiveness. In the developing world, many argue that a bad job is better than no job, and that strict conditions put people out of work.

/ Child labor

There are areas in the world where child labor is considered normal. An estimated 211m children between the ages of five and 14 have to work. In many cases, they may be the only breadwinner in the family.

/ Supply chains

The global supply chains of big companies have become sprawling and complex – crossing national boundaries and cultural norms – increasing the risk of human rights abuses. The role of multinationals in preventing such abuses has been a hot issue in recent years.

/ Diversity

Equality of opportunity is a basic human right – but how to achieve this is a point of contention. Many governments have imposed quotas for women and ethnic minorities, with some success. France, for example, has a law requiring gender diversity on company boards.

/ Democracy

From the Arab Spring to the “Occupy” movement, a new wave of “people power” has swept the globe. A strong case can be made for democracy as a force for progress: the Global Innovation Index’s top 25 economies are all democracies (excluding semi-democratic Singapore and Hong Kong).



/ Freedom of expression

Never has this been more debated. Global interconnected media make it inevitable that cultures will clash: from cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad and banning the burqa to censoring Google search results, freedom of speech is a big global issue.

What's the context?

It is no surprise that controlling the media is high on the agenda of any would-be autocrat. No self-respecting repressive regime will allow journalistic freedom. It is widely understood that a free press is bad for a dictator's health: permitting independent scrutiny and alternative political opinions isn't part of the plan. And worldwide today, social media is playing its role in opening up the power of free expression.

A free, quality press is essential to any healthy democracy, holding governments accountable and promoting informed debate. In short, there isn't freedom without freedom of the press.

Similarly, human rights depend upon the rule of law – a system of transparent legal principles that exist for everyone's benefit. Citizens or organizations should be able to defend their interests by appealing to legal norms and an independent judiciary.

Around the world, the rule of law is variable and sometimes non-existent. Even where it exists, people are often unable to access legal advice, or they encounter judicial systems that are riddled with corruption and lack accountability. Indeed, this was what prompted Peter Benenson, an English lawyer, to found Amnesty International in 1961 to stand up for human rights.



MONIQUE VILLA
CEO, Thomson Reuters Foundation

Monique Villa has been CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation since shortly after Thomson acquired Reuters in 2008, creating one of the world's largest media, professional and financial information groups. Prior to joining the Foundation, Villa was Managing Director of Reuters Media and Chairman of Action Images, a sports photography agency. A French national, she spent the first part of her career at Agence France-Presse (AFP), France's leading newswire, where she became Director of Strategy and Business Development, with responsibility for the agency's most important partnerships worldwide. Here she talks to Brunswick's Jon Miller about human rights and the power of trusted information.

Why did you select women's rights as the focus of your human rights work in the Foundation?

Because from gang rape and domestic abuse to trafficking and honor killings, millions of women face horrific dangers every day. And violence is not the only problem – women often face discrimination and have little say over their lives. It is as though in many parts of the world, human rights don't seem to apply to women.

700,000

Walmart has 700,000 workers outside of the US

23/25

Every economy in the top 25 of the Global Innovation Index is a democracy, except semi-democratic Singapore and Hong Kong

211m

An estimated 211m children between the ages of five and 14 have to work

So it's an issue where we're determined to make a big impact. We want to help women know their rights and defend their rights, so that they can live and work in peace. In developing countries, as soon as a woman works, her children are better fed and better educated. Women spend their salary on the family more than men do. So if you help them, you tackle the root causes of poverty.

The challenge of women's rights is clear – but it's not so clear how that's relevant to Thomson Reuters as a business. How do you see that?

Well, we asked ourselves: at Thomson Reuters, what is our expertise? We know how to find information, check it, and then disseminate it and database it. That's what the Foundation does as well.

For example, we are building a database of laws on women's rights in every country. The challenges vary a lot across the world, with different local laws, legal systems, and international conventions. We cover all these issues with our 25 Foundation journalists around the world and make the database available to the public, and to our main audiences: NGOs, lawyers, and campaigners working on women's rights.

How have you created such a big profile so quickly for this work?

Done well and produced well, news content can raise awareness. We organized an expert poll, for example, to identify the world's most dangerous countries for women. Many of the names on the list were predictable: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan and Somalia. But one country was a surprise to everyone: India – and the poll made headlines there. Since it was published last year, almost every day there have been articles in the Indian press referring to the poll and calling for change. So that has been impactful.

Where did the inspiration to focus on human rights come from originally?


Thomson Reuters is one of the biggest providers of legal research materials and systems in the world. And the Foundation set up TrustLaw to promote the rule of law around the world. TrustLaw is a global hub for *pro bono* legal work and a free source of news and information about good governance – and our women's rights work is part of this.

Will you expand the focus of TrustLaw?

Anti-corruption is already another focus. With partners such as Revenue Watch and Transparency International, our website is a hub for a lot of information on the issue. It makes sense when you think how much corruption is impacting the development of entire countries.

We also have TrustLaw Connect, which is a global marketplace for free legal assistance. The idea is it matches up top law firms with NGOs and social enterprises that need *pro bono* legal work – for contracts, IP problems, tax problems, and so on. So NGOs don't have to spend their valuable resources on legal fees.

What role does the Emergency Information Service play in the Foundation?

The Emergency Information Service is part of AlertNet, our humanitarian news website. We're providing support when a big disaster hits – like a tsunami or an earthquake – when accurate information can be lifesaving. We launched it when Port-au-Prince was devastated after the earthquake in Haiti. People were desperate for information: how to contact rescue teams, where to go for medical help, where they could get food or water. The humanitarian organizations were busy dealing with the chaos, but they're not equipped for communications – and not in the local languages. Our team of journalists gathered essential information and set up a free 



The issue at stake is what comes first: saving a child's life or holding elections. Because ... in some societies you can't do both

— HUMPHREY HAWKSLEY,
DEMOCRACY KILLS

It is now time to develop binding legal norms that hold corporations to human rights standards

— JEAN ZIEGLER, UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The next two decades are going to be [about] privacy. I'm talking about the internet. I'm talking about cell phones. I'm talking about health records and who's gay and who's not. And moreover, in a country born on the will to be free, what could be more fundamental than this?

— SAM SEABORN, *THE WEST WING*



SMS service, getting practical, vital information to tens of thousands of survivors. It's another instance of us leveraging what Thomson Reuters knows how to do best: sourcing, checking and disseminating information.

So is delivering trusted information the theme which links your activities?

Certainly. We believe that trusted, transparent information is a form of aid. Our other major initiative is TrustMedia – and that's about promoting quality journalism. We've trained more than 10,000 journalists from 170 countries – covering a wide range of topics, from reporting on terrorism to tracking down corruption.

It's about spreading the highest standards in journalism around the world. The training is based on the company's principles of accuracy, speed and freedom from bias. These are what has made the company the world's largest news agency. The Thomson Reuters brand is all about fast and accurate reporting around the world – and we've been doing that for 150 years.

The work of your Foundation is a long way from the traditional image of corporate philanthropy, isn't it?

It is true this is not a typical way of going about things for corporate foundations. I wanted to do something different from writing checks. I wanted to focus on what the company knows how to do best – and to leverage all the assets of the company. I call it "catalytic philanthropy."

Is it because you're new to this world that you could establish a new approach so quickly?

I agree, maybe because I had not been in the world of foundations at all, I approached this in a different manner. I was a journalist for 20 years and then a businesswoman, managing Reuters Media, which is the news agency part of the business. When I took the

job as Foundation CEO in May 2008, it was just as the deadly Cyclone Nargis struck the coast of Burma. At the time we were making a lot of small grants to NGOs working on the ground. One of them, for example, was used to buy blankets. Of course, people need blankets and, thankfully, there are people in the disaster relief community who can do that. But I thought, "What does Thomson Reuters have to do with blankets? It makes no sense."

That's when I decided to transform it completely, moving away from just giving money. Then you realize that the amount you bring with you, just through the skills and knowledge of the company, is enormous.

How does the business feel about this new approach? How do employees react?

You cannot imagine the number of e-mails I receive every time we have a good story. Every time I go to a different country, I do a staff presentation and the support we get is fantastic. Lots of people want to help, to volunteer. They're motivated by what we do; they feel like they're part of something good. It's very positive for the culture of the company, for people to feel this pride.

What's your aspiration for the Foundation?

I believe TrustLaw is going to become huge. It's already the biggest global marketplace for pro bono legal work – we're already in 140 countries – and we've got ambitious plans.

Jim Smith, our CEO, has a good way of putting it: he says that "fast and accurate information is the lifeblood of our business, so of course it's also the lifeblood of our Foundation." And that is the power of what we can do: whether it's in human rights or in disaster relief, we show the power of being able to deliver trusted information. ☺



Fast and accurate information is the lifeblood of our business, so of course it's also the lifeblood of our Foundation

— JIM SMITH, CEO, THOMSON REUTERS

The most important thing I have learned during the course is about the safety of the journalist. I remember every word of it: how to deal with the tear gas, to find a safe exit, to look around the place before you go, to find the safest point during a demonstration

— MIRETTE IBRAHIM, EGYPTIAN POLITICAL JOURNALIST WHO TOOK A TRUSTMEDIA COURSE IN 2010. SHE WENT ON TO WORK FOR AN EGYPTIAN OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER DURING THE REVOLUTION

