

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair and a nose ring, wearing a heavily beaded necklace, holding a baby. The image is in black and white with a teal tint. The woman is looking slightly to the left, and the baby is looking down.

# Democracy and Human rights

A pathway to peace and development

Ministry for Foreign Affairs





Cover photos:  
Mother and child in India.  
A village meeting in Tanzania.

Photographs: Martti Lintunen,  
Matti Remes, Veikko Ruohotie,  
Veikko Somerpuro, UN

# Democracy and Human rights

## *Pathway to Peace and Development*



During the 1990s, great strides were made on the road towards democratisation. Undemocratic governments in different parts of the world have collapsed and more democratic systems have been established. The end of the cold war era has also given new impetus to demands for respect for human rights worldwide.

To many citizens living in poor countries, democracy has represented a symbol of freedom and welfare. They expect that the reforms will raise their standard of living. Democracy is construed as a ticket ensuring admission out of poverty and destitution.

However, progress is slow on the rocky path. Democracy shows in increasing welfare only after a long time has passed. Life is still marked by multiple deprivation in many parts of the world. The underprivileged lack pure water, adequate food or health care, and they cannot or are not allowed to participate as equals in social decision-making nor are their fundamental rights respected.

The poor states of Asia, Africa and Latin America need help from the rich countries to be able to meet the challenges opening up as a result of democratisation and to safeguard the human rights of all their citizens. The countries of the West have rather unanimously committed themselves to supporting the democratisation processes in the developing world and respect for human rights in these countries. The promotion of human rights, social equality, democratic government and good governance are among the priorities of Finnish development cooperation, and it is a significant objective also in the EU's relations with the developing countries.

## Human rights belong to all



*Woodcutter in Guatemala.*

The most important and best known document which concerns human rights is the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The Declaration has led to the conclusion of a host of international human rights agreements. Its core message is that human rights are inherent to all people as from birth and neither the state nor any other party can take them away from an individual. Everyone is entitled to enjoy human rights without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, reli-

gion, political opinion, property, origin or other similar aspect.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights covers the principal human rights: both the so-called civil and political rights (CP rights) and the so-called economic, cultural and social rights (ECS rights). Civil rights safeguard all persons their personal sphere of freedom, in which the public authorities may not interfere. Political rights ensure individuals the right of participation in voluntary social activities. The ECS rights differ from the CP rights in that their materialisation normally requires not only refraining from interfering in individuals' scope of freedom but active measures from the part of the public authorities.

The principle of the universality and integral nature of human rights was confirmed in the Human Rights World Conference in Vienna in 1993. CP and ECS rights are equally important and the materialisation of one is linked to that of the other. Freedom of expression is significant only where people can read.

The developing countries have laid special emphasis not only on the rights which protect the individual but also the significance of human rights which protect entire nations and ethnic groups (so-called solidarity rights). The idea is that individual human rights can be realized only in societies where different groups of people are entitled to enjoy economic and social equity and self-determination. In the recent past, the right to

## **HUMAN RIGHTS BASED ON THE DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:**

- right to life, freedom and personal safety;
- prohibition of slavery, torture and inhuman treatment;
- right to a nationality and right to freedom of movement in one's own country;
- right to get married based on both spouses' approval;
- right to own property;
- right of thought, conscience and religion.

## **POLITICAL RIGHTS BASED ON THE DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:**

- freedom of opinion and speech;
- freedom of assembly and association;
- right to go to the polls and participate in political life, and right to free elections.

## **ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS BASED ON THE DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:**

- right to work and proper working conditions and professional association;
- right to equal pay for work of equal value;
- right to an adequate standard of living;
- right to social security;
- right to education and right to enjoy and appreciate arts and science.

development has been especially highlighted as an important solidarity right, affecting both individuals and groups of people.

Article 28 of the Declaration of Human Rights as such refers to solidarity rights: "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized." The Vienna Conference acknowledged the right to development as a part of the international human rights system.

## Equal society as the objective



*A boat on the Nile, Egypt.*

A number of countries of the world treat their citizens unequally. Freedom of speech, for example, may be restricted or some groups are prevented from participating in elections. Such restrictions may be based on the opinions, sex, religion or race of these persons.

It is typical of undemocratic systems to suppress the activities of non-governmental organisations, to restrict the freedom of operation of the press and to conduct unfair elections or not to organise elections at all. It may thus be very hard to exercise one's power of influence in society.

The industrialised countries must support the materialisation of equality in the developing countries, because inequality infringes upon the principles of human rights. Individuals and groups which enjoy the same level of equality are better capable of influencing both their own and common welfare and development.

## Democracy is a prerequisite of economic development

Effective measures to support the developing countries' democratic endeavours were introduced as late as in the latter half of the 1980s. Donors then became aware of the interrelationship between democracy and economic development. Democracy lays a foundation for social stability and equilibrium. Stable and peaceful conditions, for their part, constitute a prerequisite for economic growth and development.

Free elections and other democratic ways of action do not, however, as such, guarantee an improving economy. For the developing countries to manage to break out of the poverty trap, more equitable world trade and support from the rich nations of the world are required to improve the structures of their business and economy.

## DEMOCRACY AND EQUALITY TO THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Finland and the other Nordic countries were strongly against the racial discrimination exercised by the former government of the Republic of South Africa. Finland participated in the trade boycott targeted against the apartheid rule and effectively supported the freedom movements active in the country.

With the end of the apartheid rule, all groups in society have enhanced chances of participation in political decision-making. Political

equality has not, however, eradicated the big income differentials among the people. The future of democracy in the RSA is highly contingent upon whether the country manages to establish a more equitable income distribution. Finland is involved in the promotion of the democratisation process and equality in the RSA through, for example, the Democracy and Human Rights Fund, set up under the administration of the Finnish Embassy in the RSA. These funds are used, as a rule, to support local NGO projects and initiatives which help to step up the development of human rights culture and civil society in the RSA. Funds have been channelled to projects ranging from support to victims of violence to the consolidation of a democratic election system. Some 30 organisations have received support to date.



*Plants on the riverside are being removed to improve water supply in South Africa.*

The realisation economic, social and cultural rights is important especially for the least advantaged ones. Finland wants to help the developing countries to set up such social security systems as are locally appropriate, safeguard an equal distribution of income and take account of the poorest and most discriminated members of society.

## Support to human rights enhances international security

In today's world, states cannot base their security on military balance of power alone. To maintain stability and security, states also need to be capable of responding to challenges arising from global environmental problems and intergovernmental inequality. A grave conflict or problem anywhere in the world affects the entire international community, and sooner or later also the Finns.

Human inequality, undemocratic government and continuing breaches of human rights easily lead to domestic conflicts. Confrontations tend to expand and give rise to regional conflicts. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has said: "Today's human rights violations sow the seeds for tomorrow's conflicts."

It is both hard and expensive to solve conflicts which have already escalated into violence. The international community spends vast amount of money every year on crisis management, including the assistance of refugees. Prevention of conflicts would be considerably less costly. It would be cheaper to help the developing countries establish such democratic and comprehensive human-rights practices which prevent social tensions mounting into outbreaks of violence. This would not only be more economical but also help eliminate a vast amount of human suffering.

## Refugees and crises

Coping with refugees is one of the major international problems of our time. At the root of refugeeism there are often serious human rights violations arising from the aggravation of domestic or international conflicts. On the other hand, conflict situations easily lead to new human rights violations which prolong the crises. Crises create societies in which it is difficult to recover from the mental and social wounds caused by human rights violations.

Appropriate human rights policy can prevent crises from arising and thus influence the root causes of refugeeism. The materialisation of human rights needs to be addressed also in the post-crisis remigration and reconstruction phases.



## HELP IS NEEDED ALSO AFTER THE CRISES

"This is Guatemala's third year of peace after over 34 years of arduous domestic warfare. During the war, 50,000 persons fled from the country, the majority crossing the border of Mexico in the north. Of the refugees, 40,000 have returned or are about to return to Guatemala, where they are met by a war-crippled society. The government of Guatemala has facilitated the position of the remigrants by, for example, granting low-interest loans to purchase land.



*A village school for returning refugees in Northern Guatemala.*

I am a lawyer and work at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Guatemala City. UNHCR helps remigrants to make a new home and adjust to society. My duties include not only seeing to the interests of the remigrants but also supervision of the interests of foreign refugees and asylum-seekers who have arrived in Guatemala. In Guatemala, UNHCR decides on the granting of asylum based on an authority received from the government of the country. However, legislation related to refugeeism is being prepared and efforts are made to transfer responsibility to the Guatemalan authorities. My duties include being a legal and technical adviser of the project. I also arrange training for civil servants working at ministries, immigration authorities and NGOs, to make them familiar with the principles governing refugee and human rights agreements."

*Markku Aikomus, Associate Protection Officer, UNHCR, Guatemala City*

## Good governance is fair to everyone



*A barber in Lindi, Tanzania.*

Bribery and other forms of corruption have spread to many developing countries. A corrupt administration is ineffective and this complicates the operation of both the private and public sectors. Corruption is also an economic problem: addressing even a simple issue in a system which is based on bribes is expensive and difficult.

States and organisations which are involved in development cooperation have started to pay more attention to the eradication of corruption and to focus on the promotion of good governance. Free and fair elections and a well-functioning parliament,

judicial system and human rights system contribute to the development of a more equal society.

A more open and effective administration requires well-trained civil servants and improved official information culture. Civil servants must be provided with clear rules of the game, and separate provisions must be established to provide for the publicity of documents and citizens' rights. The rule of law guarantees equal rights before the law and, in an ideal situation, the citizens are aware of their own rights.

### **GOOD GOVERNANCE:**

- follows the principles of the rule of law and democracy;
- is open and public;
- is not based on corruption;
- offers equal chances of participation to all citizens.

*A bus in Bishkek,  
Kyrgyz Republic.*



### **The media, freedom of speech and democracy**

The existence of a free media which represents a variety of opinions is of crucial importance from the point of view of both good governance, respect for human rights and equality, and the development of democracy. The right to voice also views which are critical and different from what is the government's policy constitutes an essential mark of democracy.

#### **RADIO TRAINING PROGRAMME IN PALESTINE**

Finland has supported the development journalism on the West Bank and Gaza area in Palestine. Technical and journalist training has been given to the staff of both the Palestinian public and private radio stations in the Bir Zeit University, Bethlehem and partly also in Finland. The operation of the radio has been further supported by supplying equipment and by financing the use of a studio.

Advanced communication is of particular importance in an area inhabited by different ethnic groups of multicultural backgrounds, with a recent history marked by serious conflicts. Free discussion and communication is hoped to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding among the groups.



# Finland promotes respect

## for human rights and democracy in the developing countries



*Picking coffee beans in Ethiopia.*

The main objectives of Finland's development cooperation include the promotion of human rights, social equality, democracy and good governance. This is expected to gradually influence the developing countries' economic and social welfare.

The fact that human rights occupy such a pronounced role in our development cooperation is linked to Finland's general foreign and security political objectives. After the end of the cold war, Finland has abandoned its restrained human rights policy and adopted a more active approach which involves open discussion of human rights issues. Finland wants to

further develop the international human rights system and to enhance respect for human rights on the agenda of the international community.

In Finland's bilateral relations with other countries, human rights issues are also actively dealt with. Cooperation in the fields of human rights and democracy is discussed, for example, in the annual programme negotiations on development cooperation conducted with the developing countries. Tens of projects related to human rights, democracy and good governance are being carried out in different parts of the world relying on financing from the Finnish development cooperation funds. At the early phase of selecting partners of cooperation, attention is paid to whether the country strives to observe internationally acknowledged principles related to human rights and democracy.

Women, children, indigenous people, minorities and persons with disabilities are given special attention in Finnish development cooperation, since these groups fall more easily than others subject to discrimination.

## Of the poor in the world, 70 per cent are women

For the Finns, gender equality and women's position are issues of importance. As compared to other countries, gender equality has materialised very well in Finland and the other Nordic countries. We consider equality as a prerequisite of full-scale social development, and therefore equality issues are important also in development cooperation. Based on the universal nature of human rights, both women and men are entitled to enjoy similar human rights.

The advancement of women benefits the whole society, and women play an instrumental role in efforts to bring about improvements in the developing countries. To take an example, educated women give birth to less children than those with no education in the developing countries. Investments in the education of women also effectively lead to raising income of the family, improved health and more widespread overall well-being.

Women's position in the developing countries is advanced both by means of carrying out projects which are expressly targeted at women and by taking the special position of women into account in the planning phase of all development projects. The launch of a project is always preceded by a so-called gender analysis, which comprises a clarification of the position and activities of women who come within the scope of influence of the project. In a number of developing countries, men and women have highly divergent roles, duties and chances of influence, and women are at risk of remaining beyond the reach of development projects. Gender analysis is a means to safeguard that both sexes have a chance to participate in a given project and benefit from the outcome.

*Cooking in Vietnam.*



## Children are entitled to play games and to enjoy leisure



*A football in  
Mongu, Zambia.*

Nearly all countries of the world have acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

However, there is a considerable disparity between the principles recorded in the document and reality in the developing countries. The most significant barrier to the materialisation of children's rights in the developing world is poverty, which forces millions of children to drop out of school and take undue employment. In many countries, girls in particular are placed in an inferior position; for example, fewer girls than boys have access to school.

The UN convened the World Summit for Children - Convention on the Rights of the Child in New York

in 1990 and an International Conference on Child Labour in Oslo in 1997. Both conferences came up with a decision to, among other things, improve child health, protect children from wars and armed conflicts, and enhance the position of children living in particularly severe conditions. The idea is to put an immediate end to at least the most flagrant forms of the use of child labour, such as child prostitution, debt slavery and employment of children in hazardous tasks.

Finnish development cooperation strives to improve children's position in many ways. To take an example, Finland supports training and education, orphanages and street child work and rehabilitation of disabled children and youth. UNICEF has served as an important channel of Finnish multilateral assistance.

## Minorities and indigenous peoples

Persons who belong to a minority group fall more easily than others subject human rights violations. Safeguarding the rights of those who belong to, for example, ethnic, religious, linguistic or sexual minorities is therefore of particular importance. Attending to the interests of minorities also helps to prevent conflicts: many conflicts arise from disagreement between ethnic groups and infringements of minority rights.

Indigenous peoples and minorities often confront similar problems. Persons who belong to an indigenous people often constitute a minority in their native country and their human rights may be exposed to infringements. The materialisation of ESC rights is especially important for indigenous peoples whose cultures are, in many places, in danger of becoming extinct as a result of marginalisation and economic change.

Societies which have acknowledged and secured the status of their minorities have better chances of overall development. In its development cooperation, Finland promotes the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples' living conditions should be developed in a manner which enables continuous existence of their communities and cultures.

Finland has, among other things, supported meetings of representatives of indigenous peoples. Their worldwide cooperation provides an opportunity for indigenous people representing different countries to share their experiences and acquire information related to their rights..



*Ketšua indians in Bolivia.*

## **HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN BOLIVIA AND ECUADOR**

Bolivia is a country with 35 different indigenous peoples, and approximately 60 per cent of the whole population speak the language of one of these indigenous groups. Bolivia has acceded to international conventions related to the rights of indigenous peoples and the position of the indigenous population is constitutionally secured in the country. In practice, however, the rights of the indigenous peoples do not materialise as provided in the regulations, and members of the indigenous population themselves are not adequately familiar with their rights.

Finland is supporting projects in Bolivia and Ecuador, which involve distribution of information to representatives indigenous peoples about their rights. Projects are training active persons to be able to further disseminate this information in their own communities. The projects also help create networks between Bolivian, Ecuadorian and Peruvian indigenous peoples and the Sami population in Finland to make it possible for people living in different countries and continents to share experiences about how to defend their rights.

## The rights of persons with disabilities is one of the priorities in development cooperation



*Special education  
in Lusaka,  
Zambia.*

There is still plenty of work ahead in efforts to enhance the position and safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities in the developing world. In countries where the majority of citizens live below the margins of subsistence, the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, do not receive any special attention. Willingness to improve the living conditions of the disabled may also be hampered by prejudices and traditional beliefs.

Finland has allocated much support to a project addressing the special education needs of persons with disabilities in Ethiopia. A separate element of this project is an endeavour to influ-

ence people's attitudes towards the disabled by means of the media.

A number of Finnish NGOs are also carrying out tens of different projects related to disabilities in the developing countries. The Finnish Association of the Deaf, the Finnish Federation of the Visually Handicapped and the Finnish Disabled People's International Development Association (FIDIDA), for example, are conducting several projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Employees with disabilities who are working at wheel-chair workshops in Malawi, Sambia and Tanzania are being trained as part of a project called "Setting the wheels in motion" carried out by the National Association of the Disabled. The objective is to increase the supply of wheel-chairs and to improve the quality of the products. The Finnish Association on Mental Retardation has launched an extensive project in Sambia, in which special classes are established for young persons with disabilities who attend vocational and agricultural schools. Placement of the young in the working life is promoted by setting up production units representing different fields, where it is possible to obtain access to advice and equipment.

Furthermore, Abilis is a Finnish foundation which gives financial support to NGOs of disabled people in the developing countries.

## Suspending assistance is used as the last resort to influence partners of cooperation

As concerns the countries of cooperation, Finland requires commitment to respect for human rights and compliance with democratic principles. The partners of cooperation are chosen based on the countries' willingness and capability to uphold democratic practices and respect human rights. Human rights issues and also violations of human rights are discussed with the partner countries. The objective is that all countries accede to international human rights conventions and abide by the obligations involved, and partner countries are encouraged and supported in the process by means of, for example, development cooperation assistance.

In case of evidence of deteriorating democracy and human rights infringements in any partner country, Finland can transfer a greater share of its bilateral development cooperation to projects involving NGOs which can be supported even in countries in which cooperation with the government is not possible. NGOs and governments are not, as a rule, mutually exclusive, but their work is complementary also as concerns human rights and democracy projects.

Bilateral development cooperation can be suspended or entirely terminated if the situation in the partner country does not improve in spite of dialogue. Finland also participates in the EU's decision-making concerning the use of suspension or termination of development assistance or, in the most flagrant cases, economic sanctions. Denial of assistance and use of sanctions are always used as a last resort and, besides, boycotts and suspension of assistance often hit the most disadvantaged citizens the most.



*Woman carrying fire wood in Kathmandu, Nepal.*

# SUPPORT

## for human rights and democracy projects



*Newspapers for sale in Arusha, Tanzania.*

Human rights and democracy issues are addressed in all development cooperation projects conducted by Finland. Furthermore, special projects related to respect for human rights, democracy and good governance are being carried out in all of the target countries of Finnish development cooperation assistance. Many of the UN special agencies and funds, through which Finnish multilateral development assistance is channeled, also prioritise in their programmes the enhancement of human rights, democracy and good governance.

In Tanzania, a target country of Finnish development cooperation assistance of the longest duration, for example, extensive reforms in the local and tax administrations are under way, supported out of Finnish development cooperation resources.

In the local administration, decision-

making power is transferred from the central administration to local authorities who also become entitled to collect taxes to finance their activities. The tax reform is designed to lead to more effective state taxation; Finland has contributed to the reform by, for example, supporting the introduction of value added taxation. Support has also been channelled to a programme to fight corruption and a programme to develop the system of parliamentary representation. A number of projects carried out by Tanzanian non-governmental organisations are financed out of a human rights and democracy fund, administered by the Finnish Embassy.

By the side of projects which are expressly designed to promote democracy, human rights, equality and good governance, projects focusing on other areas also address these issues. A project to protect natural forests in Usambra, for example, enhances locals' and especially women's knowledge of forestry and the protection of forests and helps local communities exert their influence. A so-called participatory method has been applied with success in connection with a multi-field rural development programme in the provinces of Mtwara and Lind. Developmental projects initiated by local administration and ordinary citizens are supported by providing advice, training and information, and by arranging small-scale support to various projects in the form of transportation, marketing of products and financing.

*Advertising elections in Las Terrenas, Dominican Republic.*

### **Elections as a prerequisite of democracy**

Elections represent a vital part of the democratisation process of a country. Fair and genuinely democratic elections give citizens the chance to influence the future of their country and area of residence. In the developing countries, outside election observers are often used to ensure fair elections. Finnish development cooperation funds have been used to support the organisation of and training related to elections, and Finnish election observers have been assigned to ensure fair elections in different parts of the world. In connection with the parliamentary elections in Finland in the spring 1999, for example, some developing countries sent their representatives to visit our country and learn about the Finnish election system.



## Democracy and human rights funds

Finland has established Democracy and Human Rights Funds in several countries, which are used to support human rights work in the partner countries. These Funds operate in conjunction with Finnish Embassies, and funds are distributed to human rights and democracy projects launched by local NGOs and also, to some extent, by the public sector.

### DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDS SUPPORTED BY FINLAND ARE ACTIVE IN THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES:

- The Republic of South Africa
- Ethiopia
- Kenya
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Nepal
- Zambia
- Tanzania

*A bar in Rundu,  
Namibia.*



## Finland also contributes to the operation of the United Nations

The UN and its special development agencies represent a significant channel through which Finnish development cooperation assistance is channelled. The promotion of human rights and democracy plays a major role in the operation of the UN system.

According to the UN Development Programme, UNDP, respect for human rights and promotion of good governance are essentially instrumental to development. Finland supports UNDP by means of granting general assistance and has also participated in the financing of the carry-out of a number of democracy projects by UNDP.

Finland has, among other things, supported a global project launched by UNDP, which strives to make human rights an element of the countries' own development programmes. UNDP is cooperating with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR. In the preliminary phase of the project, the target countries are helped to prepare for themselves a human rights programme and find out what pre-conditions there are for the ratification of international human rights conventions. Concrete human rights projects in the countries involved are also supported.

The Commission on Human Rights, the central human rights organ of the UN, is responsible for monitoring the human rights situation in the member states. Human rights, equality, good governance and democracy are prioritised by such UN special agencies as:

- The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF; the most important channel for Finnish multilateral assistance in the field of the rights of the child
- The UN Population Fund, UNFPA; rights related to sexual health and gender equality
- The UN Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM; support to women's human rights, female leadership and good governance
- The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR; human rights projects in the developing countries

## The European Union and human rights

Respect for individuals' human rights is traditional practice in the Member States of the European Union, and democracy is an integral part of their decision-making procedures. In its relations with the developing countries, the EU emphasises the importance of these principles especially as concerns human development. All framework agreements related to development cooperation made by the EU include a statement which requires compliance with the principles of democracy, human rights and good governance. Cooperation can be suspended in case of a grave infringement of the principles of the statement. The EU can also influence the developing countries' human rights policies through trade policy measures, since it is possible to take human rights issues into account when customs relief is granted to the developing countries by the EU. Such benefits can be cancelled on account of continuing and flagrant human rights violations.

Finland is taking part in an EU project in Burundi, which supports parliamentary activities and a constitutional reform. The aim is to promote social and political stability in Burundi, which is shattered by wars that have raged in the entire territory of Central Africa. Fair administration in difficult and conflict-ridden circumstances may act as a disincentive to new conflicts.

## NGOs operate close to the man in the street

Associations and different networks which have been established and are maintained by citizens constitute an integral part of the civil society. They function as a medium for people to advance causes that they consider important. Ministries and other branches of administration represent the government's official policy, while NGOs can bring forth divergent opinions and different kinds of activity.

Many Finnish associations cooperate with associations and societies active in the developing countries. NGOs add a new dimension to contacts between countries. The majority of the NGOs are active at the grassroots level, close to the man in the street. Their development cooperation assistance extends to cover even persons and regions which would otherwise remain beyond the reach of any assistance.

Establishment of associations and being active in them is a fundamental right. States, where the operation of NGOs is grounded on a legal framework and where such associations can freely exercise their activities, are one step ahead of others in the path to democracy.

The government of Finland supports development cooperation conducted by Finnish and, to some extent, by international NGOs. NGOs which actively promote human rights and democracy have also been supported as have a number of associations advancing the cause of women, children and persons with disabilities. A variety of human rights and democracy projects have been supported, such as work among street children, human rights research and consolidation of parliamentary practice in southern Africa.



*Rural development programme of Finnchurchaid in Zimbabwe.*

### **NGOs' HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION**

Eleven Finnish NGOs combined their efforts in the autumn 1998 and set up a foundation, focusing on the prevention of infringements of human rights in the developing countries. Funds are being channeled through the foundation to human rights and democracy projects carried out by NGOs in the developing countries. The Department for International Development Cooperation of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs sponsors the activities of the foundation.

The foundation's resources can be used to support projects which improve the efficiency of democratic institutions and advance the materialisation of fundamental rights, equality and free communication. The idea is that the local people themselves plan and carry out projects financed by the foundation.

The foundation has supported, for example, the activities of the political opposition movement in Burma and a programme to train workers and election observers attending the parliamentary elections in Nepal.

**Ministry for Foreign Affairs  
Department for International  
Development Cooperation**

*Information Unit*

Kanavakatu 4a, 00160 Helsinki  
Finland

Tel. +358 9 1341 6391, 1341 6370

Fax +358 9 1341 6375

E-mail [kyoinfo@formin.fi](mailto:kyoinfo@formin.fi)



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