


## Institute of Human Rights' Inaugural Conference Makes the Connection Between Health and Human Rights

It is clear that human rights abuses often lead to health consequences for survivors. Yet it is also true that health care policy affects human rights—for example, when a government restricts its citizens' right of mobility through quarantines during disease outbreaks. This often-reciprocal relationship between health and human rights was the topic of the Institute of Human Rights at Emory's inaugural conference in April. Entitled "Lessons Learned from Rights Based Approaches to Health," the conference drew nearly 400 public health and development professionals from over forty nations together to share successful models of rights-based approaches to health and to discuss how the world can make progress toward achieving adequate standards of health as a fundamental right of all people.

The event was sponsored by the interdisciplinary Institute of Human Rights at Emory, in collaboration with CARE USA, The Carter Center human rights office, Doctors for Global Health, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organization. Featured speakers included former U.S. President and Nobel Laureate Jimmy Carter, CARE President and CEO Peter Bell, Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, and United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health Paul Hunt.

Over the course of three days, conference participants addressed topics such as the impact of war on public health, refugees and internally displaced persons, infectious disease control, children's health, racism and health, reparations for human rights abuses, human trafficking, and sexual and reproductive health, among many others.

Over one hundred participants, many from developing nations, were able to travel to the conference and present their work thanks to a \$230,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Gates Foundation grant, jointly administered by the Institute of Human Rights and Emory's Office of International Affairs (OIA), will support a number of post-conference initiatives as well, including publication of conference proceedings, development of an Emory-based online database of health and human rights programs from around the world, and a follow-up meeting of key leaders from the conference to set a research agenda for the future.

"The conference was a major accomplishment for the Institute of Human Rights and for Emory University as a whole," said Institute Executive Director Dabney Evans. "We have formed strong coalitions with both local and international partners. The conference firmly places Emory within the ranks of academic and international organizations leading the field of health and human rights." 

Conference details can be found at the Institute of Human Rights' web site, <http://humanrights.emory.edu>



*"People are very generous when the need is clear. You saw that when the tsunami that struck Asia killed about 180,000 people. But 175,000 people die every month from malaria. 140,000 die every month from diarrhea. 240,000 die every month from AIDS. Yet the world doesn't see it. If the health community could put together a clear concept of the specific needs, then I believe the funds would be forthcoming. There is no reason for a child to die of diarrhea, malaria, or measles."*

Former U.S. President and Nobel Laureate Jimmy Carter, photographed here with Dabney Evans, executive director of the Institute of Human Rights at Emory

*"The good news is that we already have the health interventions available to defeat or prevent most conditions that kill the majority of people today...so the challenge is not primarily one of making new medical breakthroughs. The main challenge is ensuring access to those interventions for all...An explicit rights based approach to health will ensure attention to the interests of the disadvantaged and vulnerable sectors."*

Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson

*"Since 1945 the human rights focus of the international community has been to negotiate the basic international human rights code. But the basic code of international human rights law is established, and now it has to be operationalized and brought to bear on policymaking processes. This new focus requires new skills and a new human rights approach. Many people recognize the right to a free trial, or to freedom of speech, as fundamental human rights, but the right to health does not yet have the same currency as those classic civil and political rights."*

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health Paul Hunt