

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

Title

Celebrity as a Political Resource: The Human Rights Now! Campaign

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2jb77459>

Journal

Human Rights Quarterly, 42(1)

ISSN

0275-0392

Author

Henry, Charles P

Publication Date

2020

DOI

10.1353/hrq.2020.0005

Peer reviewed

Celebrity as a Political Resource: The Human Rights Now! Campaign

By

Charles P. Henry

University of California at Berkeley

“Introduction”

Thirty years ago Amnesty International (AI) launched its most ambitious and innovative human rights campaign ever. Through the medium of celebrity rock musicians, the Human Rights Now! (HRN) tour took the message of global human rights to 15 countries in 20 concerts spread over six weeks with a total audience of one million people (See Appendix 1). An estimated one billion people in over sixty countries watched a three-hour broadcast on December 10, 1988, Human Rights Day.¹ Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) the campaign had five major objectives. First, to show that people everywhere support human rights. Second, to protect people in all countries who are working for human rights. Third, to get governments to commit themselves to be legally bound to respect human rights. Fourth, to promote human rights education. And finally, to directly impact the cases of five AI “prisoners of conscience (POCS).”² This retrospective examination of the tour from an insider’s perspective³ seeks to answer several questions. How did the idea for the tour arise and how did the campaign change the culture of AI? Was the tour successful in its general goal of essentially building a global civil society for human rights and its more specific goal of releasing political

prisoners? What are the consequences of using celebrities as spokespersons for human rights victims and have they changed over the last three decades?

Michael Lipsky's seminal article, "Protest as a Political Resource" serves as a theoretical framework for analyzing the HRN! Campaign. Devised to look at political protest in the sixties, Lipsky presents the problem as one of "bargaining" and asks the question how can protesters without the traditional political resources of money and influence impact or change political behavior? He suggests that the negative political resources of "naming and shaming" can force target groups to the bargaining table. For this process to happen protest leaders have to successfully negotiate four groups or elements. The protest leader(s) must convince their own group of the utility of the protest action. Next they must attract communications media that will gain the attention of those with traditional political resources. This latter constituency, which Lipsky labels "reference publics" or "third parties", must be motivated to act on the information or message in a way that influences the last group—the protest target.⁴ All four of these elements were central to the HRN! Campaign.

"The Protest Organization"

In several key ways the HRN! Tour was a fundamental challenge to AI's culture and operating procedures. This challenge produced conflict between and within AI's national sections (and groups in countries without sections), the International Secretariat (IS), the International Executive Committee (IEC), and the biannual International Council Meetings (ICMs). As the largest transnational human rights network and second oldest

grassroots non-governmental organization (NGO), the HRN! Tour is a rare look at how the process works.

On December 1, 1986, AIUSA's Executive Director, John (Jack) Healey presented a proposal for a world human rights rock tour to the Board of Directors with a copy to the IEC and IS. The idea for a world tour grew from the successful completion of the "Conspiracy of Hope" tour in the summer of 1986. Healey, with the vital assistance of rock promoter Bill Graham put together a tour with U2, Sting, Peter Gabriel and others that visited six U. S. cities and culminated in a daylong concert at Giants stadium in New Jersey and broadcast on MTV. While the specific target of the concerts was the release of six AI prisoners of conscience, the larger goal was to take AI's human rights message to a larger and younger audience. At each stop, audiences were encouraged to write letters for POCs and join AI. The tour raised over \$2.6 million dollars for the section and added 100,000 new members.⁵

The IEC was well aware of AIUSA's success when it was presented with the world tour proposal in late December of 1986. However, no non-governmental organization had attempted a project as complex, lengthy and costly as a world rock tour for human rights or any other humanitarian cause. AIUSA had approved the proposal and agreed to provide start-up funds. The IEC appointed a Working Group (WG) composed of members from AI sections in the United Kingdom, Norway and the U.S. to look at the feasibility of the tour. At its March 1988 meeting the IEC suggested changes to the WG and revised its guidelines on fundraising. At its June meeting the IEC gave the go ahead to the project creating a Policy Committee (PC) composed of two IEC members and IS staff to facilitate quick policy decisions on tour business. Crucially, the

operation of the tour was given to a separate company composed largely of a few AIUSA staff headed by Healey to reduce any liability for the international movement. A contract was signed between the company, Concerts for Human Rights Foundation, and AI, with the provision that no AI funds would be used in the production of the tour.

Despite the IEC's approval in June 1987, the tour project would raise a number of concerns throughout the movement until the concerts concluded in October 1988. Three issues would emerge that would ultimately change the culture of the organization. The first issue was who speaks for AI? Although AI is by far the largest grassroots human right organization, this question had never really been seen as a problem. IS researchers produced prisoner cases that were adopted by AI groups. These groups pressured governments to release POCs, prevent torture, and prohibit the death penalty. This narrow set of human rights concerns was clearly defined with IS researchers playing a crucial role in selecting cases and distributing information and guidelines to movement activists. Activists got to know something about AI prisoners and their families and only people actually involved in letter writing were considered members.⁶

The intensive research culture relying on moral suasion to influence governments was now challenged by a proposed global campaign that would take key decisions away from IS researchers and place them in the hands of sections holding concerts, a private corporation, musicians and others. AI's ultimate policy-making body is the ICM held every two years in which all sections send delegates to debate resolutions that set policy for the movement. In the period between ICMs, the IEC composed of elected section members meets on a regular bases to implement policy and oversee the operation of the IS. The IS, based in London, is composed of professional staff serving primarily in three

areas: research, campaigns and membership, and legal. It seemed clear from the outset that AI's traditional hierarchy would be inadequate to support a global rock tour. The IEC quickly decided that the project could not disrupt the ongoing work of the IS and sections although this decision ultimately proved unrealistic. It also became apparent that the IEC could not move quickly enough to make the daily decisions required by the project, hence the formation of the Policy Committee to work closely with tour organizers.

While the PC and the concert organization worked in close contact, they left unresolved the question of who spoke for the movement. What was a fundamental policy decision and could the PC or even the IEC resolve it? Who would choose the concert sites and what role would the sections in these sites play? How would the tour be financed and who would benefit from any tour surplus? The resolution of these questions would create conflict and division within the movement.

The first conflict was between the national sections and the IS. Most medium and small sections favored the tour. The larger sections urged caution but did not oppose the project. The Netherlands, Finland and Greece were against the tour at the outset but the first two eventually came around. The IS was reluctant for several reasons. It was the first effort to decentralize a major project outside the IS. As a result there was little integration of the project with the IS's ongoing work and there was concern that the IS lacked the capacity to follow-up on the campaign.⁷ Crucially, the fact that it was a global campaign that was decentralized to the sections challenged the pre-eminent position of researchers in the IS. While they were consulted on where the concerts should go their word was not final.

For example, AI's Indian section and the PC were strongly committed to having a concert in India, primarily for development reasons. However, the section had also warned that because of AI's research concerns and strained relationship with the Indian government, an AI association with the concert would be problematic. Although the concert organization had no promoter in India, they identified The Times of India newspaper as a local underwriter. The newspaper also insisted that AI could not be identified with the concert. That prohibition and a host of other local problems including security led the concert organization to recommend canceling the tour stop in India. Despite this negative recommendation and its own rules governing the concerts, the IS and IEC representatives insisted on going ahead with the event. In the end it was only the artists on the stage who were permitted to communicate AI's message.⁸ This radical decentering of AI's research concerns as well as AI's control over its message represented a sharp break with AI's culture.

A second major break with AI tradition occurred around fundraising for the concerts. The project proposal from AIUSA, unlike previous major rock events such as Live Aid and the Secret Policemen's Ball ⁹, was revenue neutral. That is, it was not seen as a fundraising effort by AI but rather a global human rights education project. The artists approached by Healey and Graham were not interested in simply doing a series of concerts in venues in the West that they frequently played in. They were attracted to taking both their music and AI's message to countries that rarely if ever had an opportunity to hear them. To do this, however, it was necessary to hold concerts in Europe and North America that would generate enough revenue to underwrite concerts in the Global South. Some 29 AI sections/groups asked to be considered as potential

concert sites.¹⁰ Thus the problem was to find the right balance of revenue generating sites in the West to offset the loss of revenue in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The IEC approved the tour proposal on the condition that no AI resources would be diverted to support the project. Aside from the initial seed funds from AIUSA, the concert foundation found it extremely difficult to raise private start-up funds. In large part this was due to the stringent fundraising guidelines imposed on the tour organizers. AI prohibited the use of funds from its international budget and through the PC refused to accept any financial liability for the concert tour. And while permitting the concert foundation to solicit individual and corporate donations it strictly limited the use of AI's name in conjunction with corporate sponsors. While these guidelines were consistent with AI culture, they made fundraising problematic.¹¹

By the summer of 1987, it was clear that the tour would need at least two million dollars in underwriting and an additional eight million to cover potential liability. In the fall, the concert foundation requested a \$250,000 loan from AIUSA to keep the project viable. Finally, in early 1988 a deal was worked out with the sportswear company Reebok for ten million in financing. After some initial concerns over Reebok's business practices, some mistakenly associated the company's name with South Africa's Springbok rugby team, a contract was signed. Reebok found it extremely frustrating dealing with AI and formed a separate entity to fund the tour. For example, they wanted to include a copy of the UDHR and concert information in every box of shoes they sold. This idea was rejected, as was the suggestion that Reebok have a banner on the concert stage. Rather than being seen as a partner in the tour, Reebok was consigned to a minor role being mentioned at the end of the printed program. The company was never certain

whether they were dealing with the foundation or AI and the constant back and forth between the PC, concert foundation and Reebok caused a number of delays.

The Reebok deal highlighted the issue of who speaks for AI in other ways. AIUSA, for example, was happy to work with the corporation in promoting AI membership. The French section of AI, however, wanted nothing to do with Reebok. Some sections where the concerts were to be held wanted to sell concert T-shirts and other merchandise to raise funds. Reebok and the concert foundation, however, had agreed that they would produce the official merchandise to underwrite the cost of the tour. The question of who represents AI would arise in a more fundamental way in the selection of concert sites.

As AI's first truly decentralized project, a number of issues arose that had never been encountered before. At the outset, the concert foundation discovered that U. S. tax laws prevented it or AI from lobbying for any particular treaty or for any specific government position. Therefore the Human Rights Now! Campaign would be limited in terms of the governmental pressure it could apply. Another issue at the outset was the use of a rock tour as a vehicle to promote human rights outside the West. Some within the IS and certain sections objected to the image the concerts would project in the Global South. Tour organizers sought to counter this criticism by including local musicians at each venue.

“Communications/Media”

A more fundamental issue was the role of sections in promoting and participating in concerts in their own countries. While AI had historically communicated a coherent

message from its leadership in London, it now faced a situation in which country context would play a role in communication. In Europe, a problem arose over countries in which certain artists had planned their own tours. To eliminate competing with themselves, a proposed concert(s) in Scandinavia was withdrawn while another in Spain was moved from Madrid to Barcelona. Both of these actions created a great deal of conflict in the sections involved. In Canada the section insisted on one concert in Toronto and one concert in Montreal even though Toronto's venue was too small and would produce little surplus revenue.

In Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America political concerns were predominant. In some countries in which AI had human rights concerns, it was clear that a concert could proceed only if AI's participation was invisible. Thus the concert foundation was front and center although AI development might have been a primary goal. At the other extreme, government officials in some countries sought to be on stage or at the press conference to associate their name with the event. In Argentina, for example, the IEC had invited President Alfonsin to the concert without informing the section although many members there were opposed.¹²

Another conflict in the U. S. highlighted AI's lack of flexibility concerning its mandate. When the tour reached San Francisco the tour production staff learned the hotel they had booked was being by union organizers for unfair labor practices. When the IEC was consulted their position was "AI takes no position on strikes."¹³ This neutrality did not sit well with either the section or the musicians. The tour organizers made a last minute decision to book another hotel leaving open the question of whether the section or IEC represents AI.

Although tour director Jack Healey said more than once that dealing with the artists managers and rock promoters was worse than dealing with political dictators, the artists were probably the cause of fewer headaches than any other element of the campaign. Certainly there were conflicts involving egos and musical tastes. For example, certain artists did not want “soft rockers” or folk artists on the tour.¹⁴ And there was a predictable battle over who would open or close the show. However, all the musicians were on point when it came to delivering AI’s message. Sting, Peter Gabriel and U2 were longtime AI members and supporters and the other artists, including Bruce Springsteen, quickly picked up the message. During the press conferences at each tour stop, in personal interviews and on the stage itself, the artists called attention to human rights generally and to specific local situations of concern to AI.

While more commonplace today through social media, the Human Rights Now! Tour was unprecedented in the status and number of artists speaking out on current issues across the globe. Predictably, the media loved it. According to Lipsky’s model, protest leaders must somehow convince the media that their protest is newsworthy. That need to attract attention occasionally led protesters to consider innovative and even dangerous actions in order to attract attention. During a 1980s campaign on human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, for example, the absence of media interest caused the U. S. section to rent billboards on main highways leading to the U. S. Capitol in hopes of attracting the attention of commuting legislators.

Celebrities solve the problem of media attention and the fact that they are speaking about something other than their music adds an element of unpredictability. Human rights leaders, who share the spotlight with the artists, become minor celebrities

themselves. Healey, for example, was selected as “Person of the Week” on the ABC evening news that did a mini biography of his life. IEC chairperson Franca Sciuto, who accompanied the tour, saw the Italian section benefit greatly from a single television program. The producers of a popular Italian show called *Fantastics* wanted Peter Gabriel or Sting to appear on the show prior to the Milan concert and offered the usual \$150,000 artist’s fee to the project. Sting, Peter Gabriel and Sciuto taped a segment on the purpose of the tour that drew an overwhelming response. Membership in Italy jumped from 8,000 to 12,000 and several publishers volunteered to print AI’s annual report for the first time.

Activists or former political prisoners accompanying the tour or appearing at local venues also benefited from the celebrity spotlight. At the press conference in Budapest, Hungary, Sciuto cited the historic nature of the concert. First, the United Nations Association of Hungary endorsed the tour and printed 30,000 copies of the UDHR to be distributed at the concert. Second, four days before the show, AI Secretary General Ian Martin was able to meet face-to-face with two representatives of the Hungarian government for the first time opening the way for AI investigative missions into the country. Third, Hungarian rock stars Laslo Foldes and Janos Brody were able to share the concert stage with the tour’s stars. The government in the past had censored both musicians.¹⁵

The India concert had proven problematic from the start. With the Times of India as the concert’s local sponsor, the press was essentially covering itself. They had been advertising the Delhi concert solely as a celebration of the newspaper’s 150th anniversary and had excluded AI representatives from the pre-concert press conference. It was left to the artists to make clear that the concert was an AI event for human rights. Furthermore,

in response to a reporter's question, Peter Gabriel said the musicians were disgusted about the high ticket prices and the fact that the newspaper had only agreed to give the Concerts Foundation \$50,000 of a potential gross of \$1.2 million. That said, Gabriel, Sting, and Springsteen stressed how pleased they were to be in the country that—through Gandhi—gave the world an example of non-violent human rights. Despite the obstacles, all newspapers gave enormous positive coverage to the event and its message.¹⁶

“Reference Publics/Civil Society”

Both AI activists and the artists wanted to take their message to places like Moscow, South Africa and Chile. Efforts were made in some cases to gain permissions from government authorities to no avail. The concerts in Budapest, Hungary and Harare, Zimbabwe were substitute locations that nonetheless sent a message. The concert in Mendoza, Argentina fit the pattern better than the others. Ariel Dorfman, the Chilean poet, had suggested Mendoza to Healey saying it was a frontier city where exiles had met for years. Ultimately some 15,000 Chileans crossed the border to see the concert that included three local acts in addition to exiled Chilean activist Veronica De-Negri, whose son had been killed by Chilean security police.

It was the participation of members of the Association of Missing and Detained Persons of Chile, however that complicates the issue of representation. Sting's song “They Dance Alone” had become a kind of anthem for this group of mothers, sisters and daughters of those “disappeared” under the Pinochet regime. A group of them came backstage to thank and serenade Sting at the Mendoza concert. However, the group itself

was divided and when Sting invited 25 relatives of the “disappeared” to join him on stage they could not agree on who should go on. In the end nearly 60 had to be disinvited.¹⁷

In a very real sense AI’s HRN! Campaign was not so much an effort to reach Lipsky’s reference public or third party, as it was an attempt to globally construct those entities. Joel Pruce sees celebrities as a bridge between the West and the periphery.¹⁸ That is, they can connect Western audiences to “faraway tragedies that seem remote.”¹⁹ From Richard Rorty’s perspective they manipulate our feeling more than they expand our knowledge. Sidney Tarrow contends there is no single core process leading to a global civil society or anything resembling one but there is a set of identifiable processes and mechanisms that intersect with domestic politics to produce differential paths of political change.²⁰ Those paths include the struggle to create a space for the discussion of alternatives to state-centered and hierarchical global policy. On the other hand, Saul Alinsky believed that protest’s ultimate goal was to build organization that can acquire stable political resources that don’t depend on third parties.²¹

Yet whether constructing a global civil society or a more resource rich protest organization, non-governmental organizations like AI are not necessarily more representative or accountable than elected governments. Nor, as we see in Mendoza, do they operate from a cohesive moral universe.²² Pruce warns that celebrity-heavy appeals to diverse audiences will be managed by human rights organizations that will then dictate how and what manner victim groups are presented.²³ While celebrities may help human rights organizations reach Western audiences, by directly representing the victims they weaken the connection to a human rights claim. Local groups like the mother’s of the disappeared may be more democratic than many but garner less external assistance

because of internal strife. Western NGOs often prefer to help groups with a strong, charismatic, English-speaking leader.²⁴

David Kennedy goes further and argues, “the transformation of the First World media audience into an international community is an astonishing act of disenfranchisement.”²⁵ It fosters an overwhelmingly one-way street criticism of the periphery by the center. In addition, celebrities themselves bring significant incentives to shift movement frames toward the center and depoliticize or deradicalize movement claims. David Meyer states that celebrities tend to make general collective claims about rights and tend to shape specific group claims into charity demands.²⁶

The artists on the HRN! Tour were primarily attracted to the campaign by the opportunity to take their music and AI’s message to new audiences in countries they had never performed in before. They were willing to play the usual venues in the Global North to subsidize taking two DC-10 airplanes filled with nearly 200 musicians, technicians and equipment to the Global South. Springsteen, for example, remarked, “most of the audiences I draw in the U. S. are white. In Harare, I had the first chance to play to an integrated audience.”²⁷ Yet while racially diverse, the Harare audience was not as culturally or economically diverse as it might appear.

Approximately 20,000 South Africans journeyed North to Zimbabwe for the concert. They joined roughly 50,000 Zimbabweans in a racially mixed crowd that was 60 percent White. And while Peter Gabriel emphasized that the concert represented rare opportunity to get the message in his song “Biko” out to those that could make a difference in South Africa, it does not change the elite nature of the concert audience.

AI's concert in Harare, like its concerts in all the non-Western venues, drew audiences composed of expatriates and Western educated elites. This fact is not surprising given AI's membership in the Global South. In 1979, out of 2,305 registered AI groups worldwide, only 37 could be said to be from outside the West (including 15 in Japan).²⁸ At the time of the HRN! Tour the chairperson of AI in Japan was an American expatriate, Edith Hanson, who became a popular TV actress there. Moreover, the AI section coordinator in Japan pointed out that the organization's focus on individual prisoners ran counter to Japanese culture's emphasis on the collective.²⁹ Even in the West, AI leadership was drawn from a limited demographic. Whites from the Mainland, for example, led AIUSA's group in Hawaii for years. While in the short-term it was easiest for AI organizers to establish groups and sections largely composed of expatriates and elites, it often served as an obstacle to reaching the average citizen.³⁰

The location of AI headquarters in London did not promote either membership or staff diversity. In the decade following the concert tour the composition of AI staff from the West averaged over 76 percent with a plurality coming from the UK itself. For years AI's founder, Peter Benenson, argued for moving the headquarters to a neutral country. His efforts were unsuccessful and his primary motivation for relocating was political appearances not staff diversity. Four of five of AI's Secretary Generals from 1961 to 1992 were British; the other was Swedish.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to both staff and membership diversity was the organization's "work on your own country" (WOOC) rule. Simply stated the rule said sections could not work on prisoner cases in their own countries. WOOC applied to staff and even IEC members. The intent was not only to prevent real or apparent bias in AI

work but also to protect activists from retribution by governments that closely monitored the human rights activities of their citizens. It is clear that in some countries AI would not have been permitted to operate if local groups had taken on local authorities. By the 1980s, however, it was apparent that the WOOC was severely constraining AI growth in developing countries as well as developed countries with substantial minority populations.

The type of audience attracted to AI's rock concerts, however, highlighted a problem more fundamental than the WOOC. When Peter Benenson founded AI in 1961 he said the American civil rights movement influenced him.³¹ Led by student sit-ins, the civil rights movement grew rapidly throughout the South with sympathy protesters in the North. Martin Luther King, Jr., helped turn a spotlight on the injustices suffered by Blacks in the South and many White Americans responded to the protests in Birmingham and Selma. He led a movement that was Southern based and heavily influenced by Christianity. King skillfully blended his Christian values with the country's secular "American Creed" to appeal to citizen's moral conscience. When the movement shifted to the North, however, his moral suasion conflicted with the secular, Black Power politics of Northern Black activists and anti-war activists. In addition, the White reference publics in the North that King had counted on in his protests against overt segregation in the South were less enthusiastic about confronting covert or de facto segregation in their own communities.

In Benenson's vision, AI, through its research, highlighted injustices across the globe in the hope of moving citizens in the UK and elsewhere to act. Their action was guided by the values found in the UDHR and gained additional moral legitimacy because

it was detached or disinterested. That is, the human rights activists had nothing to gain personally from their action.³² In many ways, celebrities who depoliticize or deradicalize human rights claims while at the same time popularizing them were the perfect AI spokespersons.

This initial model of AI has been characterized as resembling a chapel or Quaker meetinghouse.³³ Former AIUSA Board Chair James David Barber was fond of referring to members as worshipping at the alter of St. Amnesty. Much of the action occurred in member's kitchen tables as they wrote letters on remote cases to faraway governments. Richard Rorty has written that such notions as human rights are a function of our security and sympathy. "Sentimental education," he says, "only works on people who can relax long enough to listen."³⁴

Speaking truth to power, however, becomes complicated when deploying it for social change. Moreover, the truth loses some of its authenticity when spoken by representatives of the victim rather than the victims themselves. What happens when the victims seek to speak for themselves or when the issues raised are no longer remote but on your own doorstep?

The late 1980s represented an unprecedented opportunity for victims to speak for themselves. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Cold War drew to a close and activists in the Eastern Bloc emerged as new voices on the world stage. Decolonization was nearly complete as the apartheid regime in South Africa was drawing its last breath. On the horizon, the women's movement was claiming that women's rights were also human rights culminating in a global UN conference in Beijing in 1995. And while the

HRN! Tour contributed information and energy to these developments; it did not lead to a major expansion of AI in the Global South.

Part of the reason for this failure was a lack of integration of the campaign with AI's development arm. The organization did create a Section Resource Group (SRG) whose main activity was to administer any surplus funds collected by the HRN! Development Fund. Yet many sections were unaware of the SRGs existence. The major mode of communication between the IS and sections during the tour was through "Human Rights Awareness Project" circulars. Circular Number 1 announced the tour on July 27, 1987. However, it was another four months before Circular Number 2 on November 13 explained the creation of the SRG. In June 1988, the Danish section expressed concern about development follow-up and AIUSA was asked to contribute to the development fund.

Although there are organizational reasons for AI's failure to capitalize fully from the tour's publicity, perhaps the major reason is the development of local and national human rights organizations in the Global South. In 1981 there were 220 organizations working on human rights and social justice in Latin America. Less than a decade later there were 550 human rights groups in Latin America. For example, Pepe Zalaquette, an exiled Chilean lawyer who was on the board of AIUSA in the 1970s and became chair of the IEC from 1979 to 1982, returned to Chile in 1986. Moreover, AI was in competition with these local and national groups for scarce human right funding. One Nigerian human rights activist complained that northern NGOs claim to represent southern groups making it impossible for local groups in the south to get funding, "[w]hy should we link hands? Local NGOs cannot get support for their work so we have to affiliate with

international NGOs. Then we all hold up our hands to the ‘gates of heaven.’ When the international NGOs arrive at the gate, they drop us and do the talking on our behalf.”³⁵

“Target Groups”

An internal IEC evaluation of the campaign indicated, “almost without exception sections who were visited by the tour or who had a broadcast of same witnessed an increase in interest and membership.”³⁶ This was especially true in the smaller sections where AI was less well known among the general public. Yet this awareness did not translate into a substantial increase in groups or sections in the Global South. And, in fact, AI’s overall membership declined by roughly 24 percent in the 1990s. Nor did the campaign have an immediate impact on governments. “Few sections,” said the IEC, “reported any concrete steps being taken by their governments as a result of the campaign.”³⁷

The major impact of the HRN! Tour was on the organization itself. It served as a catalyst for changes that were already happening by bringing in a new generation of human rights activists. Unlike Benenson and the early founders of AI, they were less ideological and less religious in their viewpoints. Samuel Moyn states that Benenson saw AI as an alternative to socialism and by 1989 human rights rhetoric had replaced socialism as a progressive goal. Yet by 1989, AI’s traditional detached, neutral, state-centered approach to human rights was being challenged from within.

The 1987 ICM in Brazil just before the HRN! Campaign is a prime example of this changing culture. Although there was an informational session on the forthcoming world rock tour, most of the key decisions for the campaign had already been made. The

action in Brazil was focused on the identity-based issue of gay rights. At the 1977 ICM a resolution passed stating that sexual orientation and behavior between consenting adults were legitimate grounds for POC status but by the time of the 1978 Mandate Committee a majority ruled that a person imprisoned “for sexual offenses alone does not fall within the AI terms of reference.”³⁸ Even this position was too much for some developing sections that argued they would be closed down by their governments if AI were associated with gay rights. There was also a lack of international legal support for a bolder mandate. On the other hand, developed sections like the U. S. contended that it was hypocritical to defend the right of gays to speak but not to engage in sexual activity. In other words, “don’t practice what you preach.” By the 1991 Yokohama ICM a compromised was reached in which the Statute was not changed but it was made clear that Amnesty would adopt people imprisoned because of homosexual acts or homosexual orientation as POCs. The difficulty in stretching the mandate to cover this human right issue sparked a drive to expand the mandate more generally.

In 1985, AIUSA led a push for a Committee on Long-Range Organization Development (CLOD) whose objective was more internal democracy and a greater openness to the human rights movement as a whole. CLOD issued a final report at the Brazil ICM focused on growth outside the West. During this period, AIUSA itself fought over dedicating special attention to the rights of women and minorities. Traditionalists argued that no special efforts should be made while reformers believed the rights of certain groups were overlooked. Moreover, AI needed to devote more attention to human rights violations in developed sections such as the U. S. both because they existed and to avoid the appearance of human rights imperialism.

Moyn argues that the rise of identity based politics in the 1970s that “struggled for recognition of identities beyond those of white males challenged the narrow terms of established welfare states, but only in the age of state retrenchment and redistributive failure.”³⁹ According to Moyn, this led to a breakthrough in status equality but at the expense of material equality.

Moyn is critical of AI and the human rights movement in general because it promotes a legal culture that pushes politics aside and accepts subsistence or basic rights in place of material equality. The UDHR was largely irrelevant to anti-colonialism, says Moyn, and does not mention the right to strike or the right to welfare. This makes the human rights movement’s minimal demands for individual subsistence perfectly compatible with the rise of neoliberalism; a neoliberalism that replaces calls for global justice with market fundamentalism.⁴⁰

Much of Moyn’s critique rings true when discussing AI’s early development. It is too simplistic, however, to say that human rights are Western values imposed on the rest of the world or that identity-based movements have given up the struggle for global justice. Steven Jensen reminds us that international human rights law has been built on a foundation of race. The notion of equality was a major reason for the Global South emphasizing human rights and it was the nine Francophone African states that presented a resolution calling for a Convention of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1962. In addition, Jensen credits Jamaica, Ghana, the Philippines, Liberia and other for teaching international human rights diplomacy to Eastern and Western actors embroiled in the Cold War. Jamaica’s labor struggle, for example, was connected though Norman Manly to the International League for the Rights of Man as early as 1954.⁴¹ Moyn’s lamenting

of the passing of calls for global justice from socialist and global welfare perspectives ignores the limits gender, race and identity in general played in their demise.⁴² He also avoids defining what “material equality” means. From an organizational perspective it is much easier to determine which citizens are denied a vote or who is subjected to torture, than to decide what level of material equality beyond subsistence is required. In short, identity groups are self-defined whereas classes seldom are.

On December 12, 1988, AI –represented by Sciuto, Sting, Gabriel and N’Dour— delivered over 400,000 signatures on a petition collected at the concerts to the UN in Geneva. The petition was an appeal to the UN to promote public awareness of the UDHR and its two primary covenants on political and civil rights (ICCPR) and economic, social and cultural rights (ICESCR). UN leaders were more like partners in an alliance rather than a target group in welcoming the petition. Senegalese Ambassador Sene and UN Under-Secretary General for Human Rights Jan Martenson received it in a ceremony at the 44th UN Human Rights Commission meeting. The warm welcome was no surprise as UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar had expressed his support for the tour in March 1988. However, a more specific objective of the campaign was to pressure the UN and governments to do more to protect human rights defenders. Toward that end the HRN! Campaign highlighted cases of human rights defenders in China, Kenya, Ukraine, Colombia and El Salvador. The protection of human rights defenders remained an AI priority and some then years after the concerts the UN General Assembly passed the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders to mark the 50th anniversary of the UDHR.

“Conclusion”

It is impossible to know the extent to which the concerts motivated those who attended them in person or viewed them on television to act. Certainly the AI sections that were in a position to follow-up on the concerts added new funds and resources. Yet the more significant impact of the campaign, as stated earlier was on the organization itself.

As Franca Sciuto said in her opening statement at the press conference announcing the tour on December 9, 1987, [w]hat we need is a new generation – a human rights generation—to move into the 1990s and then the 21st century fired by the determination to see the promise of human rights made real in our time.”⁴³ The Finnish section put the question that would be raised by this new generation forth: “do our current techniques actually appeal to young persons?”⁴⁴

The answer was a resounding no! Young activists were more attracted to Healey’s campaigning style than traditional AI casework. IEC members seemed to sense this when they asked Healey and AIUSA for another world concert proposal in early 1991. The focus was to be a campaign on women’s rights to mark the 30th anniversary of AI’s founding. Although the concert schedule would not be as long as HRN! It would include Australia and South Africa. Artists were particularly keen to play South Africa but there were major obstacles. The African National Congress (ANC) had declared a cultural boycott of South Africa and any concert would require an exemption. There was also the problem of who could afford to attend such a concert since AI was not seeking corporate sponsorship for this tour. Everyone remembered the HRN! Concert in Zimbabwe had drawn mostly Whites. Finally, AI was well aware that it lacked the

infrastructure in South Africa to follow-up any concert. While all of these issues were being discussed the Gulf War was unfolding. This development raised new security concerns. Ultimately the world tour idea and even a shorter regional tour in Southern Africa were rejected.⁴⁵

While another world concert tour was not deemed feasible, major changes were occurring in the organization itself. The influx of younger members spurred changes already underway as those members coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s assumed leadership positions. In 1992 Pierre Sane, a Senegalese, replaced Ian Martin as Secretary General. Sane challenged the research culture of AI and integrated the once dominant research department into other units in 1994. He also sought to make managers rather than researchers the key decision makers.⁴⁶

AI's first female Secretary General, Bangladeshi lawyer Irene Kahn, replaced Sane in 2001. Kahn pushed AI to focus more attention on global poverty as a human rights concern. In 2004, she initiated AI's global campaign to stop violence against women. Sahil Shetty took over as Secretary General in 2010. An Indian human rights activist, Shetty made the controversial decision to decentralize the IS by opening ten new regional "hubs" to get closer to the place where human rights violations were happening. AI's current Secretary General is Kumi Naidoo, a South African who was living in the UK as a young exile at the time of the concert tour. He returned to South Africa to work with the ANC in 1990 and came to AI from his position as Executive Director of Greenpeace.

This diversification of the geographical and experiential backgrounds of AI leadership would have been impossible without major changes in AI's mandate and

culture. A watershed moment occurred at the 2001 ICM in Dakar, Senegal, when delegates voted to replace the term mandate with the less legalistic concept of mission. They then proceeded to scrap the WOOC rule that had delegitimized those members whose expertise came from experience.⁴⁷ This opened the organization to grassroots activists in the Global South as well as North.

The 2003 Mexico ICM also witnessed a conflict between the old and new AI over the issue of AI support for UN troops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. AI had never taken a decision on troop deployments. Members not only voted in favor of UN support but also for working on nuclear weapons testing, children's rights, AIDS and violence against women. Today the mandate covers work on refugee/migrant rights, indigenous/minority rights and sexual/reproductive rights. Stephen Hopgood has characterized the shift from moral authority to political authority, "the mandate was a self-validating core practice, and AI was what it did...once it began to move away from this solitary figure without social content toward issues in which there was more politics—gay rights, women's rights, economic rights—it was choosing sides."⁴⁸

AI has not abandoned celebrity politics. It has incorporated them through the Secretary General's Global Council that includes such figures as Richard Branson, Paulo Coelho and Yoko Ono among others. Nor has it abandoned rock concerts. In 2014 it sponsored human rights concerts in Brooklyn featuring Pussy Riot. Instead of a Concerts Foundation, AI now has a charity fund, AI Charity Limited that allows the central organization to accept legacy gifts and other one-off donations. In turn, AICL distributes the funds through a grant making process.

The HRN! Tour represented a rare opportunity to examine the construction of a global civil society by the largest transnational human right organization utilizing a major popular culture spectacle. No event of this size or duration promoting human rights education has been attempted since. Lipsky's theoretical framework provided a heuristic instrument in looking at what was achieved.

We found the impact of the tour on the organization was the most significant outcome. Although the HRN! Tour was not AI's first campaign to break away from its individual case approach—that was the 1973 Campaign Against Torture (CAT)—it was the first to challenge the dominance of researchers at the IS and led to the structural realignment of AI headquarters. It also led to the decentralization of some decision-making as sections sought more input into the HRN! Campaign. Finally, it demanded a rethinking of how AI raised money. Pushed by the U. S. section, the organization moved away from a “bake sale” model of funding to consider corporate sponsorships. The deal with Reebok was earthshaking in its consequences as sections sought innovative ways of raising funds and Reebok decided to form its own foundation.⁴⁹ The combination of these actions produced a transformation of AI's traditional culture.

Given the status of the artists on the concert tour, communicating AI's human rights message proved the least problematic part of the campaign. Still it raised the question of who represented AI. As what some have called “powerless elites” celebrities have greater access to decision-makers raising the question of to what extent they can represent victim groups. Some within the organization questioned whether rock music was a culturally insensitive vehicle to promote human rights. The campaign's incorporation of local musicians partially addressed this issue and the tour itself went

only to locations proposed by the sections. There was no attempt by the artists themselves to deradicalize or depoliticize AI's already general message of support for the UDHR. In fact, it was the medium and the message in songs like "They Dance Alone" and "Biko" that energized the audiences. Concerts can be seen as counter-public spaces that foster identity-based publicization of oppositional discourses. Even in the age of social media where online spaces are more open, they have less influence and a shorter life span than concert spectacles.⁵⁰

AI's primary objective for the concert tour was human rights education, not fundraising. By taking awareness of the UDHR to the Global South, AI was building a kind of reference public or third party that would support human rights work and human rights activists. Yet the very generation of young people AI was hoping to attract was beginning to raise questions about the universality of human rights. Some feminists, for example, were questioning to what extent the idea of universalism was a product of White, Western men.⁵¹ And some in the Global South saw human rights as a one-way street in which the West lectured them on morality and promoted individualism. In short, some saw it as a form of neo-imperialism.⁵²

HRN! served as a catalyst for rethinking the AI model. If AI wanted to grow globally it would have to change—it would have to take sides. No longer could it remain the detached and neutral generator of information that people used to write polite letters to government officials asking them to uphold universal ideals. Not only would AI have to switch to a more immediate campaign style approach to its work, it would also have to expand its mandate. As it did so it attracted activists and leaders from outside the West

who focused on such issues as global poverty, women's rights and minority rights. In a very real sense HRN! opened the door to the human rights future.

APPENDIX 1

1988 HUMAN RIGHTS NOW! TOUR ITINERARY

September 2	London, England
September 4	Paris, France
September 5	Paris, France
September 6	Budapest, Hungary
September 8	Turin, Italy
September 10	Barcelona, Spain
September 13	San Jose, Costa Rica
September 15	Toronto, Canada
September 17	Montreal, Canada
September 19	Philadelphia, USA

September 21 Los Angeles, USA

September 23 Oakland, USA

September 27 Tokyo, Japan

September 30 Delhi, India

October 3 Athens, Greece

October 7 Harare, Zimbabwe

October 9 Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

October 12 San Paolo, Brazil

October 14 Mendoza, Argentina

October 15 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Principal Artists: Bruce Springsteen, Sting, Peter Gabriel, Tracy Chapman, Youssou
N'Dour

End Notes

¹ Jack Healey and Jessica Neuwirth, “The Human Rights Now! World Tour—A Preliminary Report,” January 2, 1989.

² Franca Sciuto, “Opening Statement,” Human Rights Now! News Conference, December 9, 1987. Amnesty International defines a “prisoner of conscience” as an individual imprisoned for their beliefs that has neither used nor advocated violence. In a famous instance, Nelson Mandela was denied POC status because of his acceptance of violence as a last resort in the struggle against apartheid. See Ann Marie Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 14.

³ The author was a member of AIUSA’s Board of Directors from 1983 to 1989 serving as Chair from 1987-89. He was also a member of the IEC from 1989 to 1991 and participated in ICMs in 1987, 1989, and 1991.

⁴ See Michael Lipsky, “Protest as a Political Resource,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (December, 1968), pp. 1144-1158. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink in *Activists Beyond Borders*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 23-24, describe this process as “leverage politics.” A. Trevor Thrall, et. Al, in “Star Power: Celebrity Advocacy and the Evolution of the Public Space,” *International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(4): 362-385 (2008), believe Lipsky’s model of outside strategy of protest and attention getting is overrated as media continue to fragment with citizens acting as their own gatekeepers leading to the absence of a mass audience.

⁵ James Henke, *Human Rights Now!: The Official Book of the Concerts for Human Rights Foundation World Tour* (Topsfield, MA: Salem House Publishers, 1988), p. 10.

⁶ See Stephen Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006) pp. 76-84. During the celebration of AI's 25th anniversary in Washington, D.C., I met a Soviet dissident who had been a POC for a record 27 years before being released. He had served his full sentence and when I asked why he was thanking AI he said that knowing he was not forgotten enabled him to survive.

⁷ At the suggestion of the Section Resource Group, the Policy Committee decided to set up the "Human Rights Now! Development Fund" and allow sections to apply for grants to promote long-term self sufficiency. See Peter Baehr and Bill Shipsey, "Evaluation of the 'Human Rights Now!' Tour and Campaign" IEC document, July 16, 1989, p. 11.

⁸ Healey and Neuwirth, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 22-25.

⁹ The 1985 Live Aid concerts in London and Philadelphia organized by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure and joined by concerts in several other countries raised funds for Ethiopian famine relief. Beginning in 1976 the comedian John Cleese had organized several benefit concerts in England to raise funds for AI. By 1979 the idea had evolved into the Secret Policeman's Ball involving a number of musicians and gaining the attention of Bono and Sting who Healey would approach for his first concert effort. See Henke, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰ Baehr and Shipsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

¹¹ Amnesty members were rightly concerned that linking the organization to some corporations might send the wrong signals. There was debate, for example, whether a sponsorship from Coke would be proper given questions about its operations in Latin

America. On the other hand, some members failed to realize that traditional fundraising methods like bake sales could not finance the kinds of campaigns being proposed. Two IEC meetings I attended when discussing the tour financing symbolize the shift in culture. In the first meeting we were criticized for looking to corporations for funding by representatives of one European section. At a meeting a few months later a representative from the same section handed me a can of “Amnesty beer” from a brewery they had struck a deal with.

¹² In sections like Spain it was an AI tour and the section wanted to do everything possible to promote membership in the country while in the French section members wanted the tour to have nothing to do with AI. This inconsistency naturally confused Reebok, which had been interested in buying ad time during the Olympic games to run ads promoting AI as well as a television campaign ads in the U.S. to promote the tour. Given the mixed signals these opportunities were not pursued. Healey and Neuwirth, Op. Cit., p. 12.

¹³ Ibid. and personal notes.

¹⁴ Joan Baez, for example, had been a major force in developing AI on the West Coast and helped launch its first campaign against torture at her London concert in 1973. Yet AIUSA board members had to strongly protest her exclusion from the tour until the promoters agreed to include her on the U. S. tour sites. U2 had headlined the “Conspiracy of Hope” tour and planned to participate in the HRN! Tour. A recording commitment prevented their joining the tour and Peter Gabriel recruited Bruce Springsteen to replace them. See Henke, Op. Cit., p. 19.

¹⁵ Henke, Op. Cit., pp. 54-55.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 113-115.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 141-6. plus note and Biko.

¹⁸ Joel R. Pruce, (ed.), *The Social Practice of Human Rights*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 67.

¹⁹ Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality & Sentimentality," in Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley (eds.), *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p.128.

²⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 9.

²¹ Alinsky in Lipsky, Op. Cit., p.1158.

²² Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 8-9.

²³ Pruce Op. Cit., p. 69

²⁴ Clifford Bob, "Merchants of Morality," *Foreign Policy*, No. 129 (March-April, 2002), p. 37.

²⁵ David Kennedy, *The Dark Side of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 23.

²⁶ David S. Meyer, "The Challenge of Cultural Elites," *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 65, No. 2, May 1995, p. 188.

²⁷ Henke, Op. Cit., p. 129.

²⁸ Hopgood, Op. Cit., p. 171.

²⁹ Henke, Op. Cit., p. 107.

³⁰ Hopgood, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 97-100. The WOOC made it difficult to reach out to minorities in the U. S. who were concerned about the domestic struggles for justice and were anxious to link them to a broader context but not willing to give up local activism.

³¹ Jonathan Power, *Amnesty International: The Human Rights Story*, (Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, 1981), p. 10.

³² Keck and Sikkink distinguish between solidarity organizations that base their appeals on common ideological commitments and rights organizations that in principle are committed to defending the rights of individuals regardless of their ideological affinity with the ideas of the victim (p. 15).

³³ Hopgood, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 62-65.

³⁴ Rorty, *Op. Cit.*, p. 128.

³⁵ Keck and Sikkink, *Op. Cit.*, p. 183.

³⁶ Baehr and Shipsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Hopgood, *Op. Cit.*, p. 116.

³⁹ Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018), p. 202.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 60

⁴¹ Steven L. B. Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 73, 102, 105, 277.

⁴² For a comparative examination of the role race plays in social welfare policies see Robert C. Lieberman, *Shaping Race Policy: The United States in Comparative Perspective*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁴³ Franca Sciuto, Op. Cit., p. 3.

⁴⁴ Baehr and Shipsey, Op. Cit., p. 30.

⁴⁵ Charles Henry, "Proposed AI concert in South Africa," IEC Memo, June 11, 1991.

⁴⁶ Sane first articulated his vision of a new AI in a discussion paper for the 1993 Boston ICM. Hopgood, Op. Cit., p. 126.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 96-98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 209.

⁴⁹In 1988 Reebok created a foundation to give grants to young activists who have made a significant contribution to human rights causes through non-violent means. The Reebok Human Rights Award has been given to some 84 recipients from over 38 countries.

Accessed at ugfacts.net/reebok-human-rights-award/

⁵⁰ Sarah J. Jackson, *Black Celebrity, Racial Politics, and the Press*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 172.

⁵¹ Debra L. Delaet, *The Global Struggle for Human Rights*, (Belmont, CA: Thomson-Wadsworth, 2006), p. 51.

⁵² Jensen, Op. Cit., p. 281.