

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Has the Declaration Been Able to Protect Women under Dictatorships and Religious Regimes?

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Abstract

Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is considered soft law, it is widely regarded as Customary International Law, binding states. It nevertheless fails to guarantee even the minimum human rights for women under authoritarian or religious regimes. In such contexts, women are often treated as property, subjected to forced marriage, sexual slavery, and systemic degradation, frequently without legal consequences. To form a holistic view of the circumstances and to strengthen protections for women, this research adopts a doctrinal, qualitative, and interdisciplinary approach to examine how International Law functions - or fails to function - in these contexts. A critical focus lies on the psychological dimensions of power and the role of unfit leaders. Authoritarian rulers often exhibit narcissistic or psychopathic traits, facilitating the institutionalization of violence and lacking empathy.

These autocratic regimes typically pursue absolute power and extreme wealth, often stealing the state's resources and hiding them abroad, while impoverishing or brutalizing their own populations. In such environments, women and girls are systematically denied rights and protections. As the saying goes, "absolute power corrupts absolutely." Current legal mechanisms lack the enforcement capacity to prevent or disrupt these abuses or hybrid wars. Therefore, proactive indicators of cruelty must be developed. For example, because financial gain is a major motivator, cutting off funding can be effective. Ultimately, this study argues that meaningful progress requires confronting not only legal deficiencies but also the psychological and economic systems. Maybe the International Criminal Court should have jurisdiction over hybrid wars employing sexual violence?

Keywords: Dictatorships, Hybrid Wars, Oppression Indicators, Reforms for Accountability, Religious Autocracy, Sex Slaves, Terror Funding, UDHR, Wealth & Power, Women's Rights

Introduction to Human Rights for Women Under Religious Regimes and Dictatorships

Even though the universal understanding of human rights ought to be respected globally, dictators and religious regimes have sex slaves and kill or sell their own people, despite the international principle of states' responsibility to protect their citizens. It is also common that the brutal behavior is mostly targeting the weaker, namely, women and girls, who can only fight with their minds, but not their bodies. IDEA International (2024) indicated that the world was becoming more authoritarian in 2021, as autocratic regimes grew bolder and many democracies adopted similar repressive tactics, including limiting free speech and the rule of law. Over a quarter of the global population now lives under backsliding democracies, including major countries like Brazil, India, and several EU Members, while more than two-thirds live under non-democratic or weakening regimes (IDEA International, 2024). Accordingly, democracy remains in decline. In 2023, 82 countries (47%) experienced a drop in at least one aspect of democratic performance compared to five years earlier, while only 52 countries (30%) showed improvement (IDEA International, 2021).

The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) publish the *Women, Peace and Security Index*, ranking Denmark as the safest country for women. In contrast, the Syrian Arab Republic ranks 171st, with Afghanistan occupying the lowest position at 177th (GIWPS). Even though Syria has been a UN Member State since 1945 (UN Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet. Syrian Arab Republic), it continues to treat women inhumanely. Syria Support Movement (April 23, 2025) reports how, after Syria's dictator, Bashar al-Assad's fell, mass abductions emerged of mainly Alawite women, as a revenge based on al-Assad being Alawite. Activists and witnesses state that these women are being held as sex slaves in a Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) affiliate that controls areas, paralleling the 2014 ISIS genocide against Yezidis in Sinjar (Syria Support Movement, April 23, 2025). Since basic human rights for women can be absent in patriarchal dictatorships and religious regimes, this research investigates whether the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) has been successful in protecting women's rights:

Has the UDHR been able to protect women in cruel regimes?

More precisely, this research will examine the effect of the UDHR and whether women's human rights differ remarkably between different UN non-member and Member States. The UDHR is a soft law instrument, not a strongly binding legal treaty, but it provides the minimum rights for human beings. Accordingly, only one of the states examined in this research is a non-member of the UN, namely North Korea. All the other studied States are UN Member States since the 1940s, such as Afghanistan, Denmark, Iraq, the Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the U.S. (UN. Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet. Member States). Per se, there is a third dimension also, such as the non-state actors of terrorist movements like ISIS, the Islamic State. Here are the research questions:

1. *What factors contribute to the state and non-state's failure to uphold the principles of the UDHR for women's rights?*
2. *What strategies or measures can be implemented to strengthen the UDHR's effect in contexts where these rights are nonexistent or inadequate?*

Applying the Doctrinal Legal Method Across Disciplines

This research employs a doctrinal approach, analyzing soft law, legal texts, and academic writings through a qualitative and critical lens. It also draws on knowledge from multiple disciplines to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges women face in cruel dictatorships or religious regimes, even when all UN Member States should respect the UDHR as Customary International Law. Women continuously encounter issues due to gender inequality and the non-implementation of basic human rights and soft law instruments such as the UDHR. Even when not strongly legally binding, it carries significant moral and political authority and has inspired the development of legally binding human rights treaties.

Other sources include United Nations Resolutions, Statutes of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Rome Statute (RS). The psychology of narcissism and victimhood, and gender studies are essential in understanding the leaders' behavior and its impact on their citizens. Although women should have the same rights as men, this principle cannot always be applied due to bodily differences - women can, for example, become pregnant, whereas men cannot. In line with a broader academic movement, recent research has increasingly employed comparative and theoretical perspectives to advocate for legal change (Hutchinson, 2015). This study also aims to contribute to this ongoing discourse. The analysis is rooted in doctrinal legal research and concentrates on key legal instruments and well-intentioned measures for women.

The Universal Declaration's Legal Weight: Customary International Law Through Treaty Practice

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on December 10, 1948, through Resolution 217 A(III), with over 50 Member States voting in favor and eight abstaining. Drafted in the aftermath of World War II, the Declaration was created

to prevent future atrocities and affirm the inherent dignity and equal rights of all people (UN. Human Rights. History). The UDHR underscores in its Preamble the need to protect humanity from barbaric acts that shock the conscience, while also promoting friendly relations among nations (UN. Digital Library, December 16, 1948; UN. Human Rights; UN Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet).

The UDHR is credited with inspiring the adoption of over seventy human rights treaties worldwide (UN, Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet; UN Digital Library, UDHR, 1948). Charlesworth (February 2008) highlights how, although UNGA Declarations are not strongly legally binding, the UDHR has gained legal significance over time due to widespread international support. Its principles are cited in nearly all major human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as well as some regional human rights conventions (Charlesworth, February 2008). While many rights from the UDHR were incorporated into the ICESCR and the ICCPR, key rights - such as the right to asylum (Art. 14), the right to a nationality (Art. 15), and the right to property ownership (Art. 17) - were omitted from the ICCPR (Charlesworth, February 2008).

Based on the wide implementation of the UDHR through binding human rights treaties, *this research argues that the UDHR is already Customary International Law (CIL)*. This is also the understanding of Cornell Law School, with Legal Information Institute, stating that certain core rights in the UDHR, such as the prohibition of torture or the right to life, have become Customary International Law and are therefore legally binding on all states, *even those who never formally accepted the UDHR [sic!]* (Cornell Law School, July 2022). The International Court of Justice and its Statute (the ICJ, signed June 26, 1945), Cornell Law School (July 2022), and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) define Customary International Law and its judicial body in the following way:

- Customary International Law arises from consistent *state practice* and obligations accepted as law, as well as from *opinio juris*. *Opinio juris* represents the opinion of law, or frankly, a necessity, leaning toward the idea that the UDHR is legally binding
- Examples of Customary International Law are, for example, the doctrine of *non-refoulement* and *head of state immunity* during visits outside their country's borders. Non-refoulement, in its part, is a principle stating that a person cannot be sent to a territory that is not safe because of their race, religion and nationality, for example
- The ICJ settles disputes between its 196 Member States. Under Article 38 of its Statute, international customs and general state practices are key sources of International Law (*Jus Mundi*. ICJ Statute, June 26, 1945; UN legal, Art. 38; Cornell Law School, July 2022 & July 2023; UNHCR).

Protecting Women's Autonomy: The UDHR Provisions Against Slavery, Degradation, and Forced Marriage

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) outlines powerful and inspiring principles for humankind. In its Preamble, it affirms that men and women are entitled to equal rights (UN Digital Library, UDHR 1948). It also highlights that UN Member States have reaffirmed their commitment to promoting human rights, dignity, equality, and freedom, pledging to collaborate through the United Nations to improve standards for all. Article 4 explicitly *prohibits slavery and servitude in all forms*, while Article 5 states that *no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment [sic!]* (UN. Digital Library, UDHR 1948). Furthermore, Article 7 emphasizes that all individuals are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection without discrimination. Accordingly, under Article 16.1, adult women have the right to marry and establish a family regardless of race, nationality, or religion (UN. Digital Library, UDHR 1948). Marriage shall accordingly be entered with mutual consent under Article 16.2. Moreover, Article 25.2 emphasizes how mothers and children are entitled to special care and assistance (UN Digital Library, UDHR 1948).

Authoritarianism and Women's Rights: Reforms Made Under International Legal Pressure

Democracy and women's rights are closely linked in international discourse. As a result, dictatorships can signal compliance with global norms by promoting gender equality - often in ways that reinforce authoritarian rule (Donno et al., July 14, 2021). Based on new data on legal reforms in women's rights, dictatorships have enacted gender-related laws at a higher rate than developing democracies. This trend is driven by Western pressure: in autocracies, reliance on foreign aid and NGO scrutiny correlates with legal reforms for women, but not with changes in more politically sensitive areas such as elections or repression (Donno et al., July 14, 2021). This suggests that autocracies selectively comply with international expectations, using gender reforms as a low-cost response to external pressure (Donno et al., July 14, 2021).

The UN Human Rights Council is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. Its main mechanisms include, for example, the Universal Periodic Review (UN. Human Rights Council). In its 2023 Review of Saudi Arabia, the Council noted a partial endorsement of Recommendation 122.258, which encourages cultural, sporting, and recreational opportunities for women. As a result, women in Saudi Arabia can now obtain passports and travel abroad, participate more actively in the labor market, and benefit from increased legal protections against violence (UN. Human Rights Council, November 13, 2023). Additionally, shelters and access to social, mental, and healthcare services have been made available (UN. Human Rights Council, November 13, 2023). However, earlier in the same year, Amnesty International reported that the Personal Status Law (PSL) still enables discrimination against women concerning, for example, domestic violence. The PSL is based on the male guardianship system and the expectation that women have to obey their husbands (Amnesty International, March 8, 2023).

The Anatomy of Dictatorship: Ideology, Loyalty, and the Decline of Democracy

The world has seen many dictators; yet, many are most likely to take that position. The term *dictator* is defined as a person granted absolute power in ancient Rome. Today, it is described as one person gaining absolute and unlimited governmental power, often ruling oppressively (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Dictators may also employ propaganda to keep their public support (Britannica, Political Science). Larres (2022) defines autocracy as the concentration of power held by one person or a group, representing left or right-wing politics. Loyalty to these leaders is based on "incentives" such as political, security/military, tribal or financial (Larres, 2022). Larres (2022) accordingly divides dictators into hard-core and softer rulers, with the most extreme rulers being rulers like Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. The more populist ones exist today, leaders such as Erdoğan, Bolsonaro, Duterte, and Orbán, who have shifted democracies towards autocracy (Larres, 2022). For example, Hitler had a Messiah complex, as he believed he was doing God's work (Haycock, April 2, 2019). The present autocrats, such as Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, are military rulers with authoritarian tendencies. Generally speaking, dictators often lack the ability and expertise to enhance the conditions in their countries (Larres, 2022). Yet, no matter how much the historic dictators gathered power and money, many of them ended up being killed. This is the case for, among others, Ceaușescu in Romania, Gaddafi in Libya, Saddam Hussein and his sons in Iraq (BBC. News, March 24, 2009; BBC. News, July 23, 2003; Gadkari et al.).

The Psychology of Power: How Narcissism and Psychopathy Fuel Conflict and Oppression, Masking the Tyrant's Failure as Peacetime Leaders

Wars often stem from the actions of power-hungry leaders who disregard International Laws, motivated by psychological traits such as narcissism and psychopathy. These conflicts can be triggered by economic interests, territorial disputes, or differing religious beliefs, with the common factor: *power* (Khorram-Manesh & Burkle, October 14, 2022). Historically, those who seek power often exhibit traits of selfishness, greed, and a lack of empathy - qualities that make them unfit to lead. The most power-hungry tend to be the most ruthless, with many showing signs of psychopathy or narcissism (Taylor, June 19, 2019). Psychopathic leaders have largely emerged in less developed nations with unstable institutions, figures like Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi, and Charles Taylor. In wealthier countries, such leaders are rarer; instead, narcissistic personalities have become more common, especially in places like the U.S. and Russia (Taylor, June 19, 2019). However, Lockhart et al. (January 20, 2023) explain that just being religious is not directly linked to sexist attitudes. People who feel religious in a self-important or narcissistic way are more likely to hold both hostile and "benevolent" sexist views (Lockhart et al., January 20, 2023). When the researchers looked at both religious identity and religious narcissism together, they found that genuine, secure religious identity was actually linked to less sexism - while narcissistic religiosity was connected to more sexism (Lockhart et al., January 20, 2023).

Gender-Based Injustice Under Shari'ah Law in Saudi Arabia: Traits of Dictatorship, Blind Loyalty, and Repression

This research finds that dictators often gain or maintain power by portraying themselves as God-like figures, commanding blind loyalty from their followers. As a result, the public appears to be under a powerful and manipulative illusion about the righteousness of their leaders' actions. Regarding women's law-based discrimination, the Saudi Embassy states that Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state with a judicial system based on Islamic Shari'ah Law. The King is at the top of the legal system, serving as the final court of appeal and granting pardons (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). According to Larres (2022), this kind of blind trust in the leader could be based on fear, brutal violence and terrorization by various means (Larres, 2022). These kinds of violations are obvious, for example, due to the killing of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Press and newspapers are also highly regulated by the government (U.S Department of State, 2019).

Women are under male guardianship, which seems to cause a lot of discrimination for women according to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination (CEDAW) report, urging the state to eliminate the guardianship system (UN. CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/5, October 30, 2024). Accordingly, governmental services for women are only permissible when a male guardian gives his consent. Even though rape is a crime under Shari'ah Law, it is not deemed a crime when it is committed between spouses (U.S Department of State, 2019). What is more, Saudi women state that domestic abuse, such as incest, is usual, but seldom reported, based on fear. Cultural norms enforced by the government also dictate women's clothing, as covering the hair and body is important (U.S Department of State, 2019). Injustice towards women extends to almost every area of life, including the court, where one man's testimony is equal to two women witnessing (U.S Department of State, 2019).

Money-Hungry Regimes: Inside of ISIS, Syria and The Philippines Global Network of Crime, Donations, and Transfers

Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL or Daesh) is a banned terrorist group that controlled parts of Syria and Iraq from 2014 to 2019. The Global Coalition against Daesh, formed in 2014 with 88 partner nations, works to prevent its resurgence (Loft & Brooke-Holland, March 18, 2025). The Financial Action Task Force (FATF, October 21, 2021) reports accordingly that ISIL's 2019 territorial defeat significantly reduced its revenue streams, while it continues to raise funds through both legal and illegal means, maintaining an estimated \$25–50 million in reserves. It finances operations through criminal activities, including looting civilians, extorting oil networks in Eastern Syria, kidnapping for ransom, and possibly trafficking humans and antiquities (FATF, October 21, 2021). ISIL also invests in small and medium-sized businesses (FATF, October 21, 2021). According to FATF (February 2015), funds were moved by methods such as depositing large sums of cash in the United States and then wiring the money to beneficiaries located near ISIL or through local banks. ISIL's primary revenue sources, ranked by importance, are:

1. criminal proceeds from occupied territory (for example, revenue from oil fields, illegal taxation and human trafficking);
2. kidnapping for ransom;
3. donations, including those routed via charities or non-profits;
4. material support from individuals (from, for example, foreign fighters)
5. online fundraising (FATF, February 2015).

Importantly, when people need to flee their countries of origin, it often becomes an international issue. For example, if it is true, the Russian air base in Syria shelters approximately 9,000 women and children (Al Arabiya English, March 13, 2025). Money also plays a role in the international relations between Syria and Russia, as Syria's new leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, seeks the return of alleged al-Assad funds from Moscow, despite Russia's denials of their existence (Al Arabiya English, March 2, 2025). Regardless of the circumstances, it would have been "wise" for al-Assad to transfer the money elsewhere to maintain its control. Another contributing factor may be that, in the case of a bank failure, some governments guarantee the reimbursement of deposits up to a certain limit, such as 100,000 euros in Finland. Gomez (November 12, 1991) reports in these lines how the former dictators of the Philippines, the Marcos family, held at least 107 unauthorized bank accounts abroad. Some were in New York, London, and Switzerland, amounting to \$356 million (Gomez, November 12, 1991). In this way, they concealed the nation's wealth in their own foreign accounts, hidden beneath layers of foundations and complex corporate structures (Gomez, November 12, 1991).

ISIS's Weapon of Power and The Victim Psychology of Systemic Sexual Slavery, Causing Women Permanent Trauma

The systematic slavery orchestrated by ISIS began in August 2014, when it captured families and destroyed villages in southern Iraq. ISIS created a "bureaucracy of slavery," where captive women, called sabaya (slaves), were bought and sold under contracts notarized by ISIS courts (Institute for International Relations Prague, January 18, 2017). The institutionalization of sexual violence and slavery by ISIS represents one of the most horrific human rights crises of our time. What began as isolated acts of brutality has evolved into a systematic and deeply embedded structure of abuse, targeting primarily women and children (Institute for International Relations Prague, January 18, 2017). This sexual trade not only reinforces ISIS's power and control but also provides financial support for its operations. Despite international warnings and efforts, the ongoing instability in the region continues to fuel this inhumane system, leaving lasting scars on individuals and communities alike (Institute for International Relations Prague, January 18, 2017).

Shahali et al. (October 12, 2020) describe how women who received degrading treatment at the hands of ISIS, such as sexual slavery and forced marriage, still carry the outcomes. The frequency and severity of the sexual violence by ISIS

against the captive women left irreversible mental effects, along with physical injuries (Shahali et al., October 12, 2020). Physical impacts include trauma, pregnancy, STIs, somatic issues, social isolation, and revictimization. Psychological effects are grave, from depression, PTSD, anxiety, suicidal thoughts or attempts, several disorders, substance abuse, self-harm, panic attacks, to low quality of life (Shahali et al., October 12, 2020).

The Hybrid Wars of ISIS and SGBV Crimes Against Women: The International Community Is Helpless

One man's conclusion to initiate a war is rarely beneficial for the masses and is often biased. These conflicts - often *hybrid wars* - deliberately target civilians, leading to mass death and displacement (Khorram-Manesh & Burkle, October 14, 2022). Hybrid wars enable autocratic leaders to maintain power through intimidation and chaos. Figures like Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad show traits of narcissistic sociopaths or psychopaths, using conflict to mask their failures as peacetime leaders (Khorram-Manesh & Burkle, October 2022). As the unchecked rise of such leaders threatens basic humanitarian protections, these tyrants thrive in constant turmoil, unable to wage a conventional war. To ensure accountability and prevent future abuses, there is an urgent need for a universal investigative system and tribunal focused on hybrid war crimes and acts of aggression (Khorram-Manesh & Burkle, October 14, 2022).

Whatever wider crises occur, women are often at the receiving end of the aggression built up by the disasters or power-hungry regimes. The phenomenon can be sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) that harms women immensely. The *hybrid war of the ISIS/ISIL* movement is challenging for the international community for many reasons, one being the *non-existent statehood*. Even when the ISIS/ISIL movement calls itself an *Islamic State*, it is not recognized by real states. It is thus impossible to bring a case to the International Court of Justice, since the ICJ cannot exercise jurisdiction in this matter, as its mandate is limited to adjudicating disputes *between states* (IJC, 2017-2025). Even when the crimes committed by ISIS in these hybrid wars satisfy the legal definitions of crimes against humanity and war crimes under the Rome Statute (2021), the absence of statehood - once again - is a problem, as the Rome Statute also limits its jurisdiction to State Parties and does not extend to non-state entities (RS, 2021). The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has provisions on sexual violence, where rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, or other forms of sexual violence are also grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions:

- RS Article 7(1)(g), rape and sexual slavery as a crime against humanity
- RS Article 8(2)(b)(xxii), rape and sexual slavery as a war crime (RS, 2021)

This research finds it hard to understand the motivation for sexual violence, even when it is used as a weapon of war. Accordingly, the International Criminal Court was only in 2021 able to permanently convict a perpetrator of rape and

sexual enslavement in the case of Ntaganda (ICC, Ntaganda case, March 30, 2021). It took the Court almost two decades to sentence a sexual perpetrator, considering it entered into force already in July 1, 2002. (ICC, 2023). ISIS's violence is grave, as it punishes young girls, as immature as nine years old, with degrading treatment, such as rape and other physical abuse. Some survivors describe how women are gang raped and subjected to gruesome punishments, such as beatings, and being forced to watch militants rape friends and family (Counter Extremism Project, July 2017). Regarding the factors leading to rape, Ngubane et al. (July 4, 2022) found that incarcerated rapists in Africa had childhood traumas and adverse experiences - such as growing up without a father - that can contribute to a man's likelihood of committing rape. This pattern was also observed in cases of sexual abuse, where victims sometimes went on to become perpetrators themselves (Ngubane et al., July 4, 2022). Additionally, rape may be misunderstood as consensual sex and perceived by some men as a right or entitlement (Ngubane et al., July 4, 2022).

The Urge to Keep the Power and Finances in One's Own Family: Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely

Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely [*sic!*], states Walton (May 11, 2022). Walton's study (May 11, 2022) on business leaders relates to any tyrannical leadership, as they also show traits of corrupted power. Senior leaders can manipulate information and control narratives to protect themselves and advance personal agendas (Walton, May 11, 2022). They may prioritize convenient facts while discarding or downplaying important but conflicting information. Over time, this narrows their awareness and openness to alternative perspectives, leading to self-serving, insular thinking (Walton, May 11, 2022). Eventually, they risk creating a distorted version of reality, disconnected from actual events, and possibly causing serious misjudgments with harmful consequences (Walton, May 11, 2022). Power can be addictive and numbing, blinding leaders to anything that challenges their worldview. As the saying goes: Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely (Walton, May 11, 2022).

When analyzing the strategies employed by dictators, a recurring pattern emerges: the pursuit of personal wealth and absolute power often takes precedence over the well-being of their citizens. In many cases, this leads to widespread poverty and even starvation among the population. To maintain control, dictators frequently consolidate power within their own families. BBC News (July 23, 2003) reported a striking example of corrupted power in Saddam Hussein, who positioned his sons, particularly Uday Hussein, in key roles within his regime. Uday Hussein became one of the most despised figures in Iraq due to his brutal behavior, which included acts of torture, murder, rape, and rampant corruption for personal enrichment (BBC News, July 23, 2003).

In North Korea, while pretending to be a democratic state by its official name, the *Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, it is estimated that 46% of the population is starving (Kwak, March 18, 2025). This research, however, suggests that photographs of the Kim family indicate they are not experiencing hunger

in any way or form. The Kim family in North Korea has also kept the power within the family. Albert (June 17, 2020) explains how the family has ruled the state since 1948. The current leader, Kim Jong-un, has strengthened his power by removing many top officials and simultaneously enhanced the state's nuclear threat (Albert, June 17, 2020). Furthermore, North Korea is among the world's poorest nations. The elite families hold much of the country's wealth and exert heavy influence over the economy (Albert, June 17, 2020). North Korea is also a closed society, keeping outsiders and journalists out of the country, resulting in a lack of independent media (U.S. Department of State, 2021). The Internet is also highly restricted, as 25 million North Koreans have no access (Burgess, June 8, 2023).

Key Shortcomings and Measures to Strengthen Women's Human Rights in Dictatorships and Religious Regimes

Unfortunately, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has not been able to provide, not even the minimal rights, for women in dictatorships and religious regimes. It is not even about being a UN Member State or not, as North Korea and Saudi Arabia have similar traits of cruel dictatorships. Even when the UDHR is a soft law instrument, scholars see it as universally binding, providing for the entry-level human rights, such as the prohibition of slavery, servitude, torture, other degrading treatment or illegal punishment (e.g. gang rape). Prohibition of forced marriage is also an important

provision (UN Digital Library, UDHR 1948). Accordingly, the hybrid wars are problematic for the international community, as the current treaties of the Rome Statute and the International Court of Justice are helpless without statehood. In states where there is not enough food for the grassroots population without basic rights (Kwak, March 18, 2025), it is unimaginable how mothers and children could get special care and assistance, as in UDHR provisions (UN Digital Library, UDHR 1948). Money, religion, narcissistic leaders, accumulation of wealth and absolute power, as well as territorial gain, are the motivators. Maybe even accumulative and institutionalized hatred against women is a driving force?

As absolute power corrupts absolutely (Walton, May 11, 2022), early interventions are therefore essential. Even the lack of empathy is an essential indicator - a trait in the ISIS movement against women. Accordingly, experts are rarely needed to spot these signs - any layperson can see when a leader becomes extremely wealthy, owns multiple palaces, and lives in luxury, while their people remain in poverty or famine. A poor man cannot establish authority without money, so cutting off financial flows is vital. *However, none of these measures will be effective if those enforcing them are driven by greed or lack moral integrity.* See Chart 1 on the main factors contributing to the failure of states and non-state actors to uphold the UDHR principles of human rights for women.

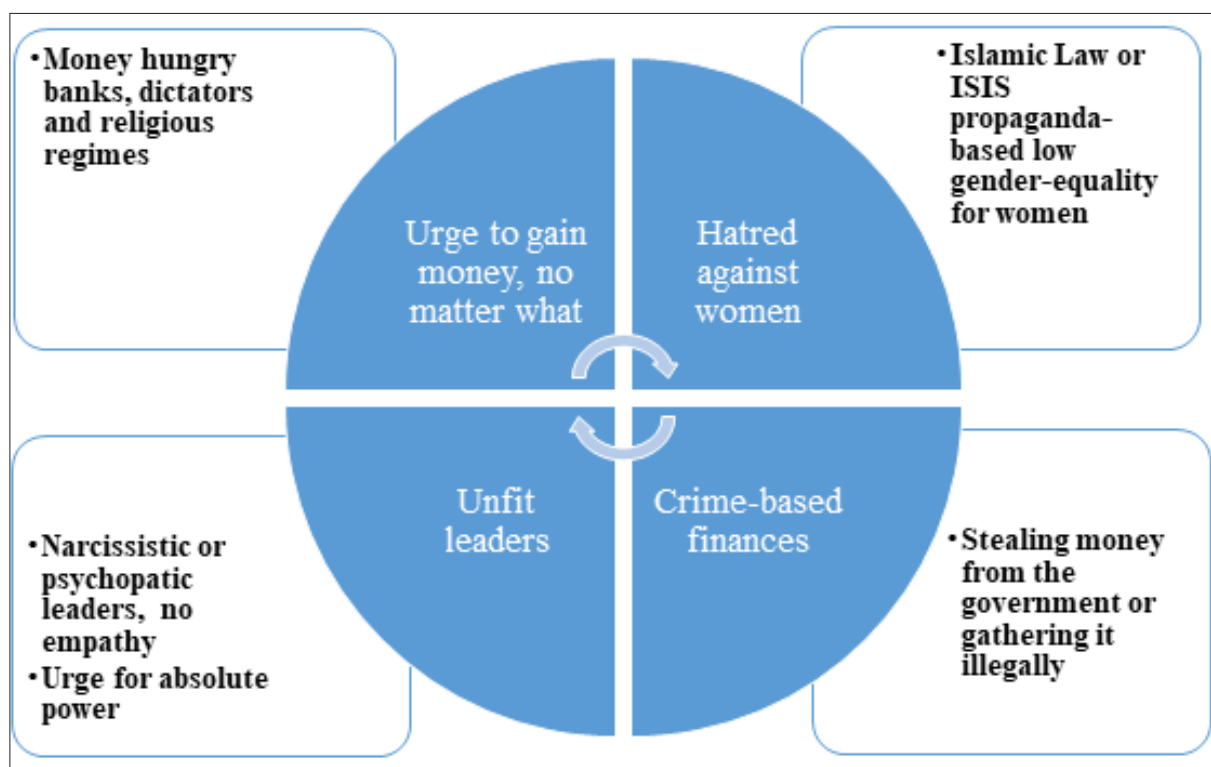


Chart. 1: Factors that can result in the non-application of the basic human rights for women

Establishing Proactive Indicators for Timely Detection of Cruel Regimes

The following indicators should prompt *proactive* international action to normalize the situation for women and girls and share the common good:

- The leader's sudden accumulation of wealth
- The leader's absolute and cruel power, passing it on to their own family, even in democracies
- The leader's narcissistic and psychopathic traits
- No human rights for women, not even the minimum as provided by the UDHR (prohibition of slavery and illegal punishments, such as gang rape)
- No entry for human rights-related press or NGOs
- Killing or starving own people
- No consequences for atrocious crimes

Modifying the Rome Statute to Address Sexual Violence in Hybrid Wars

As the current international treaties, such as the Rome Statute and the ICJ Statute, only have jurisdiction over states, maybe it would be vital to modify the Rome Statute to gain jurisdiction over hybrid war perpetrators employing sexual violence and slavery? If an act of non-state terrorism occurs within a Member State, that State may request the International Criminal Court to assume jurisdiction over the matter. Now that the procedures have established the first permanent conviction in sexual violence (ICC, Ntaganda case, March 30, 2021), the Court already knows how to proceed. Accordingly, the provisions of the Rome Statute reflect circumstances of sexual violence similar to those observed in the case of ISIS. Moreover, the group's efforts to establish a form of statehood strengthen the argument for the ICC's jurisdiction. They accordingly have gathered finances and have a clear leader. Khorram-Manesh & Burkle (October 2022) also suggest establishing a universal investigative system and tribunal focused on hybrid war crimes and acts of aggression (Khorram-Manesh & Burkle, October 2022); thus:

- Establish an amendment to the Rome Statute that enables the International Criminal Court to exercise jurisdiction over perpetrators of hybrid warfare (seeking to establish statehood)

Cutting the Money Flow: Financial Tools to Prevent Funding from Reaching Dictators and Repressive Regimes

When only one indicator of the above is satisfied, the international community must take *proactive action*. It is accordingly so much more challenging to repair a situation after a massive genocide, for example, not to mention the thousands of refugees fleeing for their lives. For example, al-Assad is suspected of having illegally obtained money in Russia (Al Arabiya English, March 2, 2025); thus, monetary early interventions are required:

- Freeze the foreign accounts and use the money to help the people in need
- Make banks liable for having illegal funds in their accounts or accepting them from unverified sources
- Monetary sanctions against the state in a constructive way (as for Russia currently)

- Stop the money flow to terroristic regimes and make it illegal also for national banks to support the terror
- Share the common good with your fellow citizens

Ensuring a Free and Unbiased Press and Timely Reporting on Any Autocratic Indicators

In states where a free press and open information flow are most critical, they are often absent or heavily restricted. It was a shock to the international community to realize that a Saudi journalist representing independent ideas was killed in the Saudi consulate. There is no independent press either in North Korea (U.S. Department of State, 2018; 2021). The information flow is restricted or frankly prevented by multiple approaches, such as is the case with North Korea (Burgess, June 8, 2023). All human rights organizations should also have free entry to investigate suspected cruel regimes:

- Establish more investigative powers for reliable financial organizations (the Financial Action Task Force?), even the power to examine foreign accounts in a preventive manner
- Establish more unmanned drones that can gather information on the proactive indicators
- Establish some kind of connection to closed societies, such as North Korea, similar to the Internet

No Aid Without Rights: Linking Foreign Assistance to Women's and Girls' Human Rights Under the UDHR

Western states have established financial pressure on autocratic states in getting foreign aid (Donno et al., July 14, 2021). This means that cruel regimes violating women's rights must become accountable in promoting, for example, the basic human rights for women, provided by the UDHR:

- Make both aid donors and recipients accountable for enhancing women's rights
- More incentives are created along the progress of human rights

Conclusion: Advancing The UDHR Compliance Through Early Action for the Shared Common Good

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights must be strengthened to provide all women and girls globally with at least the minimum of human rights, such as the prohibition of slavery and torture, and unwarranted punishments. We have to be proactive by timely intervention, to, for example, stop a genocidal killing of a specific religious group. Measures can be taken by establishing proactive indicators for the timely detection of cruelty, may it be starvation, dictatorship, accumulation of wealth and power, or slavery. This can be ensured through the presence of a free and impartial press, along with the timely reporting of any signs of authoritarianism. Accordingly, the old saying seems still relevant, as "money makes the world go 'round'". Cutting the money off is a good motivator to enhance women's rights: we help you if you help your women and girls. It is accordingly quite impossible to establish a cruel regime without any money. When all the wealth is in the hands of a small elite, this research evaluates that it instigates terroristic regimes that could not care less about women's rights. It is furthermore irresponsible to donate or receive aid when there is no accountability to human rights

for women and girls. Importantly, *the common good must be shared*.

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