



HISTORIC STEPS TO ENSURE JUSTICE

RIGHTS  
1990

CIVIL &  
POLITICAL

In 1990, there were no international criminal courts and no pending universal jurisdiction cases. The next two decades saw a sea-change in international criminal law, with many steps taken by national and international courts to bring to justice those responsible for the worst crimes – genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes – committed anywhere in the world.

1993

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is established in response to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the Balkans region.

1994

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda is set up to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Rwanda in 1994.

1995

1996

1998

Adoption of the Rome Statute which establishes the world’s first permanent International Criminal Court (ICC).  
  
UK arrests former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet, giving renewed impetus to states using universal jurisdiction.

2000

2001

2002

The Special Court for Sierra Leone is established.

2003

The ICC opens in The Hague.  
  
The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia is created. Investigations begin in 2007 and the trial of Kaing Guek Eav – “Duch” – begins in 2009.

2005

2006

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance is adopted.  
  
Former Liberian president Charles Taylor is arrested and later transferred to the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague.

2008

2009

ICC issues its first warrant against a sitting head of state, President al-Bashir of Sudan.  
  
The Special Tribunal for Lebanon formally convenes four years after the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri.

2010

As of early May, 111 states have signed up to the ICC.  
  
The campaign to ensure international justice has moved on. A number of international and internationalized criminal courts have been created and many states have ensured their national courts can and increasingly do prosecute serious human rights violations committed anywhere in the world. But there is a long way to go for an end to impunity.

ECONOMIC,  
SOCIAL & CULTURAL

In 1990, many states rejected the idea that economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights were justiciable and could be enforced through courts. Two decades later an increasing number of national courts and regional human rights bodies are now enforcing ESC rights.

Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action is adopted by the UN, with commitments to strengthen the realization of ESC rights.

Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter is adopted, enabling collective complaints on violations of ESC rights.

South Africa adopts a new constitution guaranteeing its citizens ESC as well as civil and political rights.

The UN Commission on Human Rights creates a Special Rapporteur on education.

The UN Commission on Human Rights creates Special Rapporteurs on adequate housing and the right to food.

The Supreme Court of India recognizes the right to food as a fundamental human right.

The UN Commission on Human Rights creates a Special Rapporteur on the right to health.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights decides a landmark case on Paraguay’s obligations to enforce Indigenous Peoples’ land and other rights.

In a groundbreaking move, the UN adopts the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Individuals can now seek to hold states accountable when their economic, social and cultural rights are violated. By early May 2010, 32 states have signed up to the Optional Protocol.

The adoption of the Optional Protocol has greatly strengthened the campaign for enforcement of ESC rights. An increasing number of national courts and regional human rights mechanisms also now provide remedies for violations of ESC rights. However, much needs to be done to ensure that ESC rights are enforced in all countries and that effective remedies are available to all. In the next five years, efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals should include a strong emphasis on strengthening accountability mechanisms to fill this gap.