Part II:
Foreign Policy and Human Rights
Geopolitics and Power:
What Room for Human Rights?

Sir Jeremy Greenstock*

Since my expertise is not specifically in the corpus of human rights, in the law and in the implementation of the laws of human rights, I thought I should concentrate on the big picture: where human rights fits into world politics and what problems stem from that. I will set a context for what I am going to say. I will ask where the problems lie for human rights in the modern world. I will then look particularly at governments – why do they behave as they behave, and how do we get them to improve their approach to human rights? I will then look at the balance between the individual and the state in the light of the changes that are occurring at such a pace in our world, try and draw a few conclusions on foreign policy objectives in human rights against that background, look at the United Nations’ approach to this and what the United Nations can do for it, and leave you, I hope, with a core message. That core message is that in the implementation of human rights law and human rights norms, governments are pivotal, but the good ones are not doing enough, the bad ones are not sufficiently constrained, and we must understand why both those things are true if we are to introduce some improvements and go in the right direction.

The United Nations is a vital centre of norms and actions for the pursuit of human rights, but the United Nations cannot do it on its own. Nor can governments, nor can civil society or the individual. The balance that we are looking for has to come from the interaction between all of those within a sensibly set, strategic context.

What about the context? Now, what kind of world are we living in? Globalisation, polarisation – which is dominant? We are living in a world which is

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