



*THE VANQUISHED* (1936) BY JOSEP M. SERT (1874-1945).  
DETAIL OF THE COUNCIL HALL OF THE SOCIETY OF NATIONS, GENEVA.

# EDITORIAL

**T**his year, 1993, the United Nations have called an international conference on human rights in Vienna. The growing concern for human rights is one of our age's signs of hope. But there is still an enormous distance between theoretical declarations and the effective practice of the protection of human rights. Since 1948, the year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we have made considerable progress in the formulation of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and in the establishment of conventions and legal procedures by which to guarantee the defence of human rights. We have also had the chance to see scandalous violations of these rights. The moral awareness that characterizes our age outspokenly condemns those conducts that fail to respect human rights. Governments have to take into account the enormous sensitivity of society and of international public opinion over the protection of human rights. The problems still facing us are serious ones. On a global scale we see how structures survive that condemn part of the human family to starvation, ill-health, homelessness and illiteracy. We also see the way in which complicity extends the life of dictatorial, corrupt and cruel regimes. We are outraged by the lack of efficient procedures for avoiding obvious violations of human rights or for restoring justice and freedom. What can we do to change those governments which according to reports by Amnesty International or Pax Romana practise torture? How can justice be done in the case of women raped in Bosnia? Who will protect the national rights of the Tibetans or Kurds? How can we organise peace forces to serve human rights?

Some recent events give us cause to think that new paths could be found. Countries are turning to the United Nations as an international moral authority. The United Nations provided the setting for the decision to send a humanitarian, peace-keeping mission to Somalia. In international legal and political spheres there is a growing conviction that the right to non-interference is not absolute and that the sovereignty of states has its limits. The right of states must not be the only principle of international law. At the same time, the Non-Governmental Organisations have become an extremely useful complement in the defence and promotion of human rights. We need only remember their effective presence at the Rio de Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development. We could also mention the moral and political support given the legitimate president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the impressive demonstrations that take place in European cities in favour of the rights of immigrants, the progressive recuperation of democratic liberties in countries affected by totalitarian regimes, the general consensus to act against the drug and arms mafias, and the moves by UNESCO to promote communications media characterized by pluralism and the service of freedom.

On the occasion of the Vienna conference, we have devoted this issue's dossier to an account of Catalan initiatives in the field of human rights. The problems of the countries of Catalan culture are similar to those of other European societies. Perhaps the most striking aspect is the presence of a large number of non-governmental organisations that are active in the field of human rights. The Catalan associative tradition is one of the most firmly established in Europe. Furthermore, the existence of home-rule structures has helped to create services that are more aware of citizens' needs. The political framework of the Spanish state is inspired in the international declarations of human rights, and the 1978 constitution is an enormous step forward if we compare it to the systematic violations of human rights that characterized General Franco's dictatorship. But some aspects of our freedom need to be consolidated. On 10 July Catalan intellectuals publicized the text "Els fonaments de la nostre pau civil" (The foundations of our civil peace), which denounced the torture of young independence activists by the security forces. It was an example of the need to be continuously on the look-out. In democratic societies, the general conviction that no infringements will take place can weaken control mechanisms. Developed societies often use sophisticated methods to cover up violations of human rights. The Spanish constitution of 1978 fails to recognize the right to self-determination of the peoples making up the Spanish state. We hope the general progress towards more democratic systems will give rise to more plausible legal texts and political practices in the field of human rights.

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