The Randolph W. Thrower Symposium

Comparative Constitutionalism

Keynote Address: The United States and The Advancement of Human Rights Around the World

By President Jimmy Carter
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I want first to express my thanks to the Thrower family. I think that everyone who has been involved in public affairs in Georgia knows the tremendous contribution that Randolph Thrower and his associates have made to the state. It is a special honor for me to be part of this Symposium.

I would like to start by reading a quote:

America did not invent human rights. In a very real sense, it's the other way around. Human rights invented America. Ours was the first nation in the history of the world to be founded explicitly on such an idea. Our social and political progress has been based on one fundamental principle: the value and importance of the individual. The fundamental force that unites us is not kinship or place of origin or religious preference. The love of liberty is the common blood that flows in our American veins.

That is an excerpt from a speech I made, a farewell address to the nation after I knew that I was not g

thirty or so major wars are between two sovereign nations. They are all basically within a country or an unoccupied territory.

Some of these conflicts are horrendous in scope. The year before last, Rosalynn and I and Dayle Spencer and others, spent twenty-six days negotiating to try to end the conflicts in the Sudan and Ethiopia. In the Ethiopian war more than a million people have died. In Sudan, in 1988

Secretary. We have tried to address some of the conflicts and some of the human rights violations in this hemisphere through a technique of orchestrating free elections which, as I pointed out originally, is a crucial element in the orderly and peaceful evolution of our own country.

Our first challenge was in Panama. We were invited in January 1989 by Manuel Noriega to conduct an election in Panama.

government takes little interest in the human rights status of suffering and oppressed people around the world, it is almost as though we officially condone these crimes. I saw his as a southerner in the days of segregation. I alter saw the benefits that came to both black and white people in our region when racial discrimination was ended, although not completely, both in a de facto and a de jure way. I tried to implement a human rights policy when I was President. I was not the first President who did so, of course, but under me, every ambassador who represented our nation on earth was my personal human rights representative. Every embassy of the United States in the world was a haven for those who suffered from human rights oppression. They knew if they went there, if they could get there safely, they would not only find a haven, but their plight would be known by the President of the United States, who would then speak out on the subject. But too often the voice of America is silent. That includes not only presidents and secretaries of state, but also great law schools, who quite often pay little attention to instilling in the consciousness of the world a concern about human rights violations.

In closing I would like to read a poem by an American poet about the way Americans feel about human rights. It's called "Hollow Eyes, Bellies,

What could we possibly hope to gain?

A bulldozed house, and olive trees axed,

A dried well – still, common fear never ceased,

Unknown accusers, but prison the same

Freedom for some, for the humans at least.

abuses. There are physicians in every country who can know the results of torture if the oppressive leaders don't want the tortured prisoners to die. And great universities,