

# The Need for New Tactics

## Modern Human Rights Movement



The modern human rights movement has made enormous strides in the past few decades in the advancement of the human rights ideal and the establishment of specific protections. Examples include:

- condemning torture
- protecting rights of women and children
- defined legitimate political activities
- political prisoners protected and freed
- following of human rights standards

We cannot overstate how important how important are these accomplishments or how difficult they were to achieve.

## Tactics in the Human Rights Movement

Three tactics led to these advancements:

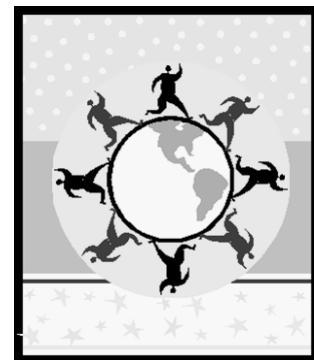
1. Setting international norms that created a body of conventions, treaties and standards
2. Monitoring compliance to these standards
3. Denouncing or shaming government actions and inaction when the standards were violated

## Limitations

It is clear that these tactics have brought about tremendous advances and thus should continue to be supported and pursued. It is equally clear that there are great limits to what we can accomplish in this way and that these approaches are not enough to solve seemingly intractable human rights problems.

## Expanding the Movement

It is the contention of this project that advancing human rights requires the creation of a broader human rights field, one that incorporates many more people and sectors of society than are currently engaged. It also requires the development of more comprehensive strategic approaches that can only be accomplished by using a far broader array of tactics than are currently in use.



## A Vision for New Tactics

All over the world dedicated human rights practitioners have begun this work:

- developing innovative approaches
- building unexpected strategic alliances
- learning from unexpected sectors

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project aims to bring together these innovators and inspire others with their work. Individually these stories are inspiring. Together, they represent a vision of what can be accomplished in human rights.

New Tactics On-line Discussion Workshop, October-November 2005

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## Benefits of Tactical Thinking

In this tutorial, we outline six reasons we believe tactical thinking is necessary to improving the effectiveness of the human rights movement:

1. What we know how to do influences what we think is possible to do; tactics help determine strategy
2. Different tactics are effective against different targets
3. Different tactics appeal to different constituencies
4. Tactical flexibility is the source of surprise
5. Tactics teach participants and observers how to engage in the world
6. Tactics are the training systems for engaging participants and allies in the organizations work



### 1. Tactics Open Up New Possibilities

What we know how to do influences what we think is possible to do; tactics help determine strategy. When our thinking about how we can act is narrowly defined, we restrict our views of what is possible to accomplish. Human history is full of examples where the same solution is tried over and over again without success, or where a new tactic overcomes an old one.

#### An Example: Tactics Determine Strategy



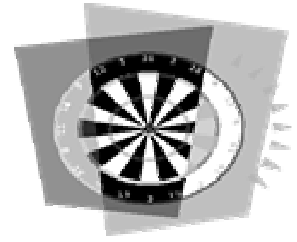
BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (BAOBAB) and Civil Resource Development and Documentation Center (CIRDDOC) in Nigeria were struggling to raise public awareness around violence against women. Few people in Nigeria believe that women suffer different forms of violence. There was little attention paid to this issue in the press, nor in the halls of government, nor in law enforcement.

The NGOs learned of the impact of other tribunals like the Vienna and Tokyo Tribunals and the attention they had attracted worldwide, and decided to try something new, and organize a national mock tribunal on violence against women. CIRDDOC experimented with a smaller mock tribunal in Amambra State South East Nigeria addressing the general topic of human rights violations. This event had been considered successful, attracting very good turn out of members of the public which raised further discussions on the issues of human rights violations in general and women's in particular. The tactic of organizing mock tribunals seemed promising.

The subsequent Nigeria National Tribunal on Violence Against Women they organized attracted lots of media and public attention. After the tribunal, this problem moved visibly onto the public agenda, opening the way for more effective application of other tactics of public education and pressure. It was one important and catalytic event in a longer struggle for the promotion and protection of women's rights as human rights in Nigeria.

## 2. Tactics Affect Different Targets

Different tactics are effective against different targets. We must learn to tailor our tactics to our targets, finding those that will have the fullest possible impact. When tactics fail to affect our targets, we must innovate with new and more effective tactics.



### Example: Tactics Affect Targets Differently



The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) in Ghana decided to address the complex issue of Trokosi, a customary practice in some parts of the country where fetish priests kept women and young girls as slaves to atone for sins or crimes allegedly committed by their relatives. The Commission recognized that using legislation to outlaw such practices may not be effective and may, in some cases, result in the priests driving the customary practice further underground. The Commission chose instead to approach the priests from a different perspective. They engaged respected leaders—at local and national levels—in direct dialogue with perpetrators, victims, other community leaders and the community at large to facilitate understanding of the practice, while providing alternatives and avenues for abandoning the practice without losing status. Their understanding of their target resulted in an appropriate selection of tactics. Over 3,000 Trokosi women and children have so far been liberated as a result.

## 3. Tactics build Constituencies

If the human rights community responds by offering only one or two tactics to engage the public, we will appeal only to the narrow constituency to whom those tactics make sense. In cultures that have experienced repression, people have learned to withdraw from public life. To engage constituencies in cultures such as these we need to offer tactics that appeal to different risk tolerances and different views of social change

### Example: Building Constituencies

Amnesty International - Netherlands realized that most of the members participating in their Urgent Actions were over the age of 30, but wanted to expand the number of young people involved in their actions. AI-Netherlands used the power of text-messaging technology to attract a new constituency, mainly young people, to become involved in its campaign against torture. As part of their efforts to engage this new group, they advertised their campaign at rock concerts and other venues where younger crowds gather.



#### 4. Tactical Flexibility

Tactical flexibility is the source of surprise

As we repeat the same tactics, our adversaries learn to counter them and contain their impact. Creating surprise keeps the adversary off balance. Inflexibility leads to repetition in our thinking, as well as the adversary's. Flexibility promotes learning by both parties.

##### Example: Tactical Flexibility



Otpor!, a student movement in Serbia, used tactical flexibility to effectively combat state repression under the Milosevic regime. They called their approach "Plan B." When Serb authorities began arresting demonstrators, Otpor! would organize secondary demonstrations outside police stations where demonstrators were being held. This allowed people to overcome their fear of participation and keep activists involved, especially at a crucial point in the struggle. It also helped turn one of the regime's strengths against it, thus switching the balance of power. People must be able to safely rise above the fear of speaking out if they are to participate, especially in an effort to overcome a repressive regime.

#### 5. Tactics Teach Engagement

Tactics teach participants and observers how to engage in the world. As we practice, the muscles learn how to move, giving the brain the opportunity to plan subtle variations and improvements. As we practice, it gets easier.

##### Example: Teaching Participants how to Engage in the World

Around the world, people instinctively turn to places of memory to come to terms with the past and chart a course for the future. From makeshift roadside memorials to official commemorations, millions of people around the world gather at places of memory looking for healing, reconciliation, and insight on how to move forward. Memory is a critical language and terrain of human rights. It's here, through the process of preserving the past, where the evidence of human rights violations is maintained and made public, where the issues this evidence raises are debated, and where tactics for preventing it from happening again are developed. In short, these places can be critical tools for building a lasting culture of human rights. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is a network of historic sites around the world that use places of power to teach citizens how to engage with human rights issues. For example, coalition member Memoria Abierta plans to open a Museum of Memory in a former



center for torture to that will stimulate citizens "to make a commitment to solve the problems of our country."

## 6. Tactics are Training Systems

Tactics are the training systems for engaging participants and allies in the organization's work. Some tactics may be short-term and some longer-term. But as systems of acting, all of them require planning, coordination and direction. They create opportunities for many citizens to be involved, to learn and to become more committed to the work of the organization or campaign. Involvement on a tactical level is excellent training ground for younger or newer staff and volunteers.



### Example: Tactics as Training Systems



The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), the creator of the New Tactics project, has instituted an intensive training and supervision model for refugees to develop local capacity for providing understanding and skills for mental health support to rebuild communities after massive human rights atrocities. CVT has instituted the training model in refugee camps in Guinea and Sierra Leone for refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia. The method utilizes an intensive, hands-on training and on-going supervision model of refugees themselves. These refugee "mental health specialists" build their capacity, provide individual and group therapy for traumatized individuals and use their skills toward rebuilding their own communities and support systems. There are currently 122 "mental health specialists" involved in this on-going training and supervision model with thousands of refugees of all ages having received a wide variety of services.

### The Need for Tactical Innovation

Tactical innovation is critical to the successful implementation of human rights around the globe. By expanding our thinking both tactically and strategically, the human rights community has the opportunity to be more effective. In summary:

- A narrow range of tactics leads to narrow constituencies; a broader range of tactics appeals to, and involves, broader constituencies.
- An over-reliance on any single tactic leads to its application in the wrong circumstances, and to missed opportunities to expand strategic targets; flexible tactical thinking creates the opportunity for refined strategic targeting.
- An overused tactic encourages the adversary to systematize a response and makes it easier for adversaries to defend their position; tactical flexibility creates surprise and learning.

