

American and African Human Rights Today

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After spending the first ten years of my life in Ghana, West Africa, I moved to the United States three years ago. I am just starting to learn about Human Rights here. I would like to compare the lack of Human Rights in Ghana to the Human Rights here in the United States. History shows that as countries develop Human Rights get more established. If you were to ask most Ghanaians about their Human Rights, they would not know what you were talking about. Following are some of the lack of Human Rights in Africa compared to the Human Rights here in the United States.

As far as gender is concerned men dominate in their culture and women have very little rights. Children have even fewer rights. In Northern Ghana where there are cocoa plantations there is still child slavery. There are no labor laws protecting children in Africa. This is very much like the slavery here in the 1800s when not everyone had equal Human Rights. Women and girls were kept as slaves in the Trokoshi Shrines run by Voodoo Priests. This can not happen here in the United States or the person will get arrested. In Ghana, men own property, have several wives, and boys are more likely than girls to go to school. Physical and sexual abuse is tolerated. In the United States women can and do own property, polygamy is not tolerated, all children are guaranteed an education, and abuse is outlawed.

For nearly 100 years men and women in the United States have been allowed to vote for government officials. Women often run for office. This is not the case in Ghana. Free election started in Ghana in 1992. Prior to that, the government was under military rule. The legal system is also slowly developing in Ghana. Unlike here, when criminals go to prison they have no rights, their families are responsible for bringing them food. There are few if any laws regarding workers and family abuse. Few people are able to access Ghanaian courts and corruption is very common. In a few cases, when a prisoner is able to appeal his conviction in Ghana and loses his appeal, more time is added to his sentence. This discourages people from appealing their conviction. This does not happen here in the United States.

Unlike the United States there are no social services in Ghana. That means no health coverage, food assistance, foster care, care for the elderly, or care for the handicapped. Here, people can generally receive medical care when they need it. In Ghana citizens can not go to the hospital unless they can afford it and have someone stay with them to do their laundry, cook their food, and help care for them.

Public education in Ghana is promoted to be free and compulsory. This Human Right however is not the reality especially in rural areas. The need for uniforms and various school fees are expenses that many poor people cannot afford. Also there is still the use of corporal punishment in many rural schools. Beatings are the rule rather than the exception in dealing with student misbehavior. Public education in the U.S. is

free and social services makes attendants compulsory. Uniforms are not mandatory, and we have laws that prohibit any type of physical abuse.

I appreciate my new found Human Rights here in the U.S. I now have the opportunity to own property, vote, run for office like my older sister, and compete for job opportunities against men when I get older. My hope is that someday soon Ghana will have the same Human Rights we are entitled to here.