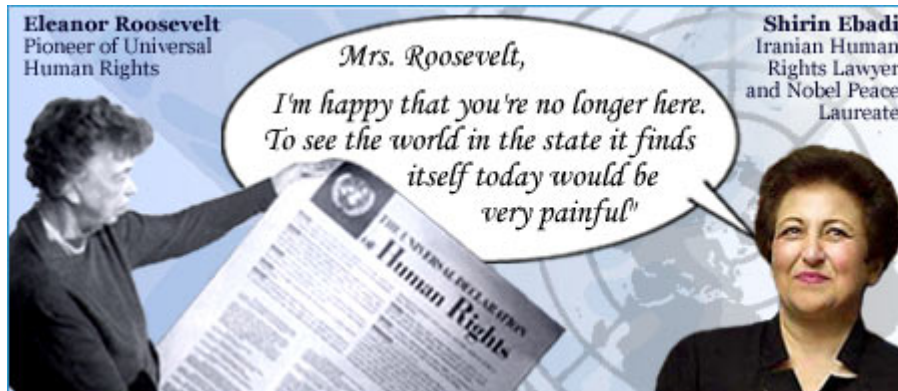


America and human rights

By Shirin Ebadi, Eleanor Roosevelt,
Created 2004-09-05 23:00



Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

Please accept my regards and respects. You worked hard to bring about a better world. You survived the second world war. I don't know if you lost any loved ones in that war. But I know that you are saddened, just as if you had lost loved ones.

I have seen your tears, Mrs. Roosevelt, shed on the tombs of unknown soldiers. I thought at that moment that I was really facing a human being. I have seen your tears when burying the dead. I feel that you really understand human suffering. I have seen your tired, exhausted face after months of hard work. I understand how significant your struggle was to bring together politicians and statesmen.

When the draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was prepared, Mrs. Roosevelt, I saw what a beautiful smile you had on your face. I have seen you struggle and bargain and negotiate to broaden the Universal Declaration as far as possible. I can imagine that to bring about this Declaration, you put your relationship with your husband and his relationship with world authorities on the line. I have seen you celebrate with your family upon the Declaration's ratification. Tired as you must have been, you whispered to yourself: "Now I can die in peace."

Mrs. Roosevelt, I'm happy that you're no longer here. Given the great hope you had for a better world, to see the world in the state it finds itself in today would be very painful.

If you had been alive to see how the children you tried so hard to protect are now bringing about fighting and war in the world; if you had been alive to see the pictures from Abu Ghraib prison, you would have cried. And it would be sad to see such a gentle human being like you cry. Your eyes should shed tears only for peace and for universal human rights. Those should be tears of joy, not tears of shame. For the first time, I am happy to see someone no longer alive.

I'm happy that you can't see what's happening in Guantánamo. I'm glad you're not here to see how they've shredded the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into pieces. You may not

know that America, your country, has not even joined the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Only two countries have refused to sign up to this, and one is the United States. This is a shame on your children.

I'm sorry to bring you this inauspicious news. But I think someone had to report to you what's happened. Forgive me for disturbing your peace. But I cannot lie. Forgive me for telling you the truth, just as I hope you will forgive your children.

I await your reply.

Shirin Ebadi

Translated by Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, professor of near eastern languages and civilization, University of Washington, Seattle.



Last week: Ramin Jahanbegloo wrote to Richard Rorty [0].

Next week: Oscar Olivera writes to Jim Shultz.

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