



Human Rights Watch's World Report 2023

For Prelims: UDHR, India's Initiatives to strengthen Human Rights, Helsinki Accords

For Mains: India's various initiatives for Human Rights and the contradictory instance of human rights violation in the country in recent years.

Why in News?

Recently, the **Human Rights Watch in its World Report 2023** (33rd edition) said that Indian authorities had **"intensified and broadened" their crackdown on activist groups** and the media throughout year 2022.

- It also claimed that the current Central ruling party used **abusive and discriminatory policies to repress minorities**.

What are Human Rights?

- **Human Rights** are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.
 - These include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more.
- The [National Human Right Commission \(NHRC\)](#) of India defines Human Rights as rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual **guaranteed by the Constitution** or **embodied in the International Covenants** and **enforceable by courts in India**.

What is the Human Rights Watch?

- **Human Rights Watch (HRW)** is an **international non-governmental organisation** founded in 1978 as **"Helsinki Watch,"** initially aimed at investigating rights abuses in countries that signed the **Helsinki Accords**.
 - Currently, its ambit has expanded to **about 100 countries worldwide**.
 - It is headquartered in New York City.
- **Helsinki Accords (1975)** was a major diplomatic agreement signed in Helsinki, Finland, at the conclusion of the **first Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe** (now [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#)).
 - Primarily an effort to **reduce tension between the Soviet and Western blocs**, they were signed by all the countries of Europe, the US and Canada.
 - The agreement made the **35 signatory nations pledge to respect human rights** and fundamental freedoms.

What are the World Report 2023's Findings about India?

- **Violation of Human Rights by Government:**
 - The report found the **Central govt. promoting Hindu majoritarian ideology**, provoking authorities and supporters to engage in discriminatory and at times violent actions against religious minorities.
 - It highlighted the **government's discriminatory stance toward minority communities** in cases of violence against women (**release of [Bilkis Bano rape convicts](#)**).
 - Even after 3 years of **[removal of Article 370](#)** and subsequent **[creation of two UTs \(J&K and Ladakh\)](#)**, "the government continued to restrict free expression and peaceful assembly" in the two UTs.
 - Authorities also invoked the **[J&K Public Safety Act](#) and [Unlawful Activities Prevention Act \(UAPA\), 1967](#)** to "arbitrarily" detain journalists and activists.
 - It also referred to suspected **militant attacks on minority Hindu and Sikh communities** in the Kashmir Valley.
- **Welcoming of Various SC Rulings:**
 - HRW appreciated the **increasingly liberal steps taken by the Supreme Court** of India such as the ruling to **halt all use of the colonial-era [Sedition law](#)**.
 - It also referred to the **[SC's ruling on extending abortion rights to all women](#)** regardless of marital status and widening the definition of a family to include same-sex couples, single parents, and other households.
 - It also took note of the **SC's banning of the [two-finger tests](#)** in a step to protect survivors of sexual assault.
 - However, the **SC did not reach a verdict on the [rights of Muslim female students of wearing a hijab](#) in educational institutions.**

What are India's Initiatives for Human Rights?

- **Provisions in the Constitution:**
 - **Fundamental Rights:** [Articles 14 to 32](#)
 - **Directive Principles of State Policy:** Including the right to social security, right to work, to free choice of employment, and protection against unemployment, right to equal pay for equal work, right to existence worthy of human dignity, right to free & compulsory education, equal justice & free legal aid etc.
- **Statutory Support:**
 - **[Protection of Human Rights Act \(PHRA\), 1993](#)** (amended in 2019). **NHRC was established under this Act.**
- **Role in International Convention:**
 - India took an active part in drafting of the **[Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#)**.
 - India has also ratified the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)** and **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**

What are Other Similar Reports?

- **[Human Rights Report on India 2021](#)** (by US State Department).
- **[Freedom in the World 2021 Report](#)** (by US based Freedom House).
- **[Democracy Report 2022](#)** (by V-Dem Institute at University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Other than the Fundamental Rights, which of the following parts of the Constitution of India reflect/ reflects the principles and provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(1948)? (2020)

1. Preamble
2. Directive Principles of State Policy
3. Fundamental Duties

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a)** 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Though the Human Rights Commissions have contributed immensely to the protection of human rights in India, yet they have failed to assert themselves against the mighty and powerful. Analysing their structural and practical limitations, suggest remedial measures. **(2021)**

Source: TH

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