

U.N. human rights goals fall short

by Catherine Siegner

Saturday, December 10, was the 35th anniversary of the ratification of the United Nations Human Rights Declaration, and in the years since Eleanor Roosevelt humored and cajoled 52 disparate nations into signing it, the world has not lived up to the document's aspirations of guaranteed basic human rights for all people.

Walter Hoffman, executive vice-president of the Campaign for U.N. Reform and a New Jersey human rights attorney, brought that message to Portland Thursday at a Portland State University speech marking National Human Rights Week.

Hoffman called the U.N. Declaration "on par with the Magna Carta and the Declaration of Independence of the United States" in its far-sighted vision of the rights of humankind. He outlined the U.N.'s role in protecting each person's human rights, including "minimal guarantees of human rights for illegal aliens; Southeast Asian refugees; Blacks looking for decent housing; women seeking equal pay for equal work, and those suffering from apartheid in South Africa."

In assessing how well governments have adhered to the standards set by the U.N. Declaration, Hoffman said the articles guaranteeing various rights must be applied to specific situations.

Hoffman cited Article 14 of the Declaration, which states that, "Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum in another country," but said clients he has represented hear nothing from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for years on end. "Stars such as athletes or ballet dancers get asylum fairly quickly," he said. "Someone not important has to wait and wait."

Article 17 of the U.N. Declaration guarantees everyone the right to own property either alone or with others, Hoffman explained. This contrasts bleakly with the situation of one of his clients, a Black man, who arranged for a contractor to build a house, but the contractor refused when he learned the man was Black.

There are additional documents that have been conceived and drawn up at the United Nations, Hoffman said, which the United States has never ratified or signed. These include the U.N. Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights. Under these covenants, Hoffman said, individuals may file petitions and complaints against their respective governments in a judicial realm beyond their own boundaries where their case may be impartially reviewed.

Of particular concern to Hoffman is the U.S.' refusal to ratify the 1948 Genocide Convention signed by President Harry Truman. "Although every president up through

Carter has recommended ratification, we have never done so," he said. "Because of our only ratifying two or three [U.N. documents] we have been accused of hypocrisy on civil rights."

"How can we criticize the terrible, terrible system of apartheid in South Africa when we haven't ratified the covenant on suppression and punishment of apartheid?" he asked. "We've done a very stupid thing."

Hoffman said those opposing the U.S. signing, for example, the Gen-

ocide Convention, argue that by signing we could be accused of genocide relating to the American Indians.

He admitted the U.S. "has a fairly good record on human rights compared to some other countries," but that "we could still improve things."

Hoffman suggested the U.N. be expanded into a world-wide watchdog for human rights; put in a role where it "can investigate and spotlight human rights violations."

Hoffman said he looks at the

world in a "global way," not in terms of local areas only. He said this kind of view is necessary to avoid nationalistic narrowmindedness that can cause needless divisions among the people of the world.

"We are on this planet together and this is a very tiny planet. What happens in one part of the globe affects all the rest of us," he said. "The denial of human rights can be, and often is, a cause of war. It can be the spark that can light up a nuclear war."

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Economics

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same time. Employment figures are important since if employment rises as fast or faster than production does, then productivity per worker may actually be decreasing even as more goods are produced, Stein explained. On the other hand, if the increase in jobs is really only two percent while the increase in goods produced is larger (let us say the current six percent), then productivity may have increased.

Thus, cautioned Stein, although both the employment and growth rates seem to be rising, it doesn't necessarily mean America's productivity is also doing so.

Employment is up now, said Stein, largely as a result of unusually high consumer demand and a change in business inventory behavior: consumers are buying more and businesses are stockpiling goods. Stein refused to say just what an "acceptable" level of unemployment is, but echoed the Administration in predicting an eight percent rate by the end of 1984. He called this an "optimum rate" the market will produce if inflation is permanently reduced.

Stein had very little to say when asked whether he foresaw any change in the Black/white employment rate discrepancy being produced by the changes in our economic structure, except that it is a problem which "has existed for a long time through various changes."