

# HOW FREE IS YOUR COUNTRY?

Can human freedom be measured? The UNDP appears to think so.

Freedom is the newest human development factor included in the Human Development Report 1991 of the UNDP. The recently formulated Human Freedom Index (HFI) has been used to rank countries according to their levels of human freedom. (See Box p. 32)

The freedom indicators used in the UNDP measurement include: *the right to ethnic language, the freedom from extra-judicial killings or 'disappearances', the freedom for political and legal equality for women, the legal right to a prompt trial and the personal right to practice any religion.*

The Human Development Index (HDI), which was introduced by the UNDP in 1990, is based on three indicators: life expectancy, adult literacy and 'purchasing power'. Although the Human Development Report 1990 conceded that "human development is incomplete without human freedom," the HDI is yet to reflect the factor of freedom because "freedom is easier to talk about than to measure." The problem is that there isn't enough reliable data available.

In the 1991 Report, the human freedom ranking is based on 1985 data and covers 88 countries. The Human Freedom Index, designed by Charles Humana, is said to be the most systematic of the human rights classifications and measurements drawn up so far. Existing systems differ in concept, definition and coverage.

"Applying a system of measurement to human freedoms," the Report reiterates, "will always be a precarious exercise."

This involves two difficult areas: deciding what constitutes serious violations of rights or curtailments of freedom, and working out the relative importance of different rights. It is likely, however, that the Humana

Index will be contested on its gradation of freedom violations - ranging from 'some violations or infringements' to 'substantial oppression' on to 'total denial'. In its present ranking of selected countries (see box) the HFI computation is based on an even simpler method of judgement - a 'one' - 'zero' approach between 'freedom guaranteed' and 'freedom violated'.

The Index has also been accused of "insensitivity" to certain kinds of freedoms, including the 'collective freedoms of a people' from 'foreign' rule or control, and their relationship to individual human rights. Dr. Chandra Muzaffar in a recent *Third World Network Features* critique of the Human Freedom Index says: "How much real political freedom do most states today enjoy in the international arena? For the freedom that a State enjoys in the international arena has a direct bearing upon the individual citizen's ability to shape the political future of his society. There is no point in advocating more 'participatory' development if the options available to a people to develop are severely limited by an international system dominated by a few powerful actors."

The Report does not doubt that many questions will be raised on the HFI and believes that "this will encourage more systematic research and studies on human freedom, which today are very scarce."

## ... AND HOW FAIR?

The 1991 Human Development Index has been made more sensitive to the factors of income and gender.

A distinct improvement on the HDI measurement of last year has been the construction of a gender-sensitive HDI - applying the disparity between the female and male HDIs to the overall HDI.

It has been possible to obtain, for 30 countries, female and male estimates of life expectancy, adult literacy, wage rates and mean years of schooling. Separate computations of female and male HDIs reveal a remarkable pattern of gender discrimination even though

the HDI is not expected to capture its full extent.

The female-male wage ratio ranges from a low of 51.8% in Japan to a high of 96.6% in Paraguay. In labour force participation, the lowest ratio is 26% in Paraguay with the highest 87% in Czechoslovakia. The female-male wage-income ratio was obtained by multiplying these two ratios.

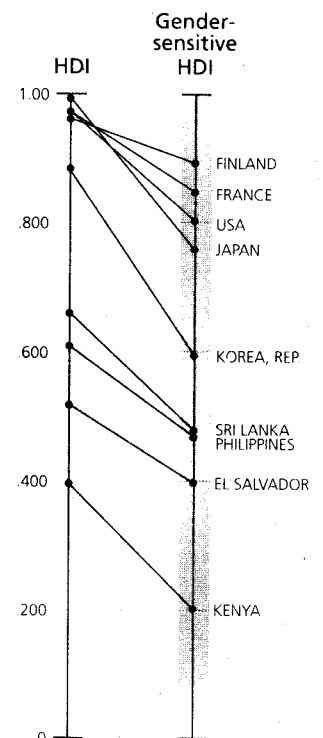
The female HDI gained from the near equal or better ratio in life expectancy but lost somewhat from unequal access to education.

The female HDI, as a percentage of the male HDI, is as low as 52% in Kenya and 65% in Singapore. Nine countries have ratios below 75% and only four - Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Czechoslovakia - have ratios of 90% or more.

These inequalities were reflected in the overall HDI of the country by multiplying the HDI by the ratio of female to male HDI. If the country has full equality, its HDI is unaffected.

The HDI values for all 30 countries declined. Japan dropped from its number 1 position to number 17 and Finland moved up from number 12 to number 1.

Sri Lanka's HDI was transformed from 0.665 to 0.484 - a drop of 27 per cent.



## The human freedom index

The goal of human development is to increase people's choices. But for people to exercise their choices, they must enjoy freedom—cultural, social, economic and political.

The *World Human Rights Guide*, by Charles Human, uses 40 indicators to measure freedom:

### *The right to*

- travel in own country
- travel abroad
- peacefully associate and assemble
- teach ideas and receive information
- monitor human rights violations
- ethnic language

### *The freedom from*

- forced or child labour
- compulsory work permits
- extra-judicial killings or "disappearances"
- torture or coercion
- capital punishment
- corporal punishment
- unlawful detention
- compulsory party or organization membership

- compulsory religion or state ideology in schools
- arts control
- political censorship of press
- censorship of mail or telephone-tapping

### *The freedom for*

- peaceful political opposition
- multiparty elections by secret and universal ballot
- political and legal equality for women
- social and economic equality for ethnic minorities
- independent newspapers
- independent book publishing
- independent radio and television networks
- independent courts
- independent trade unions

### *The legal right to*

- a nationality
- being considered innocent until proved guilty
- free legal aid when necessary and counsel of own choice
- open trial
- prompt trial

- freedom from police searches of home without a warrant
- freedom from arbitrary seizure of personal property

### *The personal right to*

- interracial, interreligious or civil marriage
- equality of sexes during marriage and for divorce proceedings
- homosexuality between consenting adults
- practice any religion
- determine the number of one's children

Drawing on the 1985 data in the *World Human Rights Guide* and assigning a "one" to each freedom protected and a "zero" to each freedom violated, the country ranking in table 1.5 emerges. Clearly, this ranking for the human freedom index (HFI) needs updating. Adding recent information for only one of the 40 aspects of freedom—multiparty elections by secret and universal ballot—makes for many changes. Eighteen countries see their HFI improve.

The world today is a freer world. An updated human freedom index based on a limited number of observable and objectively measurable key indicators is more than overdue.

## HFI ranking of selected countries

Country total of freedoms, 1985

### *High freedom ranking (31-40)*

- 38 Sweden
- 38 Denmark
- 37 Netherlands
- 36 Finland
- 36 New Zealand
- 36 Austria
- 35 Norway
- 35 France
- 35 Germany, Fed. Rep. of
- 35 Belgium
- 34 Canada
- 34 Switzerland
- 33 USA
- 33 Australia
- 32 Japan
- 32 United Kingdom
- 31 Greece
- 31 Costa Rica

### *Medium freedom ranking (11-30)*

- 30 Portugal
- 30 Papua New Guinea
- 29 Italy
- 29 Venezuela
- 27 Ireland
- 26 Spain
- 26 Hong Kong
- 25 Botswana
- 25 Trinidad and Tobago
- ▲ 25 Argentina

- 25 Jamaica
- 24 Ecuador
- 23 Senegal
- ▲ 21 Panama
- 21 Dominican Rep.
- 19 Israel
- ▲ 18 Brazil
- 18 Bolivia
- 16 Peru
- 15 Mexico
- 14 Korea, Rep. of
- 14 Colombia
- 14 Thailand
- 14 India
- 14 Sierra Leone
- 13 Nigeria
- ▲ 13 Benin
- 11 Singapore
- 11 Sri Lanka
- 11 Tunisia
- 11 Egypt
- 11 Ghana

### *Low freedom ranking (0-10)*

- ▲ 10 Poland
- ▲ 10 Paraguay
- ▲ 10 Philippines
- 10 Tanzania, U. Rep. of
- 9 Malaysia
- 9 Zambia
- ▲ 9 Haiti

▲ Recent move towards greater freedom (multiparty elections held)

- 8 Yugoslavia
- ▲ 8 Chile
- 8 Kuwait
- ▲ 8 Algeria
- 8 Zimbabwe
- 8 Kenya
- 8 Cameroon
- ▲ 7 Hungary
- 7 Turkey
- 7 Morocco
- 7 Liberia
- ▲ 7 Bangladesh
- ▲ 6 German Dem. Rep.
- ▲ 6 Czechoslovakia
- 6 Saudi Arabia
- 6 Mozambique
- 5 Cuba
- 5 Syrian Arab Rep.
- 5 Korea, Dem. Rep. of
- 5 Indonesia
- 5 Viet Nam
- ▲ 5 Pakistan
- 5 Zaire
- ▲ 4 Bulgaria
- ▲ 3 USSR
- 3 South Africa
- 2 China
- 2 Ethiopia
- ▲ 1 Romania
- 1 Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
- 0 Iraq

Note: Ranking of countries with the same degree of freedom is done in accordance with HDI ranking.

UNDP