



# The Right Livelihood Award

*for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people*

## Theo van Boven (Netherlands)

### Honorary Award (1985)



*...for speaking out on human rights abuse without fear or favour in the international community.*

Theo van Boven

Theo van Boven was born in the Netherlands in 1934 and obtained a doctorate in law in 1967. He was for ten years, until 1977, a lecturer in human rights at the University of Amsterdam and from 1970 to 1975 he was the Netherlands representative on the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. From 1977 to 1982 he was Director of the UN Division of Human Rights, since that time he has been Professor of Law at Maastricht University. In addition, Van Boven has served on numerous Councils and Committees dealing with human rights, including the Council of the International Institute of Human Rights (France) and the European Human Rights Foundation (UK), of which he was the Chairman.

In later years, Theo van Boven continued to work for human rights in various fora. He served as an expert member of the UN Subcommission on Human Rights and as a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Reparation to Victims of Gross Violations of Human Rights. He was a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, one of the treaty bodies of the UN. He was the first registrar of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. More recently he was the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.

Van Boven has been associated with the work of a number of non-governmental human rights organizations. For instance, he was a commissioner on the Executive Committee and a vice-president of the International Commission of Jurists (Geneva). He served as the moderator of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches and he is still on the Board of Directors of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, a Tokyo based human rights organization. He was also a co-director of the Maastricht Center for Human Rights.

As director of the UN Division of Human Rights, Van Boven argued consistently that concern for human rights should not be a marginal activity within the UN system, but should become the core element of development strategies on all levels. He sought to break through the selective approach of the UN in human rights matters, and to deal more consistently with the gross violations of human

rights in a large number of countries on all continents, including enforced disappearances, torture, summary and arbitrary execution, and discrimination against indigenous peoples.

He contributed to the creation of fact-finding mechanisms in these areas, in order to bring pressure on defaulting authorities and to provide relief to victims. He was concerned also to identify the root causes of human rights violations in connection with the development process, patterns of economic and political domination, militarization of societies and racial discrimination. In addition, he worked hard to strengthen the links of his office with non-governmental organizations.

Van Boven's uncompromising approach to these matters led to major policy differences with the UN Secretary General, which in turn led to his UN contract being terminated in 1982.

In 2009, he received an honorary degree of the University of Buenos Aires.

### **Quotation**

*"Peace, development and human rights are essentially inter-related, inter-dependent and indivisible."*

Theo van Boven

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