

Diane La Voy on the institutionalization of human rights

This is 2006. For people who are looking at that issue now, I would just ask that they remember that in 1974, for example when WOLA was set up, the word "human rights" meant little other than if you look in the back of your history book there is some section there that's a little boring, that you probably didn't read that carefully, about the UN conventions on human rights. And then if you are interested in the subject you might have read about efforts to ratify various human rights conventions, fruitless efforts over the years in the U.S. Senate to do that. Nobody was paying attention; a few people were. That's what you might read about and human rights per se, as a word, it had little juice. It didn't have a movement behind it. It wasn't something that mattered in politics. And it didn't fall into the bureaucratic requirements that any Foreign Service Officer or anybody else had to meet. Nobody had to certify anything; nobody had to say that the human rights in a given country were good, bad, or indifferent. George made a big difference in changing that entire terrain.