

## Richard Schifter on the beginnings of the human rights movement

The basic human rights standards were first articulated in the Charter of the United Nations in 1945 and then elaborated on under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. However, except for the case of South Africa, which began to be paid attention to sometime in the early-50s—actually, beginning in the late 40s, but big in the early 50s—aside from South Africa, there was very little done to carry forward all the principals laid down in the Universal Declaration. If you think about it, at the time the Universal Declaration was adopted Joseph Stalin was still in charge of the Soviet Union. Nobody did anything about that. No arguments were raised against Joe Stalin. The reason for that is that Mrs. Roosevelt and the people who were working on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the great majority of them, were not professional diplomats. When they went home, the professional diplomats took over. The professional diplomats had for a long time been guided by the idea that what a country does to its own citizens is not in any way something that another country should engage in.