

Rule of Law:

A Peaceful Tomorrows Program

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How do groups of people, small and large, manage to live, work, worship, and play together peacefully? The rules for living together peacefully are laws, made and accepted by the people who must abide by them. This is essential to making government work for all the people over time. In the United States, we call this form of government “for the people and by the people,” also known as a democracy.

The U.S. State Department’s introduction to the “[Principles of Democracy](#)” defines the rule of law as follows:

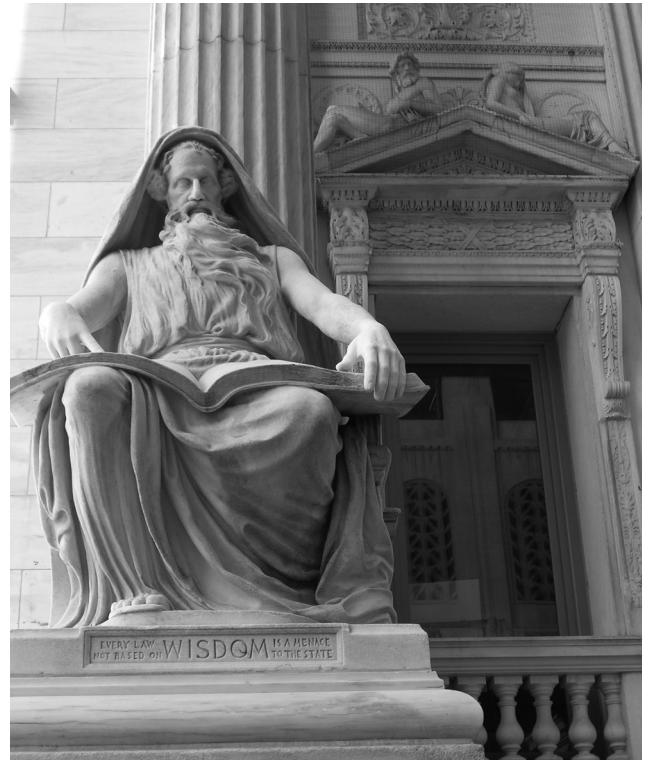
“Rule of law means that no individual... stands above law. Democratic governments exercise authority by way of law and are themselves subject to law’s constraints.

Laws should express the will of the people, not the whims of kings, dictators, military officials, religious leaders, or self-appointed political parties.

Citizens in democracies are willing to obey the laws of their society, then, because they are submitting to their own rules and regulations. Justice is best achieved when the laws are established by the very people who must obey them.”

Expecting Fairness

As the child of immigrant parents, growing up in New York City half a century ago, I learned in our free, public school system to expect justice, but a justice that includes fairness as a part of everyday life. It has been discovered recently by scientists that people, and even many animals, expect fairness. Laws dispensed with fairness are satisfying as justice: without fairness, they are impersonal rules. This sense of justice became an integral part



of my life, what I expected from my government and my fellow citizens as natural, a part of me, just like breathing.

This sense of fairness and justice are embodied in the architecture of a [beautiful court building in New York City](#). One of the marble statues that guards the entrance to this place of law is named Wisdom. At the base of Wisdom’s statue it says, “Laws not based on Wisdom are a menace to the state.” This quote embodies the meaning of living under the law as an American to me. Just laws keep us at peace with each other and are the foundation of our democracy that has seen no war on our soil for 150 years. If laws are unjust, people do not want to abide by them.

Unfortunately, we have not provided the same peace for others who are not on our soil. We have waged war in many other countries, and most recently, the government has begun a war that has no physical boundaries, the so-called “War on Terror,” motivated by the attacks on U.S. soil of 9/11.

Revenge: A Train to Nowhere

I lost my nephew in those horrible events of 9/11, and I have felt the pain very personally. At first, I thought the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan seemed right. “We must get those who did this to us,” I thought. And then I learned of how many innocent Afghanis were being killed in the name of my family, and I realized that was not justice. Killing others is no relief from the pain of your own loss. Revenge is a train to nowhere.

Innocent people are not the only casualties of this “War on Terror”; many just laws have been overridden by legislative overreactions and even political grand-standing. A prime offender is the Patriot Act. (See pp. 44-45 of Issue #33 of *The Change Agent* for more on the Patriot Act.) The Patriot Act violates many of our laws and limits the freedoms we have chosen to enshrine in the Constitution. It gives the government the right to invade your privacy and crushes the very heart of our personal liberties.

When just laws are denied, our first line of action is to be politically active, make sure the just

laws are reinstated, and see the repeal of those that are not just. This law is a menace to our state as it denies justice. We at Peaceful Tomorrows are dedicated to restoring the rule of law, as it was before the overreactions to 9/11.

Restore the Rule of Law

Peaceful Tomorrows’ Rule of Law campaign aims to mobilize and amplify the voices of 9/11 family members who support closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay in order to restore the rule of law, and see the end of torture by any name. It is a campaign to put an end to indefinite detentions and other violations of human rights that have become part of the legacy of the U.S. War on Terror. We fight against the attempts to legalize indefinite detention; we stand against military tribunals and are for fair trials in federal courts; and we stand up for the rights of immigrants and people of all religions and races. I, and other members, strongly support the right to build the Park51 Islamic Community Center in Manhattan (falsely named by the press as “the mosque at Ground Zero”).

Our Voices; Our Choices

We work toward our goals in a number of ways. We send our members to speak at events; we write articles and appear on TV and radio. We write and visit Congress and urge legislators to restore the rule of law. We organize events to involve and educate the public such as our “Say Your Peace,” a short video contest. Our voices, because they are the voices of those who experienced the ultimate loss of loved ones, are often given attention and are heard by our legislators.

Your voice can be heard too if you participate in government by being aware of current events and contacting your legislators. I also encourage non-citizens who wish to become citizens to actively be aware of current events and to join non-profit groups that protect your interests. Democracy works only if each of us are fully involved.

Sources: <<http://usinfo.org/enus/government/overview/law.html>>; <www.nyc.gov/html/dcas/html/resources/man_appellatecourt.shtml>; <www.peacefultomorrows-sayyourpeace.org>



Valerie Lucznikowska (right) with another Peaceful Tomorrows member, Adele, at a demonstration in support of Rule of Law. Their sign refers to Habeas Corpus – a legal principle that says all people have a right to appear before a court to hear the charges against them and to challenge whether their detention is legal.