



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/CDZS3895>

‘Christina Szurlej (Editor), Human Rights: Principles and Practice in Canada and Internationally’

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To cite this book review: Jatinder Mann, ‘Christina Szurlej (Editor), Human Rights: Principles and Practice in Canada and Internationally’, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 6 (September 2026): 196-197, <https://doi.org/10.52230/KLMY7970>

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Christina Szurlej (Editor), *Human Rights: Principles and Practice in Canada and Internationally* (Emond Publishing, 2026), 320pp. Paperback. C\$66. ISBN: 978-1-7746-2730-3.

This is the first time that I have ever reviewed what is essentially a textbook in the over one hundred book reviews that I have written during my academic career. And I also did so by mainly drawing on my expertise in academic law (primarily through my recent LLM International Law) rather than in history or politics – my two other disciplinary areas of expertise. The book is comprised of twelve chapters and is divided into two parts: ‘Theoretical Foundations’ and ‘Human Rights in Practice’. Due to the limitations of space, I will focus on one chapter from the former and two from the latter.

In ‘Principles of Human Rights’ by Bonny Ibhawoh and Oyinade Adekunle the chapter outlines the universality of human rights. It also highlights that contemporary human rights include a wide spectrum of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights that are incorporated into international human rights mechanisms such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, it explains the distinction between individual and collective rights – both of which are important as well as illustrating the duty of facilitating human rights, especially on the part of states. Moreover, the importance of the principle of non-discrimination and privilege and disadvantage is also emphasised. In addition, the authors acknowledge the impact of intersectionality on human rights, for example women of colour are much more likely to face discrimination due to not only their gender but also their ethnicity.

Brenda L. Gunn’s ‘Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights’ explores the unique relationship between human rights and Indigenous Peoples. The chapter first emphasises that Indigenous Peoples are nations, with whole legal and socio-political systems. However, with developments in international law, Indigenous Peoples were not considered *Peoples* anymore and therefore did not possess certain human rights. But Indigenous Peoples continued to be firm in their efforts to have their right to self-determination and their humanity more broadly acknowledged. What is more, although colonisation has had (and continues to have in my opinion) a devastating effect on Indigenous Peoples, they have fought against this, utilising human rights as a tool. However, when utilising human rights mechanisms, Indigenous Peoples have consistently affirmed a need for human rights to respect their world view and acknowledge their rights as they perceive them. Thus, because of Indigenous Peoples’ efforts in the acknowledgement of their right to self-determination, they have affected the scope and nature of human rights, in that human rights are now considered as possessing a collective perspective.

In ‘International Human Rights’ by Christina Szurlej the chapter explains that the contemporary international human rights structure emerged after the sad failure of the League of Nations (established after the First World War) to stop the Second World War, and the United Nations (UN) could suffer the same fate if it commits the same errors when facing existing and new challenges. The chapter also usefully outlines the organisational structure of the UN Charter-based bodies (whose authority is based on the UN Charter) and UN treaty bodies as established in the foundational international human rights treaties. However, Szurlej quite rightly highlights that both of the above encounter enforcement, implementation, and monitoring obstacles, mainly due to lack of capacity, and/or resources, or political will. But existing regional human rights systems in Africa, the Americas, and Europe offer a secondary level of State accountability for abuse of human rights. Each

regional structure has its own mechanisms and instruments. The chapter ends with the reflection that though the UN had a key function in creating the current human rights structure, changes are required to protect the organisation's future and to maintain international support for the protection and promotion of human rights. Szurlej also illustrates how Israel's War on Gaza is one of the gravest recent examples of the failure of the international human rights system, with up to 70% of those killed in Gaza being civilians and there being to this day no accountability for this.

I enjoyed reading this book, despite some of its difficult subject matter. But the latter is the sad reality of the world that we currently live in when it comes to attacks on international human rights. The book will be an excellent resource for courses on international human rights or even human rights in Canada. The inclusion of case studies in chapters (followed by discussion questions), as well as chapter summaries, and useful glossaries are particularly helpful.

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