

Joseph Eldridge, Former Director, Washington Office on Latin America (1974-1986)

This was the birth of the human rights language that was beginning to infiltrate our conversations. Because of the action being taken by the United States Congress, among other things, and the hearings that were taking place, we were becoming more familiarized with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These were beginning to enter into our consciousness as norms that we should all subscribe to. But of course it was deeply politicized because this is the 70's of course. Washington being what it is, everything is politicized. So, George was trying to take the politics out, but he didn't do it very successfully because nobody did it very successfully. But he was also critical of the left for its reluctance to criticize Cuba. He thought this was undermining our credibility as spokespersons for human rights and we kept insisting as the Fraser hearings kept insisting that when the United States government starts to subsidize the Fidel Castro regime, we'll scream bloody murder, but the United States government is not sending military assistance, is not subsidizing the government, is not providing all kinds of support, is not receiving bank loans from the multilateral lending institutions so the focus of our energy and the target was U.S. foreign policy and its implications for human rights because the U.S. government was supporting actively, it seemed to have a preference for de facto military dictatorships that were torturing and killing their own people.