

A world less oppressive?

Lindsay Whalen explains Ethical Consumer's new Oppressive Regimes research

Nuban GoS soldiers in Sudan; one of the world's most oppressive countries

Sudan 2005 © Y.Kunimori / Exile Images

The idea of assessing whether companies have operations sited in the world's oppressive regimes developed during the South Africa boycott. The continued presence of a company in the light of revelations about the apartheid regime was seen as sufficient to call into question the whole ethos of the company, and for people to boycott it accordingly. The effectiveness of using companies to pressure the government was then admirably demonstrated, and ethical investment organisations and ECRA have tried to apply the strategy more broadly.

A key element of the thinking behind Ethical Consumer's Oppressive Regimes (OR) rating category is a recognition of the potential cause and effect relationship between company and regime, with the worst human rights abusers often being the most attractive arenas for corporate investment. Such regimes may offer companies the chance to produce their goods without tiresome obstacles like free trade unions, pollution regulations or too much control on working conditions, with the added bonus that dissent may be physically repressed. For example, French oil company Total was recently the subject of an Early Day Motion signed by 134 MPs demanding that it be pulled out of Burma.⁶ The Early Day Motion alleged that Total's 'business partner,' the Burmese dictatorship, was "carrying out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against minorities and using rape as a weapon of war." The company was also accused of "propping up one of the most brutal and sadistic military regimes in the world."⁶

Such criticisms might not be easily levelled in every situation, so it is for the individual reader to decide how much weight to place on a mark in the OR column. As usual, a company will not receive a mark in the column when all its products sourced from the regime are marketed as fair trade.

Methodology

Our current OR list was updated in November 2002, and used Amnesty International's (AI) 2002 report, US organisation Freedom House's 'Freedom in the World' 2001-2002 and data on the death penalty taken from AI's website. This methodology produced a list of 50 countries that we have used since then to inform this column. Companies with operations in more than five OR countries receive the worst rating, and companies with operations in under five ORs receive a middle rating.

We began this research using AI's 2005 report in the same way, word-searching on 'prisoner(s) of conscience,' 'torture,' and 'disappearances' or 'extrajudicial killings.' This made up the first three columns. The fourth column was taken from 'Freedom in the World' 2004 and, as in 2002, is a comparative assessment of the state of political rights and civil liberties across the globe. It labels nations 'Free,' 'Partly Free,' or 'Not Free' according to an amalgamation of the

points scored on two checklists, one for 'civil rights' and one for 'political rights.' Any country rated 'Not Free' in Freedom of the World will be given a full mark on the table, whilst countries that are 'Partly Free' get a half mark. The final column on the death penalty in our original methodology was taken from the AI website. Countries which retained the death penalty for ordinary crimes receive a whole circle on the table, unless they have not executed anyone in the last 10 years and are believed to have established a practice of not carrying out executions. A half circle indicates that a country's laws provide for the death penalty for exceptional crimes, such as crimes under military law or crimes committed in exceptional circumstances.

The following countries would currently receive four or more marks using Ethical Consumer's original methodology: Belarus, Cameroon, Chad, China, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran, Laos, Libya, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Togo and the United States of America.

World less oppressive?

This shortlist comprises 18 countries, which is 33 less than the 2002 list. Whilst it was tempting to throw a big 'Freedom in the World' party, a closer inspection revealed some worrying anomalies. Countries like Burma had dropped off and the US had found its way on. The USA received four marks on the grounds of prisoners of conscience, torture, disappearances and the death penalty. AI claimed the US was holding Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejía Castillo and Sergeant Abdullah William Webster in prison due to their conscientious objections about the Iraq War.¹ The report claimed that both men remained in prison at the end of 2004.¹ The report also said that military investigations were initiated into allegations of torture of detainees by US personnel in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo.¹ It also said that allegations that the US authorities were involved in the secret transfer of detainees between countries, exposing detainees to the risk of torture and ill-treatment, continued.¹ AI also noted that a number of detainees were alleged to remain in secret detention in undisclosed locations, and that some of these cases amounted to "disappearance."¹ Some individuals were believed to have been held in secret locations for as long as three years.¹

Expanding the research

We have been debating the idea of using some additional criteria in our OR rating for some time now, so for this research we began to collate information from other sources. We looked at:

1. Human Rights Watch's 2005 report
2. Deployment of UN peacekeepers 2005
3. International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) 2004 report
4. FTSE 4 Good Countries of Concern 2003-2004
5. War on Want's Conflict Zones 2005
6. UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2005 report, Chapter 3 Children Caught up in Conflict
7. Survival International website 2005
8. Ethical Consumer

We looked at Human Rights Watch's (HRW) report because it contained similar data on prisoners of conscience, torture and extrajudicial killings to AI's. We looked at the FTSE 4 Good Countries of Concern as it was a list highlighting countries with poor human rights. We looked for information in the other reports under the following headings: conflict areas, workers rights violations and worldwide campaigns.

Conflict zones

Human rights violations in areas of conflict within a country weren't addressed in our original OR methodology. For example, conflict in Kashmir has claimed 65,000 lives in the past 10 years and is described by the CIA as the world's most dangerous 'low-intensity' conflict.⁷ We looked at: deployment of UN peacekeepers for international security, War on Want's Conflict Zones and UNICEF's Children Caught up in Conflict to show where conflicts were in the world. We ignored data on UN peacekeepers who monitored ceasefires, and UNICEF references to conflicts earlier than 2005.

Workers' rights violations

It is a long-standing cause of concern at Ethical Consumer that Colombia did not appear on the OR list. It's officially the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist. War on Want estimate that 3800 trade unionists have been killed in the last 15 years.³ This is more than the rest of the world combined! We looked at the ICFTU report to find out which countries operated a 'single-union system' or did not permit trade unions at all. This is problematic, as in Syria, for example, the country's sole official trade union federation is strictly controlled by the ruling Ba'ath party.⁴ Trade unions aren't the only problem. Physical torture (as well as arrests and detention) can also be commonplace. We also looked at the ICFTU report to find out which countries used physical violence against workers, or imprisonment or disappearances. We only included countries where the violence has been relatively serious, does not appear to be a one-off, and repression appears to be typical. Despite the inclusion of ICFTU research, Colombia still does not appear on the list because it doesn't receive enough points overall.

Worldwide campaigns

We also decided to look at which countries had been the target of worldwide campaigns regarding human rights abuses. This was in part to address researchers concerns on countries well-known to have poor human rights records, and also to check that we were not being swayed by a well run campaign. We looked at War on Want's website, Ethical Consumer and Survival International's website to inform these marks.

Proposed list

The large tables overleaf show which countries were criticised in each report. In light of discussions within Ethical Consumer, we propose using the first eight columns to inform the OR list. The rest are provided for information only. We feel that protection of workers'

rights data should be of particular concern to multinational companies seeking to behave responsibly. We think that countries scoring four and over should be classified as Oppressive Regimes. We invite readers to comment on the list and methodology before researchers begin to use it for March/April 2006 buyers' guides.

United States of America

Based on the proposal above, the USA now appears on our OR list. Because most large companies will operate there, this may distort our tables somewhat - although the same may be said for China too. If we look at the last issue of Ethical Consumer, two of the supermarket companies, nine of the perfume companies, six of the wine companies and all of the games console companies had operations in the US. We could make a special case and exclude the US from our list, but this could look like unfair bias towards Northern countries. We welcome readers' comments on this.

Uzbekistan

Despite Uzbekistan scoring only 3 points in our new rating system, we think there is a special case for including it in our OR list. Events in the country have not yet made it into the analysis we have used. In May, protests against the jailing of several people charged with Islamic extremism in Andijan culminated in several hundred civilian deaths as troops opened fire on crowds.² The Uzbek authorities claimed an official death toll of 180.² 15 men are on trial for the uprising, and face the death penalty.⁵ The authorities have denied reports that illegal methods were used to extract confessions.⁵ However, the BBC reported that an "employee, who cannot be named for his own security, said that people accused of political and religious crimes were often forced to confess by injecting them with psychotropic drugs, or by threatening members of their families."⁵ All of the defendants have pleaded guilty to trying to overthrow the government, and have given testimonies in court naming other people.⁵ Allegations of drugs and torture have been made by the United Nations and human rights groups prior to this.⁵

Israel

With the current analysis, Israel does not appear on the OR list, although it is the target of a number of campaigns. Although there may be arguments for making Israel a special case too (like Uzbekistan), our tables are likely to identify most companies operating there anyway through our boycott column. BIG and other campaigns have put together fairly comprehensive lists of the main companies there. We welcome readers comments on including Israel and Uzbekistan.

Proposed Oppressive Regimes

8 marks:	Sudan
7 marks:	China
6.5 marks:	Burma
6 marks:	Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Syria.
5.5 marks:	Burundi and Indonesia.
5 marks:	Cameroon, Cuba, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Laos, North Korea and Thailand.
4.5 marks:	Guatemala, Kuwait, Russia and Togo.
4 marks:	Belarus, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Philippines, Swaziland, Tajikistan, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

References **1** Amnesty International Report 2005 **2** Country Profile: Uzbekistan, BBC News, viewed on 9/11/05 **3** www.waronwant.org, viewed on 22/9/05 **4** ICFTU 2004 **5** 'Uzbekistan denies using torture,' BBC News, 12/10/05 **6** '134 MPs demand Total Oil withdraw from Burma,' Burma Campaign UK 14/7/05 **7** 'My son is gone - my world is gone with him,' The Observer 6/11/05

Prisoners of Conscience	Torture	Disappearances	Death Penalty	Freedom in the World rating	Deployment of UN peacekeepers	ICFTU - prohibition of trade unions	ICFTU - violence against workers	Total score	FTSE Countries of Concern	War on Want Conflict Zones	UNICEF Conflict Zones	Survival International	Ethical Consumer
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Afghanistan	●	●	●				3	●					
Albania	●		○	○			2						
Algeria	●	●	○	●			3.5	●					
Angola	●			●			2	●	●				
Antigua & Barbuda				●			1						
Argentina	●	●	○			●	3.5					●	
Armenia	●			○			1.5						
Australia	●						1					●	
Azerbaijan	●			●			2						
Bahamas				●			1						
Bahrain	●		●	○			2.5						
Bangladesh				●	○	●	2.5					●	
Barbados				●			1						
Belarus	●		●	●	●		4						
Belize				●			1						
Benin				○			0.5						
Bhutan	●	●		●			3						
Bolivia	●		○	○		●	3						
Bosnia-Herzegovina			●	○			1.5						
Botswana				●			1					●	
Brazil	●	●	○			●	3.5				●	●	
Brunei	●		○	●			2.5	●					
Bulgaria	●						1						
Burkina Faso			●	○	○		2						
Burma (Myanmar)	●	●	●	○	●	●	6.5			●	●		●
Burundi	●	●	●	○	●	●	5.5			●			
Cambodia	●			●		●	3						
Cameroon	●	●	●	●		●	5	●			●		
Canada	●						1					●	
Central African Republic				○	●	●	2.5						
Chad	●	●	●	●			4						
Chile	●	●	○			●	3.5						
China	●	●	●	●	●	●	7	●				●	
Colombia	●	●		○		●	3.5	●	●	●	●	●	●
Comoros				●	○		1.5						
Republic of Congo (Brazzaville)			●	○	○		2						
Democratic Republic of Congo	●		●	●		●	4	●		●	●		
Cook Islands				○			0.5						
Costa Rica						●	1						
Cote d'Ivoire			●	●	●	●	4			●			
Croatia	●	●					2						
Cuba	●			●	●	●	5						
Czech Republic	●						1						
Djibouti					○		0.5						
Dominica				●			1						
Dominican Republic	●					●	2						
East Timor				○			0.5						
Ecuador				○		●	1.5						
Egypt	●	●		●	●	●	5	●					
El Salvador				○			0.5						
Equatorial Guinea	●	●	●	●	●		5						
Eritrea	●	●		●	●		4						
Ethiopia	●	●	●	○			3.5					●	
Fiji				○	○		1						
Finland	●	●					2						
France	●						1						
Gabon				●	○		1.5						

Prisoners of Conscience	Torture	Disappearances	Death Penalty	Freedom in the World rating	Deployment of UN peacekeepers	ICFTU - prohibition of trade unions	ICFTU - violence against workers	Total score	FTSE Countries of Concern	War on Want Conflict Zones	UNICEF Conflict Zones	Survival International	Ethical Consumer
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Gambia, The				○	○			1					
Georgia			●		○			1.5					
Germany			●					1					
Ghana			●	●	●			3					
Greece	●	●	●					3					
Grenada				○				0.5					
Guatemala			●	●	○		●	4.5					
Guinea				●	●		●	3					
Guinea-Bissau					○			0.5					
Guyana		●	●	●				3					
Haiti		●	●	●	●			5					
Honduras		●		○				1.5					
Hungary		●						1					
India		●	●	●				3				●	
Indonesia	●	●	●	●	○		●	5.5		●	●	●	
Iran		●	●	●	●		●	5	●				
Iraq		●	●	●	●	●	●	5	●	●			
Israel & Occupied Territories		●	●	○				2.5		●	●	●	
Italy		●						1					
Jamaica		●		●				2					
Japan				●				1					
Jordan		●		○		●		3.5					
Kazakhstan		●	●	●	●			4	●				
Kenya		●	○	○			●	3				●	
Kuwait		●		○		●	●	4.5					
Kyrgyzstan		●		●	●			3					
Laos	●	●		●	●	●		5					
Latvia				○				0.5					
Lebanon		●		●	●		●	4					
Lesotho				●			●	2					
Liberia				●	○			1.5			●		
Libya	●	●	●	●	●	●		6	●				
Lithuania		●						1					
Macedonia	●		●		○			2.5					
Madagascar				○	○			1					
Malawi		●		●	○			2.5					
Malaysia		●		○			●	3.5				●	
Maldives	●			○	●	●		3.5					
Mali				○				0.5					
Mauritania	●	●		○	●			3.5					
Mexico		●	●					1	3				
Moldova					○			0.5					
Mongolia		●		●				2					
Morocco	●	●		○	○			3					
Mozambique					○		●	1.5					
Namibia	●							1					
Nauru				○	○			0.5					
Nepal		●	●		○		●	2.5					
Nicaragua					○			0.5					
Niger				○	○			1					
Nigeria		●		●	○		●	3.5					
North Korea		●	●	●	●	●		5	●				
Oman				●	●			2	●				
Pakistan	●	●	●	●	●		●	6	●				
Palestinian Authority		●		●				2					
Panama						●		1			●		
Papua New Guinea	●		○	○				2					
Paraguay		●			○			1.5				●	
Peru	●	●	●	○				3.5				●	
Philippines		●	●	●			●	4					
Portugal		●						1					

Prisoners of Conscience													
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Total score													
FTSE Countries of Concern													
War on Want Conflict Zones													
UNICEF Conflict Zones													
Survival International													
Ethical Consumer													

Qatar													3						
Romania		●											1						
Russia		●	●	○	●								4.5				●	●	
Rwanda			●	●	●								3		●				●
Saudi Arabia	●	●	●	●									6		●				
Senegal													1						
Serbia & Montenegro	●	●											2						
Seychelles				○									0.5						
Sierra Leone				●	○								1.5						●
Singapore				●	○								1.5						
Solomon Islands		●			○								1.5						
Somalia				●	●								3		●				●
South Africa		●											2						
South Korea	●			●									3						
Spain		●											1						
Sri Lanka		●		○	○								3				●	●	
St. Kitts & Nevis				●									1						
St. Lucia				●									1						
St. Vincent & Grenadines				●									↓						
Sudan	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8		●		●	●	
Suriname				○									0.5						
Swaziland		●		●	●								4						
Sweden		●											1						
Syria	●	●	●	●	●			●					6		●				
Taiwan				●									1						
Tajikistan		●		●	●								4						
Tanzania				●	○								1.5						
Thailand	●	●	●	●									5						
Togo	●	●	●	○	●								4.5						
Tonga				○	○								1						
Trinidad & Tobago		●		●	○								2.5						
Tunisia	●	●		○	●								3.5		●				
Turkey	●	●	●		○								3.5						
Turkmenistan	●	●		●									3						
Uganda		●		●	○								3.5				●	●	
Ukraine		●	●		○								3.5						
United Arab Emirates			●	●	●			●					4		●				
United Kingdom		●											1						
United States	●	●	●	●									4						
Uruguay		●	●										2						
Uzbekistan		●		●	●								3						
Venezuela		●	●		○								3.5						
Vietnam	●		●	●	●		●						4		●				
Yemen		●	●	●	○								3.5		●				
Zambia		●		●	○								2.5						
Zimbabwe		●		●	●								4		●				

The following countries scored 0 marks and do not appear on the table: Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Cape Verde, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Ireland, Kiribati, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palau, Poland, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome & Principe, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Columns 1-3 are an amalgamation of AI and HRW's data, and X appears for countries where no data was available
Column 4 uses AI's data on the death penalty
Column 5 uses the 'Freedom in the World' data to assess civil and political liberties



Protest by Burma campaigners against the military dictatorship in Burma and detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, London, 1997. Burma is the world's third most oppressive country according to our research methods

Key
 The first 8 columns are for rating. The 9th column is the score.
 The last 5 columns are for information.
 x = no data available
 ● = 1 point
 ○ = half point

Column 6 shows where UN peacekeepers are deployed to ensure security
Column 7 uses the ICFTU report to show countries that prohibit trade unions or have a "single Trade Union" policy
Column 8 uses the ICFTU report to show countries that use violence against workers
Column 9 is the total score of columns 1-8
Column 10 is the FTSE Countries of Concern list
Column 11 shows War on Want's data on conflict zones
Column 12 shows UNICEF's data on conflict zones
Column 13 shows Survival International's country campaigns
Column 14 shows Ethical Consumer's data on campaigns in countries

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