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THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PARADIGM PROPOSAL

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ABSTRACT

This article reconstructs the historical development of human rights as the gradual transformation of moral concern into operable rights regimes. It combines source criticism, longue-duree historical sociology, comparative law and international human-rights law, while controlling anachronism through a distinction between proto-rights and rights regimes. Three arguments guide the analysis. First, human rights history is better understood as a threshold history than as a search for one first document. Second, ancient and medieval texts matter when they strengthen writing, procedure, protection, membership or remedy; they should not, however, be treated as modern universal charters. Third, the post-1948 regime becomes effective only when treaty, court, reporting, remedy, civic space and anticipatory risk control work together. The article proposes the Threshold-Operational Rights Framework, according to which a right becomes institutionally real when recognition, inscription, procedure, forum, evidence, remedy and risk prevention form a coherent structure. The framework links cultural memory, legal history, public accountability, climate justice and artificial-intelligence governance without reducing human rights either to moral aspiration or to legal formality.

KEYWORDS: proto-rights; threshold periodisation; due process; dignity; comparative law; norm diffusion; implementation gap; climate justice; artificial-intelligence governance; cultural memory

Table I. Research context, contribution and implications.

Existing knowledge	Contribution of this article	Implication for research and policy
Human rights history is often framed as either a continuity story or a sequence of landmark documents.	The article separates proto-rights from rights regimes and explains rights through threshold operation.	Protection is strengthened less by adding texts than by improving access, procedure, evidence, remedy and oversight.
Ancient and medieval texts are sometimes presented as if they were modern charters.	They are read through source criticism as early contributions to writing, procedure, protection, membership and remedy.	Historical depth is preserved without treating pre-modern texts as modern universal instruments.
The period 2010-2025 has produced digital, ecological and artificial-intelligence risk surfaces.	The article integrates anticipatory risk design into rights analysis alongside post-harm remedies.	Impact assessment, audit, data governance, platform procedure and climate adaptation become part of rights protection.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human rights history is often introduced through a familiar sequence of documents: early Mesopotamian law collections, the Cyrus Cylinder, Magna Carta, the American and French declarations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the post-war treaty regime. The sequence remains useful. It gives the reader a map of texts through which protection, procedure and dignity gradually acquired public language. Yet a chronology of documents does not explain why some rights become enforceable while others remain largely symbolic. A right is more than a value written down; it is a relation among a protected subject, a protected interest, a duty-bearer, a procedure, a forum, evidence, remedy and the social conditions that make invocation possible [1-4].

This article therefore begins from a narrower but more productive question: when does a moral or

political claim become an operable human-rights regime? The answer cannot be found by choosing between a continuity thesis and a rupture thesis. Continuity accounts rightly emphasise care, reciprocity, religious ethics, natural law and repeated resistance to arbitrary domination. Rupture accounts rightly insist that modern human rights are a distinctive political-legal language of equal subjects, constitutional limitation, international normativity and post-1945 institutions [2-4]. The argument advanced here is that the two positions describe different layers of the same historical process. Proto-rights are historically deep; rights regimes become durable only after institutional thresholds are crossed [1,4].

The first conceptual distinction is therefore between proto-rights and rights regimes. Proto-rights are norms or practices that protect vulnerability, limit retaliation, recognise membership, standardise remedy or justify power through protection without yet creating universal and enforceable human rights. Rights regimes exist when protected subjects, duties, texts, procedures, forums, remedies and monitoring arrangements are linked in a sufficiently stable manner. This distinction avoids two opposite errors: it does not call Hammurabi, the Cyrus Cylinder, the Medina Charter, the Farewell Sermon, Ottoman ahdnames or Magna Carta modern human-rights instruments, but it also does not ignore their contribution to the long formation of protection, procedure and accountability [4,13-25].

The second contribution is a threshold periodisation. Instead of treating centuries as neutral containers, the article follows shifts in the way rights claims become workable. Oral restraint gives way to writing and record; writing makes comparison possible; procedure limits arbitrary power; revolutionary declarations recast the subject as a constitutional bearer of rights; internationalisation turns domestic treatment into a matter of external concern; judicialisation translates broad norms into case-based standards; and the digital-ecological period requires prevention before harms become irreversible or untraceable [5-9].

The third contribution is the Threshold-Operational Rights Framework (TORF). The framework treats rights not as a finished catalogue but as a chain of recognition, inscription, procedure, forum, evidence, remedy, civic space and anticipatory risk control. It connects ancient legal memory, medieval procedural restraint, revolutionary universalism, post-war treaties, regional adjudication, corporate responsibility, environmental rights and artificial-intelligence governance. Human rights can therefore be studied both as intangible cultural memory and as a disciplined culture of accountability: a way of requiring power to give reasons, produce evidence and repair harm [1,7-9].

2. METHODS

This article is a state-of-the-art review and theoretical synthesis rather than a statistical study. It combines four perspectives. Longue-duree historical sociology explains why rights language intensifies around war, state formation, industrialisation, decolonisation, social mobilisation, technological change and environmental crisis. Comparative law separates the existence of a norm from the existence of a procedure, forum and remedy. International human-rights law clarifies the post-1945 movement from declaration to treaty, court, committee, reporting and compliance practice. Source criticism prevents present-day categories from being projected onto earlier texts [5-9].

The review uses a common coding matrix for historically distant examples. Each turning point is examined through five questions: who is protected; what interest is protected; who bears the duty; which mechanism makes the claim operable; and where the implementation gap appears. The matrix permits cautious comparison between oral norms, royal law collections, charters, revolutionary declarations, treaties, regional courts, business and human-rights standards and artificial-intelligence rules. The purpose is not to flatten difference, but to identify which part of the rights chain is strengthened or absent in each period [5,7,8].

Anachronism control is the central validity rule. Practices before the modern rights vocabulary are not described as human rights in the strict sense. They are coded as proto-rights when they perform functions later central to rights regimes: protection of vulnerability, limitation of arbitrary violence, standardisation of compensation, recognition of protected status or creation of a procedure for contesting harm. A pre-modern text is therefore not assessed by asking whether it is a modern charter. It is assessed by asking which operational component it anticipates and which components it lacks [4,13-18].

The evidence base is necessarily uneven. Pre-textual periods depend on anthropology, archaeology and evolutionary accounts of social cooperation; early states rely on law collections, royal inscriptions and critical editions; medieval and early modern materials rely on charters, religious-legal texts and political theory; the modern period relies on declarations, treaties, courts, treaty bodies, institutional reports and scholarship on compliance. This asymmetry is not

a defect but a historical condition. The review therefore applies consistent questions while adjusting the strength of inference to the evidence available [10-18].

Table II. Methodological coding matrix for each historical turning point.

Variable	Analytical question	Historical indicators	Typical failure
Subject	Who is protected?	Kin member, guest, citizen, subject, woman, child, minority, refugee, data subject, future generation	Exclusion and invisibility
Protection field	Which interest is protected?	Life, body, property, belief, procedure, equality, labour, health, environment, privacy	Unclear scope
Duty-bearer	Who is responsible?	Ruler, state, court, employer, company, platform, international institution	Diffused responsibility
Mechanism	How does protection operate?	Writing, trial, court, committee, reporting, audit, impact assessment	No accessible forum or review
Implementation gap	Where does the text fail?	Capacity, discrimination, emergency power, political will, evidence gap	Symbolic right or impunity

Table III. Threshold periodisation: operating shifts rather than mere chronology.

Threshold	Historical function	Representative examples	Main risk
Proto-rights	Care, reciprocity, restraint of violence and compensation practices.	Pre-textual communities, oral norms	Anachronism; membership-based exclusion
Writing and record	Stabilises norms and makes comparison possible.	Urukagina/Uruinimgina, Ur-Nammu, Hammurabi	Status hierarchy becomes codified
Protection rhetoric	Links legitimacy of power to order, restoration and protection.	Cyrus Cylinder, imperial decrees	No individual claim or independent forum
Membership and ethical community	Strengthens plural membership, obligation and moral equality.	Medina Charter, Farewell Sermon, Ashokan edicts	Does not yet become a universal individual regime
Procedure	Limits arbitrary rule through process and lawful judgement.	Magna Carta, Habeas Corpus, Petition of Right	Scope remains narrow or status-bound
Constitutional subject	Makes rights a criterion of legitimate government.	1776/1789/1791 declarations	Women, enslaved people, colonised persons and the propertyless are excluded
Internationalisation	Turns abuse into a matter of transnational scrutiny.	UN Charter, UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR	Weak enforcement and sovereignty resistance
Judicialisation	Translates abstract rights into case-based standards.	ECHR/ECtHR and regional systems	Unequal access and uneven compliance

Anticipatory governance	Links digital, ecological and artificial-intelligence risks to prevention before harm.	UNGP, environmental right, EU AI Act, CoE AI Convention	Opacity and accountability gaps

3. RESULTS: A THRESHOLD HISTORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The first layer is pre-textual. It is not a history of rights language, but of the moral and social conditions that later make rights intelligible. Human survival depended on cooperative care, reciprocal obligation, conflict management and reputational sanction. These practices did not create equal human rights, but they did generate a recurrent premise: some lives require protection, harm should be recognised and retaliation should not be endless [10-12]. Legal anthropology also shows that order may exist without written codes; oral norms, ritual memory, shame, compensation and mediation can organise social life while reproducing hierarchy and insider-outsider boundaries [13,14].

The limitation of this layer is as important as its contribution. Protection was often strongest inside kin, clan or local membership and weakest at the boundary of the stranger, enemy or enslaved person. Hospitality could create temporary protection, while enemy status could suspend it. The later universal claim that a person has rights by virtue of being human is radical precisely because it seeks to discipline this boundary logic. Proto-rights therefore supply both moral depth and a warning: care and restraint may coexist with exclusion [1,4].

The second threshold is writing. Early legal collections in Mesopotamia transformed expectations into durable records. Ur-Nammu and Hammurabi are not modern human-rights documents, but they represent legal predictability, public norm formulation, compensation and royal justice rhetoric. Hammurabi's collection standardised relations between injury and response while also fixing distinctions among free persons, dependants, slaves, men and women [15,16]. The advance was not equality; it was inscription, classification and comparability. The danger was that hierarchy became more durable because it was written.

The Cyrus Cylinder requires the same caution. It is often celebrated as the first human-rights charter, but critical scholarship reads it primarily as an imperial restoration and legitimacy text after the conquest of Babylon. Its importance lies in protection rhetoric: power presents itself as legitimate because it restores order, respects certain local cults and reduces oppressive burdens. It does not create a universal rights catalogue, independent courts or individual remedies [17,18]. In TORF terms, it strengthens the legitimacy-through-protection component rather than the full rights framework.

The third threshold concerns ethical universalisation and plural membership. Stoic cosmopolitanism, Roman legal concepts, and Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Confucian traditions developed languages of dignity, duty, compassion, justice and limits on domination. These traditions did not converge into a modern rights regime, and they often coexisted with slavery, patriarchy and empire. Yet they created argumentative resources by making exclusion harder to justify when the tradition itself affirmed a wider moral concern [1,19].

The Medina Charter and the Farewell Sermon are significant when handled without romanticisation. The Medina Charter is best understood as a written arrangement for plural community, obligation and dispute settlement in a specific political context; the Farewell Sermon intensifies moral claims about life, property, social responsibility and human equality. Neither should be treated as a modern human-rights convention. Their value lies in connecting protection to membership, duty and moral accountability, thereby strengthening proto-rights in a religious-political order [20,21]. Similar caution applies to Ottoman protection instruments, including ahdname traditions: they may textually bind the ruler to protect defined communities without creating universal equal citizenship [24,25].

Magna Carta marks a procedural threshold. Its immediate scope was limited and aristocratic, but its later importance lies in the idea that coercive authority can be bound by lawful judgement, procedure and non-arbitrary administration. The point is not that Magna Carta already contained modern human rights. The point is that it strengthened a rule-of-process logic that later rights regimes would deepen through habeas corpus, due process, legality and effective remedy [22,23].

The fourth threshold is early modern constitutional subjecthood. Natural law, social contract theory, toleration debates and constitutional conflict moved rights from moral argument and privilege toward claims against public power. The English Bill of Rights, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the United States Declaration of Independence, the United States Bill of Rights and the French

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen recast rights as criteria of legitimate government [2,26]. This was a decisive shift from status privilege to generalisable subjecthood.

The same period also produced modern exclusion. The supposedly universal subject was often male, propertied, white, national and non-enslaved. Women, enslaved persons, Indigenous peoples, colonised populations and the propertyless were frequently outside the operational scope of rights. The Haitian Revolution and abolitionist struggles exposed this contradiction by pressing universal liberty against slavery and racial domination [2,27]. Modern human-rights history is therefore not only the history of declarations; it is also the history of those excluded from declarations forcing the text to confront its own premises.

The nineteenth century widened the framework through abolition, humanitarian law and social rights. Abolition transformed slavery from a recognised legal-economic institution into a paradigmatic violation of human dignity, although emancipation often left racial, labour and citizenship inequalities intact [27]. Humanitarian law insisted that even war must have limits, contributing a parallel order of restraint for wounded soldiers, prisoners and civilians [28]. Industrial capitalism then revealed that formal liberty may coexist with unsafe work, child labour, destitution and dependency. The emergence of labour standards, social legislation and later economic and social rights shifted the rights question from non-interference alone to capability, security and positive institutional duties [29,30].

The period 1914-1948 is the decisive negative foundation of the international regime. Total war, mass displacement, genocide, bureaucratic violence and the targeting of civilians exposed the insufficiency of domestic constitutional promises when the state itself becomes the perpetrator. The post-war settlement connected dignity, peace and international order. The United Nations Charter gave human rights a place in global governance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights created a common normative reference, and the Genocide Convention and Geneva Conventions addressed mass destruction and war-related protection [31-36].

The importance of 1948 is not that enforcement was solved. It was not. The UDHR was a declaration, not a treaty; Cold War politics, colonial power and sovereignty resistance limited implementation. Its significance was that it transformed human dignity into a shared vocabulary through which states, movements, courts and institutions could articulate claims. 1948 should therefore be read as a charter threshold, not as the completion of human rights [31-34].

From 1948 to 1990, human rights moved from declaration to treaty, court and committee structures. The ICCPR and ICESCR created a two-pillar legal order for civil-political and economic-social-cultural rights; specialised conventions addressed racial discrimination, women, torture, children and other fields; decolonisation made self-determination central. The European Convention on Human Rights gave the most developed regional example of text plus court plus case law. The European Court of Human Rights translated broad guarantees into concrete standards and compliance expectations [36-41].

Yet the treaty period also intensified the implementation gap. States could ratify instruments while maintaining weak courts, limited budgets, discriminatory policing, restricted civic space or emergency practices. Norm abundance does not automatically produce protection. It increases the vocabulary of claim-making, but the result depends on access, evidence, independent review, political cost and domestic mobilisation [7-9,41-43].

The period 1990-2010 expanded accountability and exposed backlash. Ad hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, truth commissions and transitional justice broadened the response to atrocities beyond punishment toward truth, reparation and institutional reform [44,45]. At the same time, humanitarian intervention debates raised selectivity concerns, and post-11 September counter-terrorism normalised surveillance, exceptional detention and weakened due process in many settings. The lesson is recurrent: rights become fragile when emergency governance bypasses procedure, evidence and independent review [3,8].

The period 2010-2025 introduces a systemic-risk threshold. Climate change, platform governance, data extraction, artificial intelligence and transnational supply chains alter the form of harm. Violations may be delayed, cumulative, statistically distributed or embedded in technical systems. A person may be disadvantaged by a risk score, a content-ranking rule, a biometric border system, a climate-related displacement pathway or a supply chain where responsibility is distributed among many actors [46-50]. In this context, ex-post remedy remains necessary but insufficient; rights protection must increasingly be built into assessment, design, audit, monitoring and contestability before harm becomes irreversible.

Environmental rights illustrate this shift. The United Nations General Assembly recognised the

human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in 2022. The recognition does not itself create uniform enforcement, but it changes the map: rights to life, health, housing, food, water, culture and equality cannot be separated from environmental conditions [51]. Artificial intelligence shows the same pattern in technological form. UNESCO's 2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence places human rights and dignity at the centre of global artificial-intelligence governance; the EU AI Act creates a risk-based regulatory order; and the Council of Europe's 2024 AI Convention connects artificial-intelligence systems with human rights, democracy and the rule of law [52-54].

Table IV. Selected turning points analysed through the Threshold-Operational Rights Framework.

Turning point	Protected subject	Strengthened component	Implementation gap
Pre-textual care and compensation	Community member, often defined by kinship or local membership	Care, reciprocity, mediation	No universal subject; high exclusion
Urukagina/Uruinimgina and Ur-Nammu	Status groups, debtors, weak persons, widows and orphans in reform rhetoric	Writing, measurement, compensation, social-reform language	Limited equality and uncertain enforcement
Hammurabi	Status-differentiated persons	Public legal record, proportionality, compensation, judicial responsibility	Hierarchy by class, gender and slavery
Cyrus Cylinder	Conquered communities and cultic groups	Restoration and protection rhetoric	No individual rights claim or independent forum
Medina Charter	Plural urban communities under a specific political order	Membership, obligation, dispute settlement	Community-bound protection, not universal legal status
Farewell Sermon	Moral community of believers and listeners	Life, property, social responsibility, equality rhetoric	Ethical proclamation without modern review mechanism
Magna Carta	Free persons within limited feudal context	Lawful judgement, due process, non-sale of justice	Narrow social scope and later reinterpretation
1776/1789 declarations	Abstract rights-bearing citizen/person	Constitutional subjecthood and popular legitimacy	Gender, slavery, colonial and property exclusions
UDHR and post-war treaties	Human person and peoples	Universal vocabulary, treaty duties, reporting, courts	Sovereignty resistance and uneven domestic incorporation
2010-2025 risk instruments	Data subject, platform user, affected community, future generation	Impact assessment, audit, due diligence, climate adaptation	Technical opacity and fragmented responsibility

4. PROPOSED PARADIGM: THE THRESHOLD-OPERATIONAL RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

TORF defines a right as an operational chain rather than a mere declaration. The chain has eight components: recognition, inscription, procedure, forum, evidence, remedy, civic space and anticipatory risk control. A right becomes institutionally real only when these components support each other. Recognition without procedure may remain moral aspiration. Procedure without access may serve only those already empowered. Evidence without remedy may document harm without changing incentives. Remedy without civic space may individualise a problem that is structurally reproduced.

The framework changes the central research question. Instead of asking only whether a right exists, it asks where the chain breaks. Does the problem lie in recognition because some subjects are invisible? In inscription because the norm is

vague? In procedure because there is no fair method of contesting harm? In evidence because opacity makes injury hard to prove? In remedy because compensation or correction is unavailable? Or in civic space because affected communities cannot speak, organise or transmit knowledge?

This approach also clarifies why early texts matter. They are not important because they already contain modern human rights. They are important because they strengthen parts of the rights chain: writing stabilises expectation; charters strengthen procedure; ethical traditions widen moral concern; revolutionary declarations transform political subjecthood; treaties create duties beyond domestic discretion; courts and committees translate language into standards; contemporary risk instruments move rights into design, audit and prevention.

The framework is deliberately interdisciplinary. Law explains duties, forums and remedies. History explains sequence and contingency. Anthropology explains membership, ritual and boundary formation. Political science explains state capacity, mobilisation and compliance. Public health, climate science and technology studies explain distributed harm and risk prevention. No single discipline can explain why a right moves from moral claim to working protection.

The approach also resists triumphalism. Human rights history is not a steady march from darkness to light. It is a history of expansions, reversals, exclusions, reinterpretations and institutional learning. Its progress is neither automatic nor meaningless. It depends on whether claims become structured enough to be invoked, tested, enforced, repaired and revised.

Table V. Components of the Threshold-Operational Rights Framework.

Component	Core question	Historical example	Contemporary equivalent
Recognition	Who counts as a rights-bearing subject?	Expansion from kin, subject and citizen toward human person	Refugee, data subject, platform user, future generation
Inscription	How is the norm stabilised?	Law collections, charters, declarations, treaties	Regulation, standards, model documentation, due-diligence plans
Procedure	How is a claim tested?	Witness, oath, lawful judgement, due process	Explanation, notice, appeal, audit, human review
Forum	Where can the claim be brought?	Council, court, committee, regional tribunal	Regulator, ombudsperson, platform review, treaty body
Evidence	How is harm made visible?	Testimony, record, judicial file, public report	Data access, traceability, disclosure, monitoring
Remedy	How is breach repaired?	Compensation, restitution, punishment, public correction	Compensation, restoration, deletion, redesign, compliance plan
Civic space	Can affected persons organise and speak?	Petition, movement, public criticism	Civil society monitoring, whistle-blowing, academic scrutiny
Anticipatory risk control	How is harm prevented before it becomes irreversible?	Quarantine rules, labour inspection, environmental planning	Human-rights due diligence, climate adaptation, AI impact assessment

5. DISCUSSION

The threshold approach has four implications. First, it reduces the false opposition between ancient roots and modern invention. Ancient and medieval materials become analytically useful without being mislabelled as modern human-rights law. They contribute to the long history of writing, membership, protection, procedure and moral accountability. Modern human-rights regimes remain distinctive because they combine equal subjecthood, textual normativity, independent review and remedy [1-4].

Second, the framework explains why rights expansion may coincide with persistent violation. Norms may diffuse faster than courts, budgets, evidence systems, civic space and political

accountability. Ratification may strengthen international legitimacy without changing domestic practice. The implementation gap is therefore not an accidental defect; it is a central object of analysis [7,8,42,43].

Third, the article reframes cultural memory. Human rights are not only legal instruments; they are also accumulated practices through which societies remember harm, classify injury, discipline power and repair social trust. This makes the history of human rights relevant for a journal concerned with scientific culture and cultural heritage. The cultural point is not ornamental. Without memory, evidence and transmission, protection is repeatedly lost.

Fourth, the 2010-2025 period requires a shift from violation response to risk governance. Traditional rights law remains indispensable, but it was shaped largely around identifiable victims, discrete violations and post-harm remedy. Climate change, artificial intelligence, platform moderation and supply chains often produce harm that is cumulative, probabilistic, automated or distributed across many actors. In such settings, rights protection must include impact assessment, transparency, audit, due diligence and contestability before injury becomes irreversible [46-54].

The framework is not without limits. It is a conceptual framework, not a completed measurement tool. Future studies can code specific rights fields, jurisdictions or institutional arrangements through TORF indicators. The framework also requires careful use: the more distant the historical period, the more limited the evidence and the more cautious the inference must be. The distinction between proto-rights and rights regimes is therefore not a minor terminology choice but a safeguard against overstatement.

This synthesis also sharpens the relation between cultural memory and accountability. Human rights are not an external vocabulary imposed on history; they are a late and contested language for older questions: who may be harmed, who must answer, what counts as proof and how repair is made. The vocabulary becomes modern, but the questions are older than modernity. The institutional challenge is to keep those questions answerable under changing conditions of power.

The framework also draws attention to psychosocial harm. A broken right does not only create a legal violation; it may also produce fear, humiliation, mistrust and traumatic memory. Evidence from the Cyprus Turkish Journal of Psychiatry and Psychology is relevant here: in a study of war veterans in South-East Nigeria, trauma exposure was reported as a significant predictor of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression [55]. For human-rights analysis, this finding is a reminder that protection, recognition and remedy must address lived injury as well as formal illegality.

The model therefore resists two reductionisms. It rejects the view that more rights texts automatically mean more protection, and it also rejects the claim that persistent violations make rights meaningless. The central question is more precise: which components of the rights framework are present, which are missing and which actors have the authority and capacity to repair the break?

Table VI. Risk surfaces and operating needs in the 2010-2025 rights landscape.

Classical field	New risk surface	Violation mechanism	Operating need
Privacy	Data economy and profiling	Invisible extraction, inferred identity, consent illusion, surveillance	Data minimisation, transparency, contestability and independent audit
Equality	Algorithmic classification	Bias in training data, model design or deployment context	Impact assessment, disaggregated monitoring, explanation and remedy
Expression	Platform governance	Ranking, removal, amplification or shadow restriction without fair process	Notice, reasons, appeal, independent oversight and pluralism safeguards
Life and health	Climate change and pandemic governance	Delayed, cumulative or unevenly distributed harm	Preparedness, adaptation, equitable allocation and public justification

Labour	Global supply chains and platform work	Fragmented responsibility, informalisation, forced labour risks	Due diligence, worker voice, traceable contracting and remedy
Migration and asylum	Externalised borders and biometric systems	Remote exclusion, risk scoring, pushback and data opacity	Due process at borders, non-refoulement safeguards and independent review
Cultural rights	Loss of heritage, displacement, environmental degradation	Damage to memory, language, land and communal practices	Participation, protection planning, restitution and cultural impact review

6. CONCLUSIONS

Human rights history is best understood as a threshold history. It does not begin with a single first document, nor does it end with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its long development moves from proto-rights to writing, from writing to procedure, from procedure to constitutional subjecthood, from constitutional subjecthood to international supervision, from supervision to judicial and quasi-judicial interpretation, and now toward anticipatory governance for digital and ecological risks.

The proposed Threshold-Operational Rights Framework offers a concise test: a right becomes institutionally real when recognition, inscription, procedure, forum, evidence, remedy, civic space and anticipatory risk control operate together. Where one component fails, rights become vulnerable to exclusion, symbolism or impunity. The test is historical, legal and practical at the same time.

The contribution is interdisciplinary. The article links ancient law, ethical memory, constitutionalism, international adjudication, business responsibility, environmental rights and artificial-intelligence governance through one analytical question: how does a claim become workable protection? That question allows human-rights history to be written without romanticising the past, without reducing the present to legal texts and without treating future risks as external to rights. Human rights remain unfinished because power changes form; the task is to make accountability change form with it.

APPENDIX

Table A1. High-density selected chronology and analytical coding.

Date/period	Text/event	Threshold	Analytical note
Pre-textual period	Care, mediation, compensation and limits on retaliation	Proto-rights	No rights vocabulary; practical moral grammar of protection and repair.
c. 24th century BCE	Urukagina/Uruinimgina reforms	Writing and social-justice rhetoric	Claim to limit exploitation by powerful groups; evidence and scope remain debated.
c. 2100 BCE	Ur-Nammu law collection	Record and compensation	Early public formulation of legal consequences and compensation.
c. 1750 BCE	Hammurabi law collection	Codification	Legal predictability and proportionality within a hierarchical status order.
539 BCE	Cyrus Cylinder	Protection rhetoric	Imperial restoration and legitimacy text, not a modern rights charter.
622 CE	Medina Charter	Plural membership	Written arrangement of obligations, solidarity and dispute settlement in a defined community.

632 CE	Farewell Sermon	Ethical universalisation	Moral language of life, property, responsibility and equality.
1215	Magna Carta	Procedure	Lawful judgement and restraint of arbitrary royal power.
1453	Ottoman ahdname traditions	Textual protection	Defined communities receive protection without equal universal citizenship.
1689	English Bill of Rights	Constitutional limitation	Parliamentary limits on royal power and foundations for later constitutionalism.
1776	Virginia Declaration and US Declaration of Independence	Constitutional subject	Rights become a language of legitimate government; exclusions remain.
1789-1791	French Declaration and US Bill of Rights	Rights declaration	Universal language becomes constitutional; social scope remains contested.
19th century	Abolition, humanitarian law and labour protection	Expansion of protected interests	Slavery, war and industrial exploitation reshape rights claims.
1945-1948	UN Charter, UDHR and Genocide Convention	International charter threshold	Human dignity becomes a global normative reference.
1949-1950	Geneva Conventions and ECHR	Humanitarian codification and regional adjudication	War restraint and court-based rights protection grow together.
1966-1976	ICCPR and ICESCR	Treaty consolidation	Civil-political and economic-social-cultural rights become binding treaty fields.
1979-1989	CEDAW, CAT and CRC	Specialised protection	Equality, torture prevention and children's rights acquire dedicated regimes.
1990s	Ad hoc tribunals and transitional justice	Accountability	Atrocity response includes prosecution, truth, reparation and reform.
2011	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights	Multi-actor responsibility	Corporate conduct becomes part of rights accountability.
2021-2024	UNESCO AI Recommendation, EU AI Act, CoE AI Convention	Anticipatory risk control	Assessment, audit and human-rights safeguards become central to technology governance.
2022	UNGA recognition of environmental right	Ecological rights	Clean, healthy and sustainable environment becomes a global rights reference.

Abbreviations: CAT, Convention against Torture; CEDAW, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; CRC, Convention on the Rights of the Child; ECHR, European Convention on Human Rights; ECtHR, European Court of Human Rights; ICCPR, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; ICESCR, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; UDHR, Universal Declaration of Human Rights; UNGP, United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

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