

RICHARD ROBERTS

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Sir Richard Roberts is an English biochemist, who has long been at the forefront of efforts by the scientific community to speak out against global human rights violations. Roberts has mobilized fellow scientists to appeal for justice in numerous cases involving individuals who have come under threat as a result of speaking freely, associating with others, and seeking to promote justice and human rights within their countries. Many of these individuals have been arbitrarily detained and subjected to torture and other forms of inhumane treatment.

Many of Roberts' efforts focus on addressing misunderstandings of science that threaten human rights and dignity. In one of the most high-profile cases, he marshaled the support of more than 100 Nobel Laureates and met repeatedly with Libyan authorities to argue for the introduction of independent science-based evidence in the 2006 trial of six foreign health professionals accused of deliberately infecting children with HIV at a Libyan hospital. The six individuals faced the death penalty, although independent experts had concluded that they were not responsible for spreading the infection. Following sustained international pressure, all six individuals were freed in 2007. A lawyer for the health professionals' international defense team, speaking to *Nature* following their release, emphasized the "fundamental role" played by the scientific community in altering the course of the case.

"We scientists can be effective if we are prepared to spend the time fighting for the issues in which we believe strongly."

