



The Vincentian
Partnership for
Social Justice

Working for social
and economic change
tackling poverty and
exclusion

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Commemorating the 60th Anniversary of
the Universal Declaration of Human Rights



United and Equal

2008 is the 60th anniversary of the UDHR, and will be marked by a year-long campaign in which all parts of the United Nations family take part in the lead up to the 60th birthday of the UDHR on Human Rights Day 2008. The campaign is designed to help people everywhere to learn more about their human rights throughout 2008 and to better understand the relevance of the Universal Declaration in their lives today.

All over the world, governments, NGOs, groups and individuals are commemorating the birthday of the UDHR with a series of political, cultural and educational events. Maybe an activity you are organising could also commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the UDHR?

Visit the special UDHR anniversary website
<http://www.knowyourrights2008.org> to find out more.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

What is it??

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is the main international expression of the fundamental human rights of all people. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) on 10 December, 1948, the UDHR represents the first comprehensive agreement among nations on the rights and freedoms of all people. This year, it commemorates its 60th Anniversary.



How did it come into being?

The UN was set up following two world wars at the beginning of the twentieth century. The UDHR gives expression to the commitment of the 58 members of the UN that such destruction would not be visited on the world again. Today there are 185 members of the United Nations.

Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the UN Human Rights Committee which drafted the UDHR. She was adamant that it would be universal in nature. Because it takes into account the legal, moral and philosophical beliefs held true by all peoples, it has become a living document that is as relevant to the world today as when it was drafted 60 years ago.

What does it say??

The UDHR says that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that they should not be discriminated against because of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, race, gender, political opinion, wealth, or property.

Human rights outlined in the UDHR are considered to be universal, inalienable, indivisible and interdependent.

Universal

This means that human rights are the same for all people everywhere - regardless of our background, where we live, what we think or what we believe.

Inalienable

Human rights are inalienable. They cannot be taken away, violated, or transferred from one person to another, except in specific situations and according to due process. For example, the right to liberty may be restricted if a person is found guilty of a crime by a court of law.

Indivisible and interdependent

All human rights are complementary. In certain cases, when one right is denied, it can lead to other rights violations. Likewise, the improvement of one right facilitates advancement of the others. For example, the right to education is considered the key that unlocks other rights, such as health and work.

UDHR Preamble (introduction)

These legal principles are clearly spelled out in the extracts of the preamble below:

Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind...the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standard of life in larger freedom...

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

What does it do??

Since the UDHR is, technically speaking, a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly it was never intended to be legally binding on the UN member States. Instead it was meant as a recommendation and a "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations".

Although the UDHR does not have the same legal strength as human rights treaties that followed in its path, it influenced them and remains the most well-known and most widespread human rights document and the one with the highest moral status.

(Definition: A Declaration is a general statement of values or beliefs. It is not legally binding, but can form the basis for other legally binding documents)

Definition: A Covenant/Convention is a legally binding agreement between the governments of countries).

10 December, Human Rights Day

The UDHR was adopted on 10 December, 1948. For this reason people all over the world have chosen to celebrate this date as International Human Rights Day. It marks the achievements in promoting and protecting human rights as well as renewing our commitment to the UDHR and the principles it represents. This continued affirmation is critical to the protection of human rights.



The role of the Irish Human Rights Commission

The Irish Human Rights Commission was established, under legislation (Acts of the Oireachtas) in 2000 and 2001, to promote and protect the human rights of everyone in Ireland.

The IHRC protects the rights guaranteed in the Irish Constitution and the rights covered in the many international treaties that Ireland has signed. While the UDHR is not legally binding on Ireland, its legal principles informed the development of later treaties including the international covenant on civil and political rights and the international covenant on social, economic and cultural rights, and the various treaties that protect the rights of groups including women, children and minorities. These are all treaties which Ireland has signed and has a duty to respect, protect and fulfil.

The IHRC aims to ensure that everyone's human rights are fully realised and respected in law, policy and practice and to promote awareness and understanding about human rights in Ireland. For example, the IHRC appears as *amicus curiae* or 'friend of the court' in cases in the High Court and the Supreme Court to draw attention to human rights standards. We comment on whether draft legislation meets human rights standards and publicise human rights issues through the media and events.

The IHRC is planning a number of activities to commemorate the UDHR. The UN has also urged governments, national human rights institutions and community and voluntary organisations to mark this significant anniversary in appropriate ways.

*Eamonn Mac Aodha
Chief Executive of the IHRC*

For further information about the IHRC visit www.ihrc or contact us by emailing: info@ihrc.ie

Prayer and Reflection

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

We all have:



- The right to life and to live in freedom and safety;
- The right not to be made or treated as a slave;
- The right not to be hurt or tortured;
- The right to be treated fairly by the law, which should be the same for everyone;
- The right to ask the law to help us if we are not treated fairly;
- The right not to be put in prison without a good reason or to be sent away from our country;
- The right to be tried in public;
- The right not to be blamed for doing something until it is proved that we did it;
- The right to our good name;
- The right to privacy - no one should come into our home, open our letters or bother us or our families without a good reason;
- The right to travel freely in our own country and to go abroad if we wish;
- The right to go to another country if we are frightened of being badly treated in our own country;
- The right to belong to a country;
- The right to marry and have a family;
- The right to own things and not to have these things taken from us without a good reason;
- The right to our beliefs and to have a religion;
- The right to have ideas and say what we think;
- The right to meet other people and assemble in a peaceful way;
- The right to take part in the government of our country and the right to vote if we are old enough;
- The right to a home, enough money to live on and health care if we get ill;
- The right to share in the cultural life of our community;
- The right to a job, a fair wage for our work and to join a trade union;
- The right to rest from work, to relax and play;
- The right to a good life and to receive care and support if we need it;
- The right to go to school and to receive free primary education;
- The right to our own way of life and to enjoy the good things that science and learning can bring.

The Declaration also says that everyone must respect the 'social order' so that we can all enjoy rights and freedoms in our own country and all over the world. We also have a responsibility to respect the rights of other people, the community and public property.

Summary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*available on the Amnesty International Irish Section website at www.amnesty.ie*)

Creator God we believe in your unconditional love for all your people. Help us to remember that all men and women are our brothers and sisters in Christ and that all are born equal in dignity and rights. As we commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights strengthen our commitment to promote these rights throughout the world.

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