

THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

75 YEARS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

On December 10, 1948, the rights of the whole human family were articulated for the first time in history when the UN General Assembly adopted the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**. Regarded as one of the major accomplishments of the 20th century, the thirty articles of the Declaration set forth a comprehensive body of principles to which all UN member states commit themselves. The UDHR establishes the foundation for the framework of human rights conventions that have evolved since 1948, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1966), the Convention against Torture (1984), and Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Indicating of its global recognition, the UDHR holds the record for the most translated of all human documents.

Unlike rights enumerated in a national constitution, which apply only to citizens of that particular country, the rights enshrined in the UDHR are universal: they belong to every human being everywhere “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

Furthermore, human rights are inalienable: no one can take them away from you for any reason. They are indivisible and interdependent: no right is “less important” or “non-essential.” You need them all! For example, your ability to participate in your community is directly affected by your right to express yourself, to assemble with others, to get an education, or even to obtain the necessities of life.

MORE THAN CIVIL RIGHTS

Most people in the USA are familiar with the rights guaranteed in the US Constitution and Bill of Rights, which are primarily **civil and political rights** such as the right to vote, to a fair trial, and to freedom of religion, speech, and assembly. The Universal Declaration goes further, however, including **social, economic, and cultural rights** such as the right to shelter, health care, education, and “a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being.” The Universal Declaration affirms that both groupings of rights are necessary to ensure all people a life of dignity.



Eleanor Roosevelt holding a Declaration of Human Rights poster, 1949 (UN Photo)

BRINGING HUMAN RIGHTS HOME

A familiar function of the US Supreme Court is determining whether a specific law violates the US Constitution or is “Constitutional.” Less familiar to the American public is examining laws, policies, decisions, and events through a human rights lens. Too often people in the United States think of human rights as problems somewhere else in the world. When analyzed from the broader perspective of the UDHR, current issues facing the USA such as gun violence, infringement of voting rights, the treatment of refugees at our borders, or the limits of expression may look very different. While inviting learners to consider an issue from different and possibly conflicting legal and ethical standards may be challenging, it also encourages critical thinking, meaningful discussion, and a global perspective on local situations. Learning about the UDHR can literally bring human rights home. A human rights approach is not just about violations. The UDHR is intended to provide “a standard of achievement for all nations,” norms and standards to ensure everyone “the full development of the human personality. This aspiration is especially meaningful to educators and activists who are exhorted by the UDHR to “strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.” Everyone needs to know their rights to cherish them, to claim them, and to defend them for themselves and others.

Text of the UDHR

- **Full UDHR Text:**
 - https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf
- **UDHR Passport format:** <https://bit.ly/udhr-passport>
- **Simplified UDHR Text:**
 - <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Simplified-UDHR.pdf>
- **UDHR in 548 different languages**
 - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/universal-declaration-human-rights/about-universal-declaration-human-rights-translation-project>



The UDHR set a world record for being the most translated document in the world



Little people of the world with the UDHR (UN Photo)

UDHR 75th RESOURCE AND ACTION IDEAS

CELEBRATING THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT 75

Source: Human Rights Educators USA
Content: Resources for lesson plans, videos, action ideas.
Audience: Elementary School – Adults
<https://hreusa.org/hre-library/topics/udhr/>

COMMEMORATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Source: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Content: Resources including background, posters, action ideas, and much more.
Audience: Elementary School – Adults
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/get-involved/campaign/udhr-75>

25+ IDEAS FOR CELEBRATING THE UDHR'S 75TH

Source: Human Rights Educators USA
<https://bit.ly/25-ideas-for-udhr75>