

What Are Human Rights?



YouthforHumanRights.org

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INTRODUCTION

Every person is entitled to certain rights—simply by the fact that they are a human being. They are “rights” because they are things you are allowed to be, to do or to have. These rights are there for your protection against people who might want to harm or hurt you. They are also there to help us get along with each other and live in peace.

There are 30 rights and they are contained in a document called The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was created in 1948 by the United Nations. The United Nations came into being in 1945, shortly after the end of World War II. It was started by the five major powers that won the war: Britain, China, France, the Soviet Union and the United States. Its purpose is to bring peace to the world. Today 192 countries are members of the United Nations.

This booklet explains each of your rights as written in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



1. We Are All Born Free & Equal

We are all born free.

We all have our own thoughts and ideas.

We should all be treated in the same way.



2. Don't Discriminate

These rights belong to everybody,
whatever our differences.



3. The Right to Life

We all have the right to life, and
to live in freedom and safety.



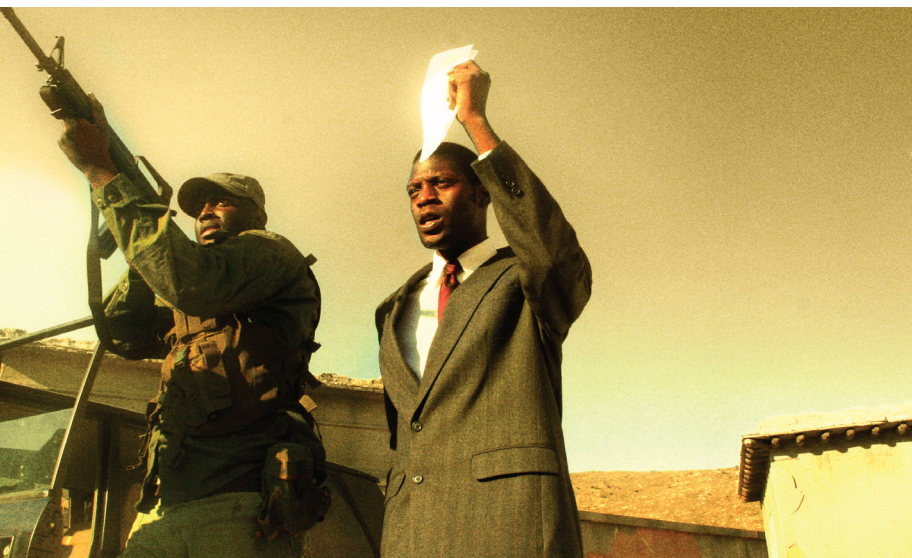
4. No Slavery

Nobody has any right to make us a slave.
We cannot make anyone our slave.



5. No Torture

**Nobody has any right to hurt us
or to torture us.**



6. You Have Rights No Matter Where You Go

I am a person just like you!



7. We're All Equal Before the Law

The law is the same for everyone.
It must treat us all fairly.



8. Your Human Rights Are Protected by Law

We can all ask for the law to help us
when we are not treated fairly.



9. No Unfair Detainmentment

Nobody has the right to put us in prison without good reason and keep us there, or to send us away from our country.



10. The Right to Trial

If we are put on trial this should be in public. The people who try us should not let anyone tell them what to do.

11. We're Always Innocent Till Proven Guilty

Nobody should be blamed for doing something until it is proven. When people say we did a bad thing we have the right to show it is not true.



12. The Right to Privacy

Nobody should try to harm our good name. Nobody has the right to come into our home, open our letters, or bother us or our family without a good reason.



13. Freedom to Move

We all have the right to go where we want
in our own country and to travel
as we wish.



14. The Right to Seek a Safe Place to Live

If we are frightened of being badly treated in our own country, we all have the right to run away to another country to be safe.



15. Right to a Nationality

We all have the right
to belong to a country.



16. Marriage and Family

Every grown-up has the right to marry
and have a family if they want to.
Men and women have the same rights
when they are married, and
when they are separated.



17. The Right to Your Own Things

Everyone has the right to own things or share them. Nobody should take our things from us without a good reason.



18. Freedom of Thought

We all have the right to believe in what we want to believe, to have a religion, or to change it if we want.



19. Freedom of Expression

We all have the right to make up
our own minds, to think what we like,
to say what we think, and to share our
ideas with other people.



20. The Right to Public Assembly

We all have the right to meet our friends
and to work together in peace
to defend our rights.
Nobody can make us join a group
if we don't want to.



21. The Right to Democracy

We all have the right to take part
in the government of our country.
Every grown-up should be allowed
to choose their own leaders.

A person is silhouetted against a bright, hazy sky, holding a rectangular sign above their head with both arms. The sign contains the text "What is social security?". To the right, the silhouettes of utility poles and power lines are visible against the sky.

What is
social security?

22. Social Security

We all have the right to affordable housing, medicine, education, and childcare, enough money to live on and medical help if we are ill or old.



23. Workers' Rights

Every grown-up has the right to do a job,
to a fair wage for their work,
and to join a trade union.



24. The Right to Play

We all have the right to rest
from work and to relax.



25. Food and Shelter for All

We all have the right to a good life. Mothers and children, people who are old, unemployed or disabled, and all people have the right to be cared for.



26. The Right to Education

Education is a right.

Primary school should be free.

We should learn about the United Nations
and how to get on with others.

Our parents can choose what we learn.



27. Copyright

Copyright is a special law that protects one's own artistic creations and writings; others cannot make copies without permission.

We all have the right to our own way of life and to enjoy the good things that art, science and learning bring.



28. A Fair and Free World

There must be proper order
so we can all enjoy rights and freedoms
in our own country and all over the world.



29. Responsibility

We have a duty to other people,
and we should protect their rights
and freedoms.



**30. No One Can
Take Away Your
Human Rights**





A LOOK AT THE BACKGROUND OF HUMAN RIGHTS

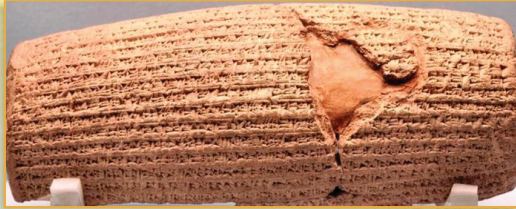
Originally, people had rights only because of their membership in a group, such as a family. Then, in 539 B.C., Cyrus the Great, after conquering the city of Babylon, did something totally unexpected—he freed all slaves to return home. Moreover, he declared people should choose their own religion. The Cyrus Cylinder, a clay tablet containing his statements, is the first human rights declaration in history.

The idea of human rights spread quickly to India, Greece and eventually Rome. The most important advances since then have included:

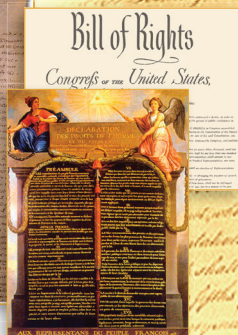
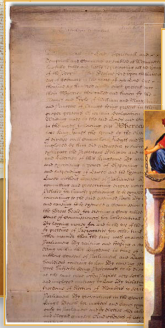
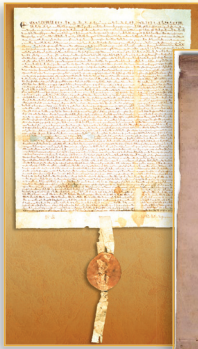
1215: The Magna Carta—giving people new rights and making the king subject to the law.

1628: The Petition of Right—setting out the rights of the people.

1776: The United States Declaration of Independence—proclaiming the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.



The clay cylinder of Cyrus the Great, first king of ancient Persia (585–529 B.C.), is hailed as the first document of human rights.



- 1787: The Constitution of the United States of America**—forming the fundamental law of the US federal system of government and defining the basic rights of citizens.
- 1789: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen**—in France, establishing that all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law.
- 1791: The US Bill of Rights**—limiting the powers of the federal government and protecting the rights of all citizens, residents and visitors on United States territory.
- 1864: The First Geneva Convention**—setting standards of international law.
- 1948: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**—the first charter proclaiming the thirty rights to which every human being is entitled.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

During World War II, tens of millions of people died. In addition to those who lost their lives in the fighting, the Nazis in Germany killed millions in cold blood.

When the war ended in 1945, the victorious nations met to decide how to prevent such acts from happening again. They formed the United Nations to advance human rights and peace.

The United Nations created The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first truly universal human rights document. Eleanor Roosevelt, the woman who led the committee that created this document, stated that the Declaration grants rights for all Mankind.

The United Nations also took other steps. One was to create international laws to protect human rights, a

process that took almost twenty years. International laws are laws agreed upon by many countries, and so they apply not just in one country but in all the countries that agree to them.

The countries that belonged to the United Nations also brought these rights to the rest of the world. As a result, the basic laws of many nations today include the rights contained in the Declaration.



On December 10th, 1948, the United Nations adopted The Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Eleanor Roosevelt holds a copy of the document she helped create.



FAMOUS PEOPLE WHO PROMOTED HUMAN RIGHTS

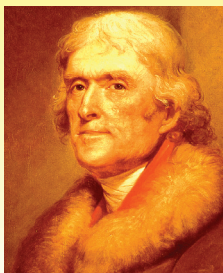
Many humanitarians have advanced human rights by working bravely for what they believed in. Their examples have inspired millions and can inspire you. Learn from what they said.

Kofi Annan, for many years the head of the United Nations, had a special message for young people about human rights:

“Young friends all over the world, you are the ones who must realize these rights, now and for all time. Their fate and future is in your hands.”



“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” –Voltaire, French writer of the 18th century. ▲



“The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government.” –Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the American Declaration of Independence. ▲



“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.” –Nelson Mandela, South African statesman and Nobel Peace Prize winner. ▲



“You must be the change you want to see in the world.” –Mahatma Gandhi, 20th century political and spiritual leader of India. ▲



“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” –Martin Luther King, Jr., who worked for the rights of African-Americans. ▲



THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of December 10, 1948. On December 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the full text of which appears in the following pages. Following this historic act the Assembly called upon all member countries to publicize the text of the Declaration and “to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories.”

Preamble

Whereas 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, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from

fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas 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 standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore, The General Assembly, Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11

1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

2. No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.

2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.

2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17

1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.

3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.



About Youth for Human Rights International

Youth for Human Rights International (YHRI) is the youth component of United for Human Rights, a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Los Angeles and with chapters across the world. YHRI was founded in 2001 to educate youth in human rights so they become advocates for tolerance and peace.

Youth for Human Rights International distributes a series of audiovisual and printed human rights educational materials that can be ordered from its website, by phone or e-mail.

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