

10 December - Human Rights Day



'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' – these are the famous words enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the most famous global expression of human rights, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

Human Rights Day is celebrated each year on 10 December, the day on which the Declaration was adopted, and all over the world, this occasion is used to promote respect for human rights and human dignity as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

What are human rights?

Human rights are the rights and freedoms shared by everyone. Nobody has the right to take these rights away, they are:

- **Universal** – Every person, by virtue of being human, should enjoy all human rights. Human rights were officially recognised as universal values by the world when the UN adopted the Universal Declaration.
- **Equal** – All rights are equally important.
- **Interdependent** – Human rights are indivisible. They are inter-related and reinforce each other.
- **Inalienable** – Rights cannot be taken away, but they can be limited by law (e.g. your liberty can be curtailed through criminal proceedings).

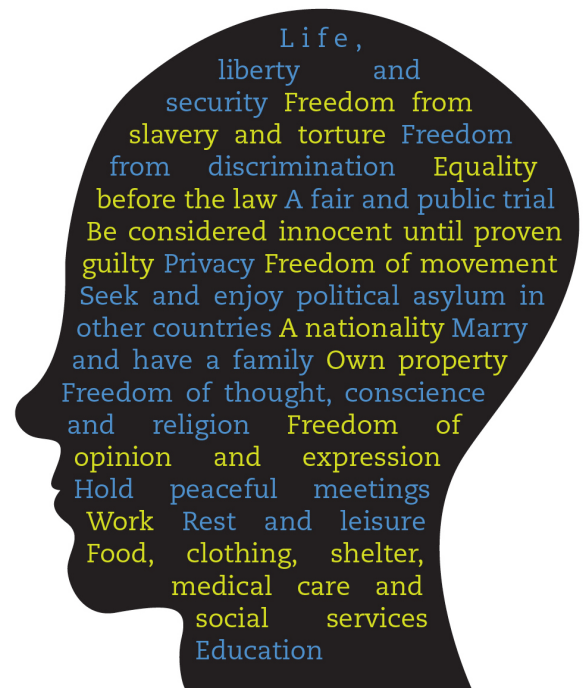
Human rights are based on fairness, dignity, justice, equality and respect. These are values that everybody can understand and that have existed for hundreds of years in different societies all over the world. Human rights include¹:

- *The right to life. To food. To shelter.* These are rights based on our physical needs.
- *The right to be free from torture, cruel treatment and abuse.* These are rights that protect us.
- *The right to education. To work. To participate in your community.* These are rights that enable us to develop to our fullest potential.

Why do human rights matter?

Human rights matter to everyone but not everyone knows when their rights are not being respected or how they can change their situation. Children are especially vulnerable to having their rights violated. For example:

- About 640 million children do not have adequate shelter
- Some 270 million children have no access to health services
- Approximately 126 million children aged 5–17 are believed to be engaged in hazardous work
- Over 70 million children of primary school age are currently not enrolled in school



¹ <http://www.una.org.uk/learnabouthumanrights/>

Even if sometimes it seems as though human rights are only important to people in other countries. There are many children in the UK whose rights are not being respected. In the UK:

- One child in three lives in poverty, one child in four is physically abused, and one child in seven does not have a proper home.²

Everyone, especially young people should know their rights and understand how they can use their rights to protect themselves. All adults have a responsibility to uphold the rights of all children.

How does the UN protect human rights?

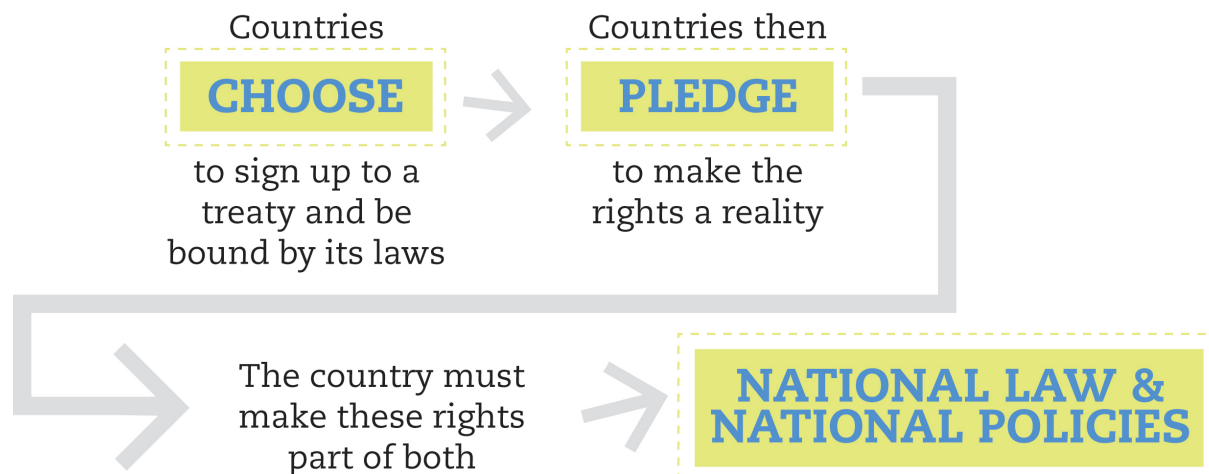
When the United Nations was founded in 1945 human rights for everyone was a central aim along with maintaining international peace and security.

Human rights are protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which is the cornerstone of human rights. The UDHR was adopted by the UN's member states in 1948 and has served as a moral compass for people and governments ever since. It has inspired more than seventy international human rights treaties³ and holds the world record as the most translated international document – with more than 360 language versions available to help people learn about their rights.

What about the rights of children?

The human rights of specific groups like children are also protected by treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which lists all the rights that children everywhere in the world should enjoy.

- The CRC applies all the human rights contained in the Universal Declaration to children, taking into account the special protection that children require. It contains rights such as the right to a name and to family reunification, as well as the rights to education, shelter, health and protection from abuse.
- The main principles of the CRC are that every child has all these rights, and that all government have to take action to protect the rights of all children, regardless of their nationality, gender or any other distinction. The vast majority of the world's countries – 194 – have signed up to the CRC, including the UK, which did so in 1991.



Once a country has signed up to a treaty like the CRC, it pledges to make the rights contained in it a reality i.e. putting words into action. States agree to ensure that public bodies and service-providers are obliged to respect, protect and fulfil rights, and enable people whose rights have been violated to seek help, if necessary via the courts.

² <http://www.una.org.uk/learnabouthumanrights/Student%20Factsheets/CRC.pdf>

³ <http://untreaty.un.org/cod/avl/ha/udhr/udhr.html>