



Frequently Asked Questions about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

What is the UDHR?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights articulates fundamental freedoms and human rights considered inherent to all humans. This "Magna Carta for all humanity" contains a Preamble and thirty separate articles, each detailing specific rights that belong to humans everywhere, including the principles of non-discrimination, civil and political rights, and economic and social rights.

How was it created?

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, devoted itself exclusively to drafting the UDHR. The declaration was adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948, at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris.

What does it say?

The UDHR comprises a broad range of rights, and has inspired more than 60 other human rights instruments. The UDHR articulates that "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." The fundamental rights articulated in the UDHR include the right to life, liberty and security of person, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to seek asylum, the right to freedom of expression, the right to education, and the right to freedom from torture, among others.

What was the United States' role in the UDHR? What is it today?

Eleanor Roosevelt of the United States was the chairman of the Commission on Human Rights, the UN body responsible for drafting the Declaration. In addition, the United States was one of the original forty-eight countries who voted in favor of the UN adopting the Declaration. Today, human rights have been used as a tool in foreign policy rather than making sure that the rights described within it are respected at home. A recommitment by the U.S. to the principles and ideals of the UDHR is essential to protecting these precious rights.

What countries originally voted in favor of the UDHR?

When the UDHR was adopted by the United Nations in 1948, 48 countries – almost the entire membership of the UN at the time – voted in favor of it. At the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, Austria, in 1993, 171 countries reaffirmed their commitment to the UDHR.

What is the significance of the UDHR today?

The UDHR is one of the foundational documents in international human rights. It forms the basis for many other human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Documents such as these enable governments, advocates, and lawyers to promote respect for human rights everywhere, and take action when human rights are violated.

Why does the ACLU use the UDHR?

The ACLU's Human Rights Program works to ensure that the U.S. government complies with universal human rights in addition to the U.S. constitution. The UDHR is one of the basic documents outlining international human rights law. The ACLU uses human rights strategies to complement existing ACLU advocacy and advance social justice in the areas of national security, immigrants' rights, women's rights, and racial justice.

What can you do?

Go to <http://www.udhr60.org> and sign the petition calling for the recommitment to the UDHR and enter the "My UDHR" video contest.