

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Declaration, which was adopted without dissent, is a pledge among nations to promote these fundamental rights as the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. The 30 articles of the UDHR together form a comprehensive statement covering the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of all people.

A declaration lacks enforcement provisions. Instead, it is a statement of intent, which is a set of principles to which United Nations member states commit themselves. The UDHR has acquired the status of customary international law because most states treat it as though it were law, although governments have not applied this common law equally.

The Universal Declaration proclaims the right to:

- life, liberty, and security of person
- equality before the law
- a fair and public trial and the presumption of innocence
- freedom of movement
- freedom of thought, conscience, and religion
- freedom of opinion and expression
- freedom of assembly and association

It insists that no one shall:

- be held in slavery
- be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment
- be arbitrarily arrested, detained, or exiled

Furthermore, it establishes that everyone has the right:

- to a nationality
- to marry
- to own property
- to take part in the government of his or her country
- to work and to receive equal pay for equal work
- to enjoy rest and leisure
- to have an adequate standard of living and education
- to form and join trade unions
- to seek asylum from persecution

The Declaration proclaims each person's right to protection from deprivation of life, and it categorically states that no one shall be subjected to cruel or degrading punishment. The death penalty - the pre-meditated killing of prisoners in state custody - violates both of these rights. For a full text of the UDHR, go to <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/aboutai-udhr-eng>.

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

--Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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

--Article 5, Universal Declaration of Human Rights