

# Human Rights Toolkit





## ABOUT THE ADVOCATES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The mission of The Advocates for Human Rights is to implement international human rights standards to promote civil society and reinforce the rule of law. By involving volunteers in research, education, and advocacy, The Advocates for Human Rights builds broad constituencies in the United States and select global communities. The Advocates for Human Rights:

- Investigates and exposes human rights violations internationally and in the United States;
- Represents immigrants and refugees who are victims of human rights abuses;
- Trains and assists groups that protect human rights;
- Works through education and advocacy to inform the public, policy-makers, and children about human rights and cultural understanding.

The Advocates for Human Rights was founded in 1983 by a group of Minnesotans who recognized the community's unique spirit of social justice as an opportunity to promote and protect human rights in the United States and around the world. The organization has produced more than 75 reports documenting human rights practices in more than 25 countries and works with partners overseas and in the United States to build the human rights movement, and restore and protect human rights. The Advocates for Human Rights holds special consultative status with the United Nations.

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ISBN: 0-929293-68-1

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## What Are Human Rights?

Human rights are standards that allow all people to live with **dignity, freedom, equality, justice, and peace**. Every person has these rights simply because they are human beings. They are guaranteed to everyone 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. Human rights are essential to the full development of individuals and communities.

Many people view human rights as a set of moral principles that apply to everyone. Human rights are also part of international law, contained in treaties and declarations that spell out specific rights that countries are required to uphold. Countries often incorporate human rights in their own national, state, and local laws.

## Why Are Human Rights Important?

Human rights reflect the minimum standards necessary for people to live with dignity. Human rights give people the freedom to choose how they live, how they express themselves, and what kind of government they want to support, among many other things. Human rights also guarantee people the means necessary to satisfy their basic needs, such as food, housing, and education, so they can take full advantage of all opportunities. Finally, by guaranteeing life, liberty, equality, and security, human rights protect people against abuse by those who are more powerful.

According to the United Nations, human rights:

*“Ensure that a human being will be able to fully develop and use human qualities such as intelligence, talent, and conscience and satisfy his or her spiritual and other needs.”*

### CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**UNIVERSAL**  
Human rights belong to all people equally regardless of status. Everyone is born free and equal in dignity and rights.

**INALIENABLE**  
Human rights may not be taken away or transferred. People still have human rights even when their governments violate those rights.

**INTERCONNECTED**  
The fulfillment or violation of one right affects the fulfillment of other rights.

**INDIVISIBLE**  
No right can be treated in isolation.

**NON-DISCRIMINATORY**  
Human rights should be respected 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.



# Who Is Responsible for Upholding Human Rights?

Under human rights treaties, governments have the primary responsibility for protecting and promoting human rights. However, governments are not solely responsible for ensuring human rights. The UDHR states:

*“Every individual and every organ of society ... 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.”*

## Where Do Human Rights Come From?



The modern human rights era can be traced to struggles to end slavery, genocide, discrimination, and government oppression. Atrocities during World War II made clear that previous efforts to protect individual rights from government violations were inadequate. Thus was born the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as part of the emergence of the United Nations (UN).

The UDHR was the first international document that spelled out the “*basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all human beings should enjoy.*” The declaration was ratified without opposition by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948.

When it was adopted, the UDHR was not legally binding, though it carried great moral weight. In order to give the human rights listed in the UDHR the force of law, the UN drafted two treaties, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The division of rights between these two covenants is artificial, reflecting the global ideological divide during the Cold War. Though politics prevented the creation of a unified treaty, the two covenants are interconnected, and the rights contained in one covenant are necessary to the fulfillment of the rights contained in the other. Together, the UDHR, ICCPR, and ICESCR are known as the International Bill of Human Rights. They contain a comprehensive list of human rights that governments must respect, protect, and fulfill.

### HUMAN RIGHTS OUTLINED IN THE INTERNATIONAL BILL OF RIGHTS

- The right to equality and freedom from discrimination
- The right to life, liberty, and personal security
- Freedom from torture and degrading treatment
- The right to equality before the law
- The right to a fair trial
- The right to privacy
- Freedom of belief and religion
- Freedom of opinion
- Right of peaceful assembly and association
- The right to participate in government
- The right to social security
- The right to work
- The right to an adequate standard of living
- The right to education
- The right to health
- The right to food and housing



## How Do Rights Become Law?

International human rights law provides an important framework for guaranteeing the rights of all people, regardless of where they live. International human rights law is contained in many different types of documents, including treaties, charters, conventions, and covenants. Despite the different official names, these documents are all considered treaties and have the same effect under international law: countries that ratify a treaty are legally obligated to protect the rights it describes.

The human rights treaty process usually begins at the United Nations or a similar international body. Legal and subject matter experts might first create a draft of the treaty. After the draft is written, the UN or other body will arrange a meeting between representatives of interested countries to negotiate the final terms, or content, of the treaty. This can be a lengthy process if large numbers of countries want to participate in the drafting process. Non-governmental organizations are sometimes allowed to offer recommendations during some of the stages of the drafting process. After the negotiating countries agree on a final text of the treaty, the treaty is opened for ratification by countries that want to become parties to it.

Countries have different methods for acceding to or ratifying treaties. For the United States to become a party to a treaty, the president must first sign it, and then present it to the Senate, where two-thirds of the senators must vote to ratify it. Through ratification, a country agrees to be legally bound by the terms of the treaty.

Countries that ratify treaties are allowed to enter reservations to those instruments. Reservations are statements made by a country that “modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty.” Entering a reservation allows a government to agree to most of a treaty, while excluding or limiting parts that might be controversial or unconstitutional in its own country. Many countries have entered reservations to the major human rights treaties, which can limit the effectiveness of the treaties in protecting people against abuses committed by their governments.

### DEFINITIONS

<b>Declaration:</b> document stating standards or principles, but which is not legally binding	<b>Covenant/Convention/Charter/Treaty:</b> legally binding agreement between two or more countries
<b>Ratification:</b> formal process by which a country agrees to be bound by the terms of a treaty	<b>Reservation:</b> the exception that States make to a treaty (e.g. provisions within the treaty that the government does not accept)



# Government Obligations

When a government ratifies a human rights treaty, it assumes a legal obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights contained in the treaty. Governments are obligated to make sure that human rights are protected by both preventing human rights violations against people within their territories and providing effective remedies for those whose rights are violated. Government parties to a treaty must do the following:

## RESPECT

Governments must not deprive people of a right or interfere with persons exercising their rights.

### HOW GOVERNMENTS CAN RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS

- Create constitutional guarantees of human rights.
- Provide ways for people who have suffered human rights violations by the government to seek legal remedies from domestic and international courts.
- Sign international human rights treaties.



In 1945, the U.S. ratified the United Nations Charter, which established the United Nations.

*Photo: The signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco, 1945.*

## PROTECT

Governments must prevent private actors from violating the human rights of others.

### HOW GOVERNMENTS CAN PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

- Prosecute perpetrators of human rights abuses, such as crimes of domestic violence.
- Educate people about human rights and the importance of respecting the human rights of others.
- Cooperate with the international community in preventing and prosecuting crimes against humanity and other violations.



The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act provides protection for children against child labor in the U.S.

*Photo: Protest against child labor, 1901.*

## FULFILL

Governments must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.

### HOW GOVERNMENTS CAN FULFILL HUMAN RIGHTS

- Provide free, high-quality public education.
- Create a public defender system so that everyone has access to a lawyer.
- Ensure everyone has access to food by funding public assistance programs.
- Fund a public education campaign on the right to vote.



The “New Deal” laws of the 1930s established the foundation of the modern welfare system in the U.S.

*Photo: Depression era breadline, 1930.*



# Human Rights and the United Nations

The United Nations is a global organization that includes nearly every country in the world. When a country becomes a member of the UN, it is legally bound to uphold the obligations set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, which include the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people. As part of its mission to protect human rights, the UN oversaw the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as most other global human rights treaties.

## United Nations Human Rights Legal Bodies

The UN not only helps create international human rights law, it also promotes and protects human rights through different human rights bodies.

**Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).** The OHCHR is charged with coordinating all of the human rights activities of the UN. It provides staff and logistical support to the Human Rights Council and the core treaty bodies, and it coordinates UN action to promote human rights

**Human Rights Council.** The UN Charter called for the creation of a Commission on Human Rights, which was reorganized into the current Human Rights Council. The Council consists of 47 UN member countries that meet regularly to review the status of human rights in all countries around the world, address situations of human rights violations, and make recommendations on how to improve the fulfillment of human rights.

**Treaty Monitoring Bodies.** Nine core international human rights treaties have entered into force. Each of these treaties established a committee of independent experts to monitor implementation of the treaty provisions by its member countries. Each country that has signed and ratified a treaty is required to submit regular reports to the monitoring body on their compliance with the terms of the treaty. The following are the nine UN treaty-monitoring bodies:

### MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

- Human Rights Committee (CCPR)
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)
- Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Committee against Torture (CAT)
- Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW)
- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- Committee on Enforced Disappearance



## Regional and Other Human Rights Legal Bodies

The United Nations is not the only international organization involved in creating, monitoring, and enforcing international human rights law. Some of the following international organizations focus on a particular category of human rights issues, while others restrict their focus to a geographic region. This web of human rights treaties and declarations, governed by a network of international and regional human rights bodies, provides activists with many avenues for improving human rights conditions in their countries. Governments that may resist or ignore one means of addressing human rights violations can be encouraged or compelled through another mechanism.



**The International Labour Organization (ILO)** oversees a group of legally binding conventions that guarantee certain human rights related to work, especially: “freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor; the effective abolition of child labor; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.”



**The International Criminal Court (ICC)** is an independent, permanent court that tries persons accused of the most serious international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The ICC is based on a treaty ratified by 100 countries.



**The Inter-American Court of Human Rights** and the **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights** together interpret and enforce the **American Convention on Human Rights** and the **American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man**. The Commission investigates individual complaints, conducts independent monitoring, and refers cases to the Inter-American Court. The Court rules on cases involving violations of the Convention brought by governments or by the Commission and offers advisory opinions on the correct interpretation of regional human rights treaties.



**The European Court of Human Rights** enforces the **European Convention on Human Rights**, which protects rights, such as the right to life, freedom from torture, the right to vote, and freedom of expression. Individuals and countries bring complaints before the Court, which then passes judgment. The judgments of the Court are binding and typically involve compensation for the victim of the violation.



**The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights** and the **African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights** together oversee implementation of the **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights**. The Commission receives regular reports on human rights conditions from governments that are signatories to the Charter. The Court adjudicates allegations of human rights violations brought by the Commission, governments, and individuals.



# Functions of the Human Rights System

The UN and other human rights bodies engage in a variety of activities to protect, monitor, and advance human rights worldwide. The activities include the following:



**CREATE TREATIES.** An important function of human rights bodies is to expand our understanding of the scope and content of human rights. One way to do this is to oversee the drafting of new treaties. For example, in 2003 and 2007, two new human rights treaties written by UN bodies entered into force: 1) the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and 2) the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The UN and other human rights bodies also issue declarations and comments that define and clarify existing human rights treaties, educating governments and civil society on their responsibilities under international law.



**MONITOR AND REPORT.** International and regional human rights bodies monitor and report on human rights conditions in member countries. Parties to international and regional human rights treaties are required to submit regular reports detailing their compliance. Sometimes a human rights body independently undertakes missions to monitor human rights conditions in a particular country or for a particular group of people. The reports can include information from domestic or international human rights groups, independent experts, and government sources. These reports are used to expose human rights violations to a global audience and pressure countries to improve their human rights records.



**TAKE COMPLAINTS.** Some UN and regional human rights bodies, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, are able to take complaints from individuals and others whose human rights have been violated. These bodies may request a government response to the complaint, hear testimony from the victim, and make a public report on the case. If the individual is found to have suffered a violation of human rights, the body may mediate a settlement between the victim and the government, require the country to report on what steps it has taken to remedy the violation, and in some instances refer unresolved cases to international courts.



**ENFORCE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS.** The UN Security Council can impose consequences on countries that engage in massive human rights violations by enforcing sanctions or authorizing humanitarian intervention. Regional organizations, including the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court, investigate and rule on cases involving human rights violations in their member countries. The International Criminal Court and special international criminal tribunals (such as those created for Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone) provide legal remedies for massive human rights violations. These tribunals have the power to impose criminal sentences on people found guilty of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes of aggression.



**DIRECTLY IMPROVE HUMAN RIGHTS.** The UN contains agencies that work directly with governments and civil society to improve human rights. These agencies run educational programs, provide training to government officials, and fund projects that increase understanding of human rights and responsibilities worldwide. In some cases, these agencies directly improve conditions for people, fulfilling human rights such as the right to food, the right to education, women's rights, or the right to a clean environment.

# The International Human Rights System in Action

## **ENFORCING HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS**

### **The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR):**

#### **Case of Theoneste Bagosora**

At the beginning of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Theoneste Bagosora was the highest authority with control over the Rwandan military. The ICTR found that he was responsible for planning the massacre of ethnic Tutsis, the assassinations of opposition government officials, and the murders of 10 Belgian peacekeepers. He organized and armed the militias that carried out most of the killings and compiled lists of Tutsis and moderate Hutus to be killed. Roughly 800,000 people were killed in the genocide. Bagosora was sentenced to life in prison in 2008. He is the first person to be convicted by the tribunal of organizing the genocide.

## **TAKING COMPLAINTS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**

### **The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights:**

#### **Fausto Mendoza Giler and Diogenes Mendoza Brazo, Ecuador**

In 2001 Mr. Diogenes Monserrate Mendoza Bravo submitted a complaint to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on his behalf and that of his 16-year old son, Fausto Fabricio Mendoza Giler, who the Ecuadoran National Police had brutally beaten and killed. Despite the fact that the police officers responsible were clearly identified, no one was prosecuted for the crime. The Commission helped to mediate a friendly agreement between the victims and government through communications and meetings. As a result, Ecuador accepted responsibility for the violation of the victims' rights, provided the victims with monetary compensation for the damages suffered, and agreed to prosecute those responsible, though prosecutions have not yet occurred.

## **MONITORING AND REPORTING ON HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS**

### **International Labor Organization:**

#### **Better Factories Cambodia Program**

The International Labor Organization, working with the U.S. and Cambodian governments, created the Better Factories Cambodia program to monitor and report on working conditions in Cambodian garment factories. As part of a trade agreement between the U.S. and Cambodia, the U.S. promised better access to markets for Cambodian garment factories in exchange for improved working conditions and rigorous monitoring. As part of the program, the ILO conducts regular unannounced site visits to monitor working conditions and publishes its findings in semi-annual reports and on the internet. The detailed reporting allows international buyers to select factories that comply with international labor standards and creates pressure on Cambodian factories to improve their performance.

## **DIRECTLY IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **United Nations:**

#### **Peacekeeping in Namibia**

South Africa illegally occupied Namibia beginning in 1966, sparking a decades-long civil war between the Namibian independence movement and forces loyal to South Africa. In 1988, South Africa and the Namibians finally negotiated a peace agreement to be overseen by the United Nations. Despite continuing violence in the first few months of the peace agreement, the UN mission managed to establish conditions for free and fair elections held in November 1989. The transition government demobilized combatants, assisted with the return of refugees, released political prisoners, and repealed the discriminatory legislation which was a legacy of rule by apartheid South Africa. In 1990, Namibia gained independence from South Africa and has remained free and democratic ever since.



# Human Rights and U.S. Law

Although international human rights law provides an important framework for guaranteeing the rights of all people in all countries, human rights standards generally do not become enforceable in the United States unless and until they are implemented through local, state, and/or federal law. International treaties define rights very generally, and international courts and monitoring bodies typically lack the ability to directly enforce their decisions in the United States. Because the greatest capacity for protection lies in domestic law, one of the best ways to improve human rights in the United States is to strengthen domestic legal protections for human rights by passing laws recognizing those rights and ensuring the implementation of those rights by the government and U.S. courts is consistent with international standards.

## The U.S. Constitution and the UDHR

In the United States, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights provide broad human rights protections. Many of the rights contained in the Constitution are equivalent to rights found in the UDHR, especially those related to political and civil liberties. In addition, the U.S. Supreme Court has identified fundamental rights not explicitly stated in the Constitution, such as the presumption of innocence in a criminal trial and freedom of movement. U.S. courts provide a remedy for people whose constitutional rights have been violated. The U.S. Congress also passes laws that protect constitutional rights and provide remedies for victims of human rights violations when court cases may be too costly or difficult. The most important of these domestic laws are those that prohibit discrimination, including discrimination based on race, gender, religion, or disability.

UDHR ARTICLE	RELATED U.S. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
Article 2	14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (non-discrimination)
Article 3	14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (life, liberty, security)
Article 4	13 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (slavery)
Article 5	8 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (cruel and unusual punishment)
Article 6	14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (equal protection)
Article 7	14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (equal protection)
Article 9	5 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (arbitrary arrest)
Article 10	6 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (fair trial)
Article 12	4 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (privacy)
Article 17	5 <sup>th</sup> Amendment (property)
Article 18	1 <sup>st</sup> Amendment (religion)
Article 19	1 <sup>st</sup> Amendment (speech)
Article 20	1 <sup>st</sup> Amendment (association)
Article 21	15 <sup>th</sup> , 19 <sup>th</sup> , 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 24 <sup>th</sup> , and 26 <sup>th</sup> Amendments (vote)

## The Missing Human Rights

Although the U.S. Constitution provides strong protections for civil and political rights, it fails to recognize the economic, social, and cultural rights guaranteed in the UDHR. Some rights, such as the right to education, can be found in some state constitutions; others, such as the right to an adequate standard of living including food, shelter, and medical care, have not been recognized as rights. Statutes may address issues such as access to food and treat it as meeting a need for some defined group of people, but they do not recognize it as a right to which all people are entitled. Because economic, social, and cultural issues are not viewed as rights enjoyed by all, public policies can exclude people from eligibility as long as they do not discriminate on prohibited grounds such as race. While ensuring that public policies are not discriminatory is important, it does not address the underlying problem of failing to guarantee for all people in the United States an adequate standard of living and other rights necessary to live in dignity.

# Timeline: Human Rights and the U.S.

The Bill of Rights guarantees civil and political rights to individual citizens, including: freedom of speech, religion, and association; the right to a fair trial; and the prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment.



One hundred women and men sign the Seneca Falls Declaration proclaiming equal social, civil, and religious rights for women.

The U.S. signs the Hague Conventions which define the laws of war and maritime combat, create protections for prisoners of war and civilians, and establish mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of international disputes.



The League of Nations forms “to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security.” U.S. President Woodrow Wilson leads the effort to establish the League, but the United States never joins.

Following the Japanese government’s attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government forcibly interns 120,000 Japanese Americans, many of them citizens, in detention camps.



The American Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are adopted. The United States leads the efforts to draft both documents.



Martin Luther King, Jr. wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent resistance to racial injustice in America. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlaws major forms of discrimination in voting, the workplace, schools and public accommodations

The United States ratifies the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. While signed, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights remains unratified.

1776

The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal ... [and] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.”



1791

1830

Congress passes the Indian Removal Act, leading to the forced relocation of 70,000 Native Americans. Many Native Americans die on the westward journey. The Act was one of many official government actions that violated the Native Americans’ rights.

1863

The 1863 Emancipation Proclamation helped to end slavery in the United States, eventually leading to the 13th Amendment (1865), which abolishes slavery, and the 14th Amendment (1868), which guarantees equal protection of the law to all people in the United States.



1907

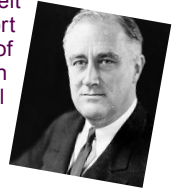
1918

Congress passes the Sedition Act of 1918, which makes it a crime to publish or speak “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” about the form of government, the Constitution, or the military of the United States. Over 2,000 people are prosecuted under the Act.

1920

1933

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt launches the New Deal in an effort to bring the United States out of the Great Depression. Legislation passed under the New Deal establishes Social Security, bans child labor, legalizes trade union practices, and provides jobs to millions of Americans.



1942

1945

The United Nations is established. One of its purposes is “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all.” The United States is instrumental in helping create the United Nations.

1948

1954

In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.



1964

1988

Almost 40 years after its creation, the United States ratifies the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

1992

2002

The U.S. begins using a detention camp at Guantanamo Bay to hold terrorism suspects in custody without a trial.



# The United States and Modern Human Rights: A Brief History

The United States has a mixed record on human rights. Despite early leadership on human rights during the 20th century, the United States, unlike many other nations around the world, has not ratified most of the major human rights treaties. U.S. foreign policy does not always respect human rights and the government also fails to protect key human rights domestically, especially economic and social rights.

## FOUNDING OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

During the first half of the 20th century, the United States was an active proponent of establishing a universal human rights system. It was one of the leaders in creating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was signed in 1948. It also played a prominent role in the Nuremberg International Military Tribunals, which prosecuted individuals for crimes against humanity for the first time.

## WITHDRAWAL FROM THE HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

Despite its initial support, in the 1950s the United States stopped participating in, and in some cases directly opposed, the newly established international human rights system. One reason for this disengagement was the conflict stemming from the Cold War, which made it difficult to support a common standard for human rights that might leave the United States vulnerable to criticism from its ideological enemies. The United States also had domestic reasons for refusing to accept international human rights law. At that time, many states in the United States practiced legally-sanctioned discrimination against racial minorities in the form of Jim Crow laws. The U.S. government did not want to be forced to change discriminatory laws and policies as a result of ratifying an international treaty.

## RE-ENGAGEMENT WITH THE HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States renewed its commitment to the international human rights system by signing, though not ratifying, several major human rights treaties, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Indeed, during the Carter Administration, respect for human rights played a role in determining foreign policy.

Despite these gains, it was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that the United States ratified some of these treaties, including the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1987), the ICCPR (1992), the ICERD (1994), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1994). During this period, the United States also became more active in humanitarian interventions and prosecuting crimes against humanity.

## PRESENT-DAY SITUATION

Today, the United States is still not fully committed to the international human rights system. The government has yet to ratify important human rights-related treaties and opposes some forms of international cooperation on human rights such as the International Criminal Court. There are signs, however, that the United States is increasing its commitment to international human rights. In 2009, the United States rejoined the UN Human Rights Council that it helped to create and signed the newly created Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

## MAJOR INTERNATIONAL TREATIES THE U.S. HAS NOT RATIFIED

- **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights • (1966)** *Part of the International Bill of Human Rights, this is the only covenant that requires governments to promote and protect such rights as health, education, social protection, and an adequate standard of living for all people. The ICESCR has been ratified by more than 150 countries. President Carter signed the Covenant in 1977, but the United States has yet to ratify it.*
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women • (1979)** *The most comprehensive and detailed international agreement that seeks the advancement of women, CEDAW has been ratified by 185 countries. Although President Carter signed CEDAW in 1980, today the United States is the only industrialized country that has not ratified the treaty.*
- **Convention on the Rights of the Child • (1989)** *Protecting children from physical and mental abuse and hazardous work, and giving children the right to free primary education, the CRC has been ratified by 193 countries, making it one of the most widely adopted conventions. President Clinton signed the CRC in 1995 but the United States has yet to ratify it, one of only two countries in the world not to do so.*
- **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court • (1998)** *The ICC conducts trials of individuals accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity when there is no other recourse for justice. 146 countries have signed the ICC, including the United States. In 2002, President Bush stated that the United States did not intend to be bound by its signature to the Rome Statute and that it had no intention of ratifying it.*
- **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families • (1990)** *The Migrant Workers Convention protects migrant workers and their families from abuse and inhumane treatment in the countries where they work. No industrialized, migrant-receiving country, including the United States, has signed this treaty.*
- **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities • (2006)** *The CRPD is the first global convention that specifically addresses the human rights of persons with disabilities. President Obama signed the treaty in 2009, but the United States has yet to ratify it.*
- **International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance • (2006)** *This Convention affirms that enforced disappearances constitute a crime against humanity when practiced in a widespread or systematic manner. The United States has not yet signed this treaty.*

## U.S. Reservations to International Law

When the U.S. ratifies a human rights treaty, it often adds a reservation, declaration, or understanding that negates protection of certain rights. The U.S. generally makes two kinds of reservations to treaties:

**Declares treaty “not self-executing.”** This means that the treaty alone is not enforceable in domestic courts unless Congress passes legislation to implement its provisions. If the United States fails to pass the necessary legislation to uphold its international obligations, people whose treaty rights are violated have no recourse in domestic courts.

**Limits scope of treaty.** The United States frequently makes reservations limiting the scope of the treaty so as not to supersede the rights protected in the U.S. Constitution. For example, if a treaty prohibits cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, the U.S. will interpret this clause to mean the same thing as the Constitutional prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. In some cases, the U.S. says that it will not enact any part of a treaty that conflicts with the U.S. Constitution, as interpreted by the United States.

Such limiting reservations mean that the decisions of international bodies on what constitutes a violation of an international treaty are superseded by domestic courts interpreting domestic laws created by Congress. Thus, rather than accepting the international system of human rights law when it signs international human rights treaties, the U.S. continues to rely on domestic protections alone.



# U.S. Human Rights Record

Despite guarantees provided by domestic and international law, the U.S. does not fully protect the rights of individuals. The following are some examples of the failure of the U.S. to comply with international human rights obligations.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE U.S.

## POVERTY

According to the U.S. Census, 42.9 million Americans lived below the poverty line in 2009 and this number is increasing. The child poverty rate (20.7%) is the highest among developed countries, despite the U.S. having the highest national income. 3.5 million Americans experience homelessness in the course of a year. Government assistance programs designed to address poverty, such as food stamps, may be missing as many as four in ten eligible people. While persons from every race, gender, and ethnicity live in poverty, Census Bureau findings show that racial minorities and women are disproportionately affected. In 2009, 25.8% of blacks lived in poverty compared to 9.4% of non-Hispanic whites, while households headed by single women were more than twice as likely to be living in extreme poverty as households headed by single men.

## DISCRIMINATION

Systematic discrimination and racial bias continue to exist in the United States. For instance, as a result of unequal pay and more limited access to high-paying jobs, women, persons with disabilities, and racial and ethnic minorities must all work more hours to achieve the same standard of living as white males. African-Americans face particular obstacles and are “more likely to live in poverty, less likely to own businesses, less likely to hold a university degree, and much more likely to have served time in prison than members of other groups.” Discrimination on the basis of race, age, gender, or disability persists despite laws protecting these groups. The LGBT community is unprotected by federal guarantees of their rights, and as a result, faces discrimination in education, public accommodations, and the right to a family.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women continues to be a serious problem in the United States. Nearly one in four women is raped or beaten by a partner during adulthood. An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year. In 2008, 35% of female murder victims were killed by an intimate partner. Women and girls are more likely to be victims of human trafficking, most often for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Up to 50,000 women and girls are trafficked into the U.S. each year.

## THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The U.S. continues to have problems providing equal access to justice for all and protecting the rights of prisoners. Racial profiling by law enforcement officials contributes to the disproportionately high numbers of minorities in prison. Though the U.S. guarantees a right to counsel in criminal cases, most public defender offices are understaffed and underpaid, resulting in inadequate legal advice for poor defendants, even in cases involving lengthy sentences or the death penalty. Harsh anti-crime measures erode the rights of prisoners by creating conditions where they will be subject to abuse, such as prison overcrowding, insufficient protections for incarcerated women, the housing of juvenile offenders with adults, and juvenile life without parole.

## VOTER DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Certain groups in the U.S. face high barriers to exercising their right to vote or are excluded from voting entirely. In a majority of states, felons on parole or probation are denied the right to vote, while a handful of states deny the right to vote permanently, even after the individual has served his or her sentence. Residents of the District of Columbia are also denied the right to elect full voting representation in Congress. Citizens with limited mobility, low incomes, or who lack stable housing may also find it difficult to vote because of restrictive voter registration laws.





## IMMIGRATION

Despite commitments made in international and domestic law, the U.S. system often fails to protect the human rights of migrants. Migrants experience discrimination and intimidation in the workplace and in society at large; unequal access to basic services such as health care, housing, and education; arbitrary infringement of their civil liberties; and the denial of their fundamental right to due process. Immigration enforcement policies that enlist local police in immigration raids undermine basic trust in local law enforcement, alienate immigrant communities, and create an atmosphere of fear. Once detained, immigrants face harsh conditions, such as being housed with individuals convicted of criminal offenses; “inappropriate and excessive use of restraints; inadequate access to healthcare, including mental health services; and inadequate access to exercise.”

## DEATH PENALTY

Perhaps the most basic human right is the right to life. In the U.S., there are hundreds of people on death row facing the possibility of execution without adequate legal representation. When the U.S. imposes the death penalty, it often operates irresponsibly, frequently overlooking serious flaws in legal proceedings. Over 138 people have been released from death row since 1973, raising serious doubts about the integrity of the death penalty system. As of 2009, there were 139 countries that had abolished the death penalty, either by law or by practice. The U.S. remains among the minority that retain the death penalty and is one of the top five countries in the number of executions it carries out.

## POST-9/11 ANTI-TERRORISM POLICIES

The U.S. government has sharply limited certain civil and political liberties as part of its efforts to prevent and prosecute terrorism. These limitations have fallen most heavily on immigrants, on Muslims and Arabs, and on suspected terrorists. Immigrants face tough new procedures that deny them due process rights. Thousands of Muslim and Arab individuals have been the targets of selectively enforced legislation, government monitoring, and detention without charge, despite having no link to criminal activity. The government denied rights to suspected terrorists, held them in secret detention without access to courts, engaged in torture and abusive interrogations, and returned them to countries where they would face a high likelihood of further torture. All persons in the United States have felt the impact of anti-terrorism actions, such as new surveillance laws that make it difficult to know about and challenge government searches in the courts, and even surveillance with no judicial oversight at all.

## HEALTH CARE

Nearly 50 million nonelderly Americans, or 18.8% of the population, were without health insurance in 2009. 45,000 people die each year because they are uninsured. More than three-quarters of the uninsured come from working families and four in ten are individuals and families who are poor. Minorities are also more likely to be uninsured. About 30.9% of Hispanics and 19% of African-Americans are uninsured compared to 10.8% of whites. Another 25 million Americans are “underinsured,” with coverage so meager they often postpone medical care due to costs. Even when health care is available, noticeable disparities in the quality of care still exist between racial, socio-economic, and ethnic groups. One study found that closing the black-white mortality gap would eliminate a startling “83,000 excess deaths per year among African Americans.”

## EDUCATION

In the United States, there is a significant difference between the educational achievement of minority and poor populations and their wealthier white counterparts. The achievement gap is present in several different areas: grades, standardized test scores, drop-out rates, and college completion rates. According to U.S. Department of Education, children in low-income communities are three grade levels behind their high-income counterparts by the time they reach the fourth grade. This disproportionately affects African Americans, Latinos, and Native American students who are three times more likely to live in these areas. Education level helps determine the potential future income of students, thus creating a dangerous cycle for low-income families whose children are unlikely to achieve the same educational results as wealthier children, trapping them in generational poverty.



## What Is My Role?

Governments are not the only ones responsible for upholding human rights. The UDHR states:

*“Every individual and every organ of society ... 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.”*

This means that not only the government, but also businesses, civil society, and **individuals** are responsible for promoting and respecting human rights.

As individuals we are both *rights-holders* and *duty-bearers*. This means that we have both the right to be treated equally in dignity and justice, and (also have) the responsibility to treat others this way. It is also our responsibility as individuals to continue the struggle for human rights.

Human rights standards are increasingly being accepted around the world, but there is much work yet to be done. Heroes of the past worked to envision these rights; human rights defenders struggled to make their vision a reality; and modern day heroes continue to defend, protect, and preserve them. There is no room for complacency, as the daily litany of human rights abuses around the world demonstrate. We all play an important role in making the enjoyment of human rights universal. Persuading governments to fully implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights requires effective and sustained action at a grassroots level.

*“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”*  
~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Human rights will only be respected, protected, and fulfilled to the extent that individuals like you demand that they are.**

So where do you begin when there is so much suffering in the world? This question is best answered by Eleanor Roosevelt, under whose leadership the UDHR was drafted. She said,

*“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”*

One of the best things you can do as an individual is to **get informed, get involved, and get others interested in human rights**. The resources on the next few pages will help you get started in becoming a powerful and effective human rights advocate.

# Human Rights Quiz

- In what year was the UDHR adopted?
  - 1948
  - 1993
  - 1874
  - 1893
- Who drafts and monitors international human rights standards?
  - The International Red Cross
  - The governments of individual countries
  - The United Nations
  - International human rights organizations
- How many articles are there in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
  - 105
  - 30
  - 14
  - 3
- Which of the following treaties has the U.S. not signed?
  - Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination
  - Convention against Torture
  - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
  - Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Who has human rights?
  - A criminal
  - An illegal immigrant
  - A citizen
  - All of the above
  - None of the above
- What does every human right have?
  - An associated law
  - Universal acceptance
  - A corresponding responsibility
- How many people in the U.S. live below the poverty line?
  - 250,000
  - 1.5 million
  - 14.8 million
  - 42.9 million
- True or False: The right to housing is protected by the U.S. Constitution.
  - True
  - False
- What percentage of people in the U.S. without medical insurance are employed or live in working families?
  - 77%
  - 66%
  - 55%
  - 40%
- How many women are trafficked into the U.S. each year?
  - 1,000
  - 5,000
  - 10,000
  - 50,000
- True or False: The United States Constitution guarantees rights only for citizens of the United States but not for migrants or undocumented workers.
  - True
  - False
- How much further behind in reading are low-income children than high-income children in the U.S. by the time they reach fourth grade?
  - 1 grade level
  - 2 grade levels
  - 3 grade levels
  - 6 grade levels

Answers on page 20.

# Human Rights Quiz Answers



1. **A - 1948.** The Declaration was adopted through a proclamation by the General Assembly on December 10, 1948. A total of 48 countries voted in favor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There were no votes against the declaration and only eight abstentions. This was considered a triumph as the vote unified very diverse countries and conflicting political regimes.
2. **C - The United Nations.** While the United Nations is the international creator of policy, it is important to recognize that it is the responsibility of individual countries to recognize and enforce these policies.
3. **B - 30 Articles.** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) consists of 30 articles which set forth the inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms of each and every person in the world. These rights have been elaborated in subsequent international treaties, regional human rights instruments, national constitutions, and laws.
4. **D - Convention on the Rights of the Child.** The CRC was adopted by the UN in 1989 and is one of the most widely adopted conventions. The CRC has been accepted by 193 countries. The U.S. may soon be the only country in the world not to have ratified this convention.
5. **D - All of the above.** All human beings are born free and possess the same equal and inalienable basic rights and basic freedoms; no one can lose their entitlement to universal human rights.
6. **C - A corresponding responsibility.** International human rights law describes the rights that people possess and also assigns responsibility for ensuring human rights. The primary entity responsible for promoting and protecting human rights is the government. However, governments are not the only ones responsible - businesses, civil society, and individuals are also responsible for promoting and respecting human rights.
7. **D - 42.9 million.** According to a report by the U.S. Census Bureau, the total number of people living in poverty in the U.S. increased from about 37.3 million people in 2007 to 42.9 million in 2009. The poverty rate - the percentage of the people in the United States living in poverty - rose in 2009 to 14.3%.
8. **B - False.** While some federal statutes prohibit discrimination in housing or provide some support for the homeless, there is no legal guarantee of housing within the Constitution of the United States. However, the U.S. has endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims a universal human right to housing and has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which also addresses the right to housing.
9. **A - 77%.** Despite having access to a consistent income, many Americans remain uninsured. Often, the uninsured work in small businesses or low-wage occupations that fail to offer employer-based health coverage, or face premiums that are too high for their salaries.
10. **D - 50,000.** Up to 50,000 women and girls are trafficked in the U.S. each year. The number of persons trafficked within the country is even higher, with more than 200,000 American children at risk for trafficking into the sex industry.
11. **B - False.** The U.S. Constitution guarantees certain rights for all people in the U.S. whether citizens or migrants, documented or undocumented. These rights include equal protection under the law, the right to due process, and the right to fair criminal proceedings.
12. **C - 3 grade levels.** According to U.S. Department of Education Reading Assessments, children in low-income communities are three grade levels behind their high-income counterparts by the time they reach 4th grade. This disproportionately affects African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans who are three times more likely to live in low-income communities.

# Ten Steps to Becoming a Human Rights Advocate

- 1. Choose a human rights issue.** What are the biggest problems you are observing in your community or that you hear about in the news? Is there a particular issue you feel passionate about? What is most important to you? Write out a definition of exactly what you want to address. Deal with just one problem at a time and stay focused.
- 2. Identify the related human right(s).** Learn about what human rights are connected to your problem. Download a copy of the UDHR at [www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/) and choose the human rights most relevant to your issue.
- 3. Research the Issue.** Get informed on your issue. Read newspapers, magazines, and reports that discuss the problem. Call or write letters to organizations and officials asking for information. Collect statistics. If appropriate, survey your community. Learn what your government is doing to address the issue. Find out what your state or national laws say. Find out who is already taking action on the issue.
- 4. Decide on a course of action.** Try to understand the root causes behind the problem. Brainstorm ideas that would help to address those root causes and choose one or two actions that seem the most possible and likely to make the biggest difference. Consider some of the different methods listed in the sidebar.
- 5. Organize.** It is often easier to work with other people to achieve your goals. Build a coalition of support. Find other organizations and individuals who are concerned about the problem and agree with your solution. Try to get support from as many different sectors as possible - teachers, officials, students, businesses, community groups. The more people on your team, the more power you will have to make a difference.
- 6. Identify your opposition.** Find out who the people and organizations are that oppose your solution. They may not be the "bad guys" but people with different opinions. Consider meeting with your opponents; you might be able to work out a compromise. It is important to try to understand each other's point of view. Always be polite and respectful of other opinions.
- 7. Make an action plan.** Make a list of all the steps you need to take to implement your chosen action. Who will do them? When and where will these actions happen? What is the desired result? Will you need to raise money to fund your idea? If possible, practice the action before you carry out your plan.
- 8. Advertise.** Let as many people as possible know about the problem you are trying to solve and your proposed solution. Newspapers, radio, and television are usually interested in stories of action. Some TV and radio stations offer free air time for worthy projects. Write a letter to the editor. The more people who know about what you are doing, the more who may want to support you.
- 9. Take action.** Carry out your plan and do not give up if things do not work out exactly as planned. Making change happen takes time. Problem solving means eliminating all the things that do not work until you find something that does.
- 10. Evaluate and follow-up.** After you have taken your action, take time to think and talk about what happened. Did you achieve what you wanted to achieve? How do you know? What could you have done better? Try to define some indicators for what progress means. Are some efforts effective and others not? Have you tried everything? Keep thinking creatively about how to solve the problem and decide on what to do next.

## Advocacy Methods

### Monitor:

Be a human rights witness. Document the problems you see in your community and categorize them as human rights violations.

### Name and Shame:

Pressure governments to stop violations and change policies through protests, letter-writing, and media campaigns.

### Educate:

Raise awareness on human rights violations and educate others about our human rights and responsibilities.

### Empower:

Build the capacity of others to claim their rights, participate, have their voices heard, and create change.

### Lobby:

Use human rights standards to make recommendations and pressure government officials to change budgets, policies, and laws.

### Legally Enforce:

Bring violators to justice and use international human rights legal arguments to support cases in domestic courts.

# TAKE ACTION

IF YOU HAVE

10  
Minutes

- **Get the Facts.** Learn more about human rights issues in the U.S. Read the Discover Human Rights Fact Sheets at [theadvocatesforhumanrights.org](http://theadvocatesforhumanrights.org).
- **Stay Informed.** Sign up to receive updates and action alerts from a human rights organization (see list on pp. 24-25). Or take some time to read a national or international newspaper to increase awareness about current events. Check out [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) or [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).
- **Donate.** Make a donation to a local or national organization working to protect human rights. For ideas, check out the “Human Rights Resources” list.
- **Send an Email.** Send a pre-written e-mail to your elected official expressing your views on current legislation. Many of the organizations in our “Human Rights Resources” section provide pre-written messages on various pressing domestic policy issues.
- **Follow a Bill.** Track a piece of legislation that addresses a domestic human rights policy issue. The government has many sites that give you immediate updates on the progress of legislation including [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov).
- **Make a Statement.** Get a bumper sticker or button that promotes human rights and put it on your car/bike/skateboard/notebook to show your support. Check out [www.northernsun.com/n/s/home/bumperstickers.html](http://www.northernsun.com/n/s/home/bumperstickers.html).

IF YOU HAVE

A Few  
Hours

- **Write a Letter.** Research and write a personal letter to the editor of your local newspaper or to your elected official on a human rights issue. For writing tips, go to [www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-4/9\\_action-activity5.htm](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-4/9_action-activity5.htm)
- **Vote.** Exercise your right to vote and support local, state, and national legislators who advocate for human rights. Learn about candidate positions at the non-partisan Project Vote Smart, [www.votesmart.org/](http://www.votesmart.org/).
- **Watch a Film.** Watch a film that addresses a human rights issue. Invite friends and neighbors and facilitate a discussion following the film. Some examples include *The Visitor*, *Milk*, *The Kite Runner*, *Born Into Brothels*, or *Invisible Children*.
- **Educate.** Ask a local human rights organization to give a presentation at your school, church, or community organization to raise awareness and encourage more people to get involved. You could also give your own presentation. Download free PowerPoints and lesson plans on human rights at [theadvocatesforhumanrights.org](http://theadvocatesforhumanrights.org).
- **Take Part in a Human Rights Day Event.** Attend a Human Rights Day event, celebrated every year on December 10th. Volunteer for your local celebration. Can't find any? Collaborate with several organizations and plan an event in your community. Check out [www.un.org/events/humanrights/2008/](http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/2008/).
- **Join a Group.** Become a fan or join a Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking group that addresses a human rights issue.

# ON HUMAN RIGHTS

IF YOU HAVE

A  
Month

- **Inform Others.** Create an educational mural, poster or flyer with statistics, stories, and other attention grabbing information on a human rights issue. Distribute it in your city, school, or workplace.
- **Start a Petition Drive.** Petitions are a good way to raise awareness about an issue, a piece of legislation, or a specific organization. For tips on beginning a petition-based campaign, try [www.studentpirgs.org/activist-toolkit/petitioning](http://www.studentpirgs.org/activist-toolkit/petitioning).
- **Start a Campaign.** Encourage your representatives to back rights-based legislation. Organize a letter writing campaign. Gather friends, family, and other members of your personal network to write letters and make phone calls. Find your representatives at <https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>. For writing tips, go to [http://action.aclu.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AP\\_effective\\_activism](http://action.aclu.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AP_effective_activism).
- **Host a Film Festival on Human Rights.** Download a planning guide and list of films from Amnesty International USA at [www.amnestyusa.org/amnesty-film-festival/on-campus-film-festival/page.do?id=1108504](http://www.amnestyusa.org/amnesty-film-festival/on-campus-film-festival/page.do?id=1108504).
- **Hold a Fundraiser.** Raise money and awareness for an organization that is addressing an important human rights issue. Ideas include a bake sale, music concert, photo exhibit, car wash, pancake breakfast, silent auction, walkathon, art show, bingo night, or anything that sounds fun for you and your community.

IF YOU HAVE

A Year  
or More

- **Start a Book Club.** Focus on a different human rights issue each month. For example, focus on the death penalty and read *A Lesson Before Dying* or *Dead Man Walking*, or focus on poverty and economic justice and read *Nickel and Dimed* or *Growing Up Empty*.
- **Run for Office.** Help build the human rights movement in the U.S. by making policies that protect our rights. Learn more at [www.runforoffice.org/](http://www.runforoffice.org/) or at [www.thewhitehouseproject.org](http://www.thewhitehouseproject.org).
- **Get a Resolution Passed.** Raise awareness about a human rights issue and send a powerful message to your legislators. For more information on passing community resolutions, visit <http://citiesforprogress.org/>
- **Write a Blog.** Highlight different human rights issues, current events, and breaking news. For tips on best practices for online writing, explore [www.onenw.org/toolkit/writing-online-best-practices/](http://www.onenw.org/toolkit/writing-online-best-practices/).
- **Document.** Monitor and gather stories about a human rights abuse in your community. Document what you find in a film or report. Upload your film to the HUB - a global platform for human rights media and action - <http://hub.witness.org/>. Use your findings to educate the public.
- **Volunteer.** Search around your community for local food shelves, women's/children's/homeless shelters, homes for the elderly, your local Habitat for Humanity, and other organizations that work to promote human rights for everyone. Find opportunities at [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org).

# HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCES

## **The Advocates for Human Rights**

[www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org](http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org)

Documents human rights abuses, advocates on behalf of victims, educates on human rights issues, and provides training and technical assistance to address and prevent human rights violations.

## **American Civil Liberties Union**

[www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)

Works to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and laws of the U.S. guarantee everyone in this country.

## **American Friends Service Committee**

[www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)

Carries out service, development, social justice, and peace programs throughout the world.

## **Amnesty International USA**

[www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org)

Investigates and exposes abuses, educates and mobilizes the public, and helps transform societies to create a safer, more just world.

## **The Anti-Defamation League**

[www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)

Fights all forms of bigotry in the U.S. and abroad through information, education, legislation, and advocacy.

## **The Carter Center**

[www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org)

Committed to advancing human rights and alleviating unnecessary human suffering. Works to create a world in which everyone has the opportunity to be healthy and live in peace.

## **Center for Constitutional Rights**

[ccrjustice.org](http://ccrjustice.org)

A non-profit legal and educational organization committed to the creative use of law as a positive force for social change.

## **Children's Defense Fund**

[www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

Advocates for policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse, and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and a moral foundation.

## **Freedom House**

[www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

Dedicated to promoting free institutions worldwide. Publishes surveys detailing the state of civil liberties, political rights, and economic freedom in every country.

## **Global Rights**

[www.globalrights.org](http://www.globalrights.org)

A human rights advocacy group that partners with local activists to challenge injustice and amplify new voices within the global discourse.

## **Heartland Alliance**

[www.heartlandalliance.org](http://www.heartlandalliance.org)

Provides comprehensive, innovative programs to help the most vulnerable among us to improve their lives and realize their human rights.

## **High Road for Human Rights**

[www.highroadforhumanrights.org](http://www.highroadforhumanrights.org)

Founded to stop the cycle of complacency, to elevate understanding by people in communities throughout the nation, and to organize them so they will be empowered to help make a difference.

## **Human Rights Campaign**

[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

The largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender civil rights organization, HRC envisions an America where LGBT people are ensured of their basic equal rights and can be open, honest, and safe at home, at work, and in the community.

## **Human Rights First**

[www.humanrightsfirst.org](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org)

Exists to protect and defend the dignity of each individual through respect for human rights and the rule of law.

## **Human Rights Watch**

[www.hrw.org/en](http://www.hrw.org/en)

Dedicated to defending and protecting human rights. Known for their accurate fact-finding, impartial reporting, effective use of media, and targeted advocacy, often in partnership with local human rights groups.





### **Human Rights Without Frontiers**

[www.hrwf.org](http://www.hrwf.org)

Focuses on monitoring, research, and analysis in the field of human rights and promotes democracy and the rule of law.

### **Legal Momentum**

[www.legalmomentum.org](http://www.legalmomentum.org)

The nation's oldest legal defense and education fund dedicated to advancing the rights of women and girls.

### **MercyCorps**

[www.mercycorps.org](http://www.mercycorps.org)

Focuses on disaster response, sustainable economic development, and health services. In the U.S., mobilizes youth to help fight against hunger, poverty, and social injustice.

### **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**

[www.naacp.org](http://www.naacp.org)

Works to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic quality of rights of all persons and eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.

### **National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty**

[www.ncadp.org](http://www.ncadp.org)

Works to abolish the death penalty in the U.S. and support efforts to abolish the death penalty worldwide.

### **National Economic and Social Rights Initiative**

[www.nesri.org](http://www.nesri.org)

Promotes a human rights vision for the U.S. that ensures dignity and access to the basic resources needed for human development and civic participation.

### **The Justice Project**

[www.thejusticeproject.org](http://www.thejusticeproject.org)

The Justice Project is a non-partisan organization dedicated to fighting injustice and creating a more humane and just world.

### **Oxfam**

[www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)

In the U.S., partners with local groups to tackle the causes of poverty and foster social change to alleviate it.

### **Physicians for Human Rights**

[www.physiciansforhumanrights.org](http://www.physiciansforhumanrights.org)

Investigates the health consequences of human rights violations and works to stop them.

### **The Public Justice Center**

[www.publicjustice.org](http://www.publicjustice.org)

A nonprofit legal advocacy organization that seeks to enforce and expand the rights of people who suffer injustice because of poverty or discrimination.

### **Reporters without Borders**

[www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)

Fights for press freedom and denounces violations of human rights all over the world.

### **Rights Working Group**

[www.rightsworkinggroup.org](http://www.rightsworkinggroup.org)

A coalition working to restore the American commitment to protect civil liberties and human rights for all people in the U.S.

### **Southern Poverty Law Center**

[www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org)

Dedicated to promoting civil rights and fighting harmful prejudices since 1971.

### **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**

[www.unhchr.org](http://www.unhchr.org)

Works for the protection of human rights for all people; helps empower people to realize their rights and to assist those responsible for upholding such rights in ensuring that they are implemented.

### **UN High Commissioner for Refugees**

[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

Leads and coordinates international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems.

### **Urban Justice Center's Human Rights Project**

[www.hrpujc.org](http://www.hrpujc.org)

Documents, monitors, and reports on economic human rights violations in the U.S.

### **U.S. Human Rights Network**

[www.ushrnetwork.org](http://www.ushrnetwork.org)

Works to increase the visibility of the U.S. human rights movement, build the capacity of U.S. groups, strengthen links between U.S. activists, and connect them with the global human rights movement.

### **WITNESS**

[www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org)

Uses video and online technologies to empower people to transform personal stories of abuse into tools for justice, promoting public engagement and policy change.



# HUMAN RIGHTS HEROES

Human rights and their worldwide acceptance today would not have been possible without the human rights heroes who stood up for them. Here are just a few examples of individuals who made a difference. Their stories are inspiring and remind us that we all play an important role in making the enjoyment of human rights universal.



## Eleanor Roosevelt (1884 – 1962)

Eleanor Roosevelt was an integral figure in the development of international human rights law. While serving as the First Lady to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, she actively supported women's rights, workers' rights, and social justice. In 1945, she was chosen by President

Truman to head the United Nations Human Rights Commission and was a key creator of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which continues to be the core of international human rights norms today. To learn more, visit: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eleanor/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eleanor/index.html)

*"Justice cannot be for one side alone, but must be for both."*

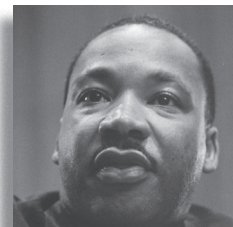
~ Eleanor Roosevelt

## Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 – 1968)

*"A right delayed is a right denied."*

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

A strong proponent of civil rights in the U.S., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. fought for racial equality when segregation was the norm in much of the country. He utilized nonviolent means to combat institutional racism and also advocated on the issues of poverty and the Vietnam War. He



was named Time Magazine's Man of the Year in 1964 and won the Nobel Peace Prize the same year. His assassination on April 4, 1968 caused him to be revered by many as a martyr for human rights. To this day, he remains a central figure in U.S. civil rights history. To learn more, visit: [www.mlkonline.net](http://www.mlkonline.net)

## Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (1945 – Present)



Leader for the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Burma, Suu Kyi has worked tirelessly for the creation of a Burmese democratic nation. She has been placed under house arrest multiple times for her support and advocacy for democracy. In 1991, she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her nonviolent actions. Although she was arrested again in 2003, Suu Kyi continues to express her "hope that Burma can have freedom for all political parties and all people." To learn more, visit: [www.myhero.com/myhero/hero.asp?hero=suukyi](http://www.myhero.com/myhero/hero.asp?hero=suukyi)



### Wangari Muta Maathai (1940 – Present)

Dr. Wangari Muta Maathai (Kenya) won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her work with the Green Belt Movement, a broad-based, grassroots organization whose main focus is helping women's groups plant trees to conserve the environment and improve quality of life. Through the Green Belt Movement, she has helped women plant more than 30 million trees on their farms, at schools, and in church compounds. Maathai is listed in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global 500 Hall of Fame and was named one of the 100 Heroines of the World. In 2005, Dr.

Maathai was elected Presiding Officer of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. To learn more, visit: [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-bio.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-bio.html)

### Nelson Mandela (1918 – Present)

Nelson Mandela fought for human rights in South Africa, first as a lawyer striving to continue his practice in Johannesburg, and later as part of the African National Congress' (ANC) liberation movement fighting against apartheid. Mandela was arrested for illegally exiting the country in 1963 and subsequently spent 27 years as a political prisoner. He conducted peace negotiations with the government from prison and was released in 1990. The next year he was elected President of the ANC and in 1993 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1994, the era of apartheid ended and Mandela was



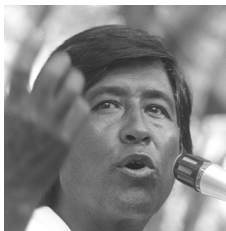
*“I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities.”*

~ Nelson Mandela

elected President of democratic South Africa. Although he retired in 1999, his legacy of human rights work lives on. To learn more, visit [www.nelsonmandela.org](http://www.nelsonmandela.org)

### Cesar Chavez (1927 – 1993)

Cesar Chavez strove to promote civil rights and social justice throughout his life. Affected by the Great Depression as a young boy, Chavez started working as a migrant laborer to help support his family after the eighth grade. Witnessing the lack of rights in the fields, he took up work as a community organizer, later



forming the National Farm Workers Association, which would become the United Farm Workers of America. He modeled peaceful initiatives after Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by holding fasts, nonviolent protests, boycotts, strikes, and pilgrimages. His motto – “Si se puede” – It can be done – embodies his constant efforts for equality. To learn more, visit [www.chavezfoundation.org](http://www.chavezfoundation.org)

*“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.”*

~ Cesar Chavez



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