



THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

“Sixty years ago, representatives from 16 nations gathered to begin deliberations on a new international bill of rights. The document they produced is called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — and it stands as a landmark achievement in the history of human liberty.” — President George W. Bush

History

In the aftermath of the Second World War and following the establishment of the United Nations’ Human Rights Commission in 1946, Eleanor Roosevelt was chosen to lead the effort to draft a Declaration of Human Rights, a document that might help to prevent another such war and serve as a model for how human beings and nations should treat each other.

Philosophy

Although the 58 Member States that formed the United Nations at that time varied in their ideologies, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights represented a common statement of goals and aspirations — a vision of the world as the international community would want it to become. The core philosophical value of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the human dignity of every individual. The Declaration highlights the universality, inalienability, and indivisibility of human rights.

Practice and Use

Although the Universal Declaration, which comprises a broad range of rights, is not a legally binding document, it has inspired more than 60 human rights instruments which together constitute a set of international human rights standards. These instruments include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which are legally binding

treaties. Together with the Universal Declaration, they constitute the International Bill of Rights.

Since 1948, the Universal Declaration has been translated into more than 200 languages and remains the best known and most often cited human rights document in the world. Over the years, the Declaration has been used in the defense and advancement of people’s rights. Its principles have been enshrined in and continue to inspire national legislation and the constitutions of many newly independent states. References to the Declaration have been made in charters and resolutions of regional intergovernmental organizations as well as in treaties and resolutions adopted by the United Nations system.

Human Rights Leaders

Many in the General Assembly represent countries that have recently become free and democratic. Indeed, some of these countries are led by former prisoners of conscience. These historic figures were once persecuted by their own governments and maligned as parasites, criminals, foreign agents, and traitors — simply for peacefully exercising the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration. Today they are recognized for what they always had been — men and women of courage and of conscience, impatient patriots who were prepared to press for change at great risk and against all odds, heroes who not only inspired their fellow citizens but whose examples give hope to people everywhere who live in fear yet dream of freedom.