

THE GENEVA STATEMENT

Commemorating 70 Years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights



People from more than
165 COUNTRIES
have signed their support

GENEVA IS HOME TO THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, and the different bodies that monitor human rights treaties.

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), we reaffirm the understanding that fundamental human rights are based on the dignity that each person possesses.

WE CELEBRATE the enormous contributions of the Declaration, which ushered in an unprecedented approach to human rights as belonging to ‘all members of the human family’—a timeless, and yet groundbreaking, understanding of the universality of human rights.

WE CALL upon the international community to recommit to the urgent work of ensuring human rights for all.

This necessitates a renewed attention to the fundamental rights enumerated in the Declaration, many of which tragically are disregarded across the world. Concurrently, the UDHR must not be used to advance newly claimed rights that do not enjoy international agreement. The Declaration was drafted to be relevant to all peoples and cultures—a tremendous feat that must be protected for the longevity of the human rights project.

WE RECALL the delicate balance struck by the drafters, who successfully identified what is universal in a plural world. The enduring value of the UDHR rests in its ability to transcend divisions and appeal to our shared humanity, resulting in a practical agreement that delineates the basic rights to which everyone is entitled. While not without the inevitable imperfections of any international project, it is this practical function that has solidified the Declaration’s status as the most important reference point on human rights today.

WE AFFIRM a universal understanding of human dignity that is based on our common human experience. Human dignity refers to the intrinsic worth of the person, no matter one’s circumstances, status, or vulnerabilities. Because dignity is innate, all human beings are equal in value, and human rights cannot be given or taken away by the State or any other actor. The universal applicability of the rights enumerated in the UDHR is made possible by its grounding in the dignity of the human person.

WE URGE the United Nations, and the international community at large, to focus on ensuring fundamental human rights for every person ‘without distinction of any kind’. Yet all over the world, the provisions so clearly articulated in the UDHR go unrecognized.

WE CALL for a renewed attention from the UN and its Member States to the core human rights that currently are threatened internationally, beginning with the right to life. People in all stages of life and in all regions of the world are increasingly vulnerable to assaults on this foundational right. Respect for human life, from conception to a natural death, is the indisputable corollary of respect for human dignity.

WE CALL also for a renewed respect for the family as ‘the natural and fundamental group unit of society,’ which ‘is entitled to protection by society and the State.’ Respect for the dignity of every child requires a commitment to ensuring, whenever possible, that children are raised by both mother and father in a loving, safe, and stable home. Protection of the family should be centered on this ideal, including through the safeguarding of parental rights, in particular the right to choose the education of their children, and the provision of support to equip healthy families who will in turn contribute to the flourishing of society.

WE FURTHER CALL for urgent action with regard to the foundational principle of freedom of religion and belief, together with the related freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly, and association. The UDHR protects not only religious freedom in private, but ‘in community with others’ as lived in public life. In every region, people are suffering violations of this right. Millions are enduring severe limitations on freedom, violence, and death in the name of religion or conscience, and others are unable freely to exercise their religious beliefs or rights of conscience, thus seriously jeopardizing the human rights project.

WE CAUTION against the promotion of agendas that do not share universal consensus to the status of fundamental rights. The UDHR is by design unequivocally multicultural, respectful of pluralism, and open to engaging with the challenges of new generations. This openness must be embraced, at the same time that we protect the philosophical, religious, and cultural identity of sovereign states. The principle of self-determination guarantees the right of every nation to inform its approach to human rights according to its own national tradition, while remaining bound to the strict enforcement of fundamental human rights.

WE CONCLUDE with a renewed appreciation for the crucial role of the UDHR in an age when fundamental human rights consistently are being ignored and abused and countless individuals are suffering from that privation all over the world. As noted in the UDHR, the UN by its Charter is bound to reaffirm ‘fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person.’ It is imperative that the UN take a leading role in ensuring that the international community recommit to the vision of the UDHR and work to revitalize the integrity of the human rights project.