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 URGES 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 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.