

The 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

“Dignity and Justice for All.”



In 1948, member nations from the newly formed United Nations organization sent delegates to London, UK, to negotiate a statement of basic rights that every human being possesses. The U.S. delegate, Eleanor Roosevelt, was highly influential in building a consensus among the other delegates, and on December 10, 1948, the United Nations formally proclaimed that all humans had inviolable rights and that all nations must respect these rights. (For more information on rights in the UN UDHR, see www.knowyourrights2008.org)

In 1998, on the 50 anniversary of the UN's UDHR, Pope John Paul II declared that the UN's UDHR "was the highest articulation" of concern for human dignity in the 20th century, and that this declaration must be "observed integrally, both in its spirit and letter" by all countries in the global community. (*World Day of Peace Message*, 1998)

In 2008, Pope Benedict XIV recalled his visit to the UN during a general audience on April 30 of that year: "On the 60th anniversary of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Providence gave me the opportunity to confirm the value of this United Nations Charter at the UN itself. I referred to its universal foundations, that is, the dignity of the human person, created by God in his image and likeness so that he might cooperate in the world with God's great plan of life and peace. Like peace, respect for human rights is also rooted in "justice", in other words, in a valid ethical order for all epochs and all peoples, which can be summarized in the famous maxim: "Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you" or, expressed in a positive form in Jesus' words: "Treat others the way you would have them treat you" (Mt 7: 12). On this basis, which constitutes the Holy See's characteristic contribution to the United Nations Organization, I renewed and I renew again today the effective commitment of the Catholic Church to contribute to strengthening international relations marked by the principles of responsibility and solidarity echoed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In the Future: While all countries have endorsed the UN's UDHR, many have a long way to go to ensure that all of their citizens can access the full human rights they are due and receive the "dignity and justice" that the UDHR calls for. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, has declared that : "In the course of this 60th anniversary year, unprecedented efforts must be made to ensure that every person in the world can rely on just laws for his or her protection. In advancing all human rights for all, we will move towards the greatest fulfillment of human potential, a promise which is at the heart of the Universal Declaration."

Human Rights Litany and Signs of the Times

The following litany focuses on some of the realities and challenges that still need to be addressed for the full realization of human rights in the entire global community.

Litany for the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights

Creator and Lord, we give thanks that the global community is celebrating the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which insists on “dignity and justice for all.”

We pray for all those who have been denied their rights.

We especially remember:

Those who are denied their full equality, especially women around the world who are not given the same rights as men in countries such as India and Egypt. (Article 1, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.

Those who are not free from Discrimination, especially migrants and refugees such as Moroccans and Turks in the Netherlands and Hispanics in the U.S. (Article 2, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.

Those who are denied the right to life, including those sentenced to capital punishment in the U.S. and the other 23 countries in the world where death by execution is practiced. (Article 3, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.

Those who are enslaved, including those women and children who are being trafficked for sexual purposes, in many regions around the globe, including in the Americas and throughout Europe. (Article 4, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.

Those who are tortured or abused in any way as part of a penal and/or legal system and those who do not receive equal treatment before the law, including prisoners in detainment, jails and prisons under U.S. control. (Articles 4, 7, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.

Those who are denied freedom of belief and religion, and those denied freedom of opinion and information, including many citizens in China. (Articles 18, 19, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.



In many developing countries the girl child has been deprived the right to education

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Those who do not have basic social supports, including those who lack health care in the U.S. and in developing countries. (Article 22, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.

Those who are denied an education, including 60 million young women around the world, including young women in Afghanistan. (Article 26, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.

Those who are denied workers' rights, such as migrant workers who contribute to the economies in many developed countries. (Article 23, UDHR)

May they know dignity and experience justice.

Those who are denied a global social order that guarantees human dignity and human rights for every woman, man and child. (Article 28, UDHR)

May we all know dignity and experience justice.

Hear our prayers and have mercy upon us, Lord; hear our prayers and help us promote the rights of all your children.

Amen.



Roma Children in Kolonia GjakoveDjakovica in Kosovo