

Universal
Declaration
of Human
Rights
by the
World's
Religions

Whereas human beings are led to affirm that there is more to life than life itself by inspiration human and divine;

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948 bases itself on the former;

Whereas any exclusion of the world's religions as positive resources for human rights is obnoxious to the evidence of daily life;

Whereas the various communities constituting the peoples of the world must exchange not only ideas but also ideals;

Whereas religions ideally urge human beings to live in a just society and not just in any society;

Whereas one must not idealize the actual but strive to realize the ideal;

Whereas not to compensate victims of imperialism, racism, casteism and sexism is itself imperialist, racist, casteist and sexist;

Whereas rights are independent of duties in their protection but integrally related to them in conception and execution;

Whereas human rights are intended to secure peace, freedom, equality and justice — and to mitigate departures therefrom — when these come in conflict or the rights themselves;

Now, therefore, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Faculty of Religious Studies, at McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada;

The signatories to this *Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions*, as legatees of the religious heritage of humanity do hereby propose the following as the common standard of achievement for the followers of all religions or none, on the 10th day of December, 1998, as all people are brothers and sisters on the face of the earth.

ARTICLE 1

All human beings have the right to be treated as human beings and have the duty to treat everyone as a human being.

ARTICLE 2

Everyone has the right to freedom from violence, in any of its forms, individual or collective; whether based on race, religion, gender, caste or class, or arising from any other cause.

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ARTICLE 3

- (1) Everyone has the right to food.
- (2) Everyone has the right to life, longevity and liveability and the right to food, clothing and shelter to sustain them.
- (3) Everyone has the duty to support and sustain the life, longevity and liveability of all.

ARTICLE 4

- (1) No one shall be subjected to slavery or servitude, forced labour, bonded labour or child labour. Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all its forms.
- (2) No one shall subject anyone to slavery or servitude in any of its forms.

ARTICLE 5

- (1) No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, inflicted either physically or mentally, whether on secular or religious grounds, inside the home or outside it.
- (2) No one shall subject anybody to such treatment.

ARTICLE 6

- (1) Everyone has a right to recognition everywhere as a person before law; and by everyone everywhere as a human being deserving humane treatment, even when law and order has broken down.
- (2) Everyone has the duty to treat everyone else as a human being both in the eyes of law and one's own.

ARTICLE 7

All are equal before law and entitled to equal protection before law without any discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, class, sex and sexual orientation. It is the right of everyone to be so treated and the duty of everyone to so treat others.

ARTICLE 8

Everybody has the duty to prevent the perpetuation of historical, social, economic, cultural and other wrongs.

ARTICLE 9

- (1) No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile by the state or by anyone else. The attempt to proselytize against the will of the person shall amount to arbitrary detention, so also the detention, against their will, of teenage children by the parents, and among spouses.
- (2) It is the duty of everyone to secure everyone's liberty.

ARTICLE 10

Everybody has the right to public trial in the face of criminal charges and it is the duty of the state to ensure it. Everyone who cannot afford a lawyer must be provided one by the state.

ARTICLE 11

Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be considered innocent until proven guilty.

ARTICLE 12

- (1) Everyone has the right to privacy. This right includes the right not to be subjected to arbitrary interference with one's privacy; of one's own, or of one's family, home or correspondence.
- (2) Everyone has the right to one's good name.
- (3) It is the duty of everyone to protect the privacy and reputation of everyone else.
- (4) Everyone has the right not to have one's religion denigrated in the media or the academia.
- (5) It is the duty of the follower of every religion to ensure that no religion is denigrated in the media or the academia.

ARTICLE 13

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence anywhere in the world.
- (2) Everyone has the duty to abide by the laws and regulations applicable in that part of the world.

ARTICLE 14

Everyone has the right to seek and secure asylum in any country from any form of persecution, religious or otherwise, and the right not to be deported. It is the duty of every country to provide such asylum.

ARTICLE 15

- (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of one's nationality nor denied the right to change one's nationality.
- (3) Everyone has the duty to promote the emergence of a global constitutional order.

ARTICLE 16

- (1) Everyone has the right to marriage.
- (2) Members of a family have the right to retain and practice their own religion or beliefs.
- (3) Everyone has the right to raise a family.
- (4) Everybody has the right to renounce the world and join a monastery, provided that one shall do so after making adequate arrangement for one's dependants.
- (5) Marriage and monasticism are two of the most successful institutional innovations of humanity and are entitled to protection by the society and the state.
- (6) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. It is the duty of everyone to extend special consideration to mothers and children.
- (7) Everyone shall promote the outlook that the entire world constitutes an extended family.

ARTICLE 17

- (1) Everybody has the right to own property, alone as well as in association with others. An association also has a similar right to own property.
- (2) Everyone has a right not to be deprived of property arbitrarily. It is the duty of everyone not to deprive others of their property arbitrarily. Property shall be understood to mean material as well as intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual property.
- (3) Everyone has the duty not to deprive anyone of their property or appropriate it in an unauthorized manner.

ARTICLE 18

- (1) There shall be no compulsion in religion. It is a matter of choice.
- (2) Everyone has the right to retain one's religion and to change one's religion.
- (3) Everyone has the duty to promote peace and tolerance among different religions and ideologies.

ARTICLE 19

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, where the term expression includes the language one speaks, the food one eats; the clothes one wears; the religion one practices and professes, provided that one conforms generally to the accustomed rules of decorum recognized in the neighbourhood.
- (2) It is the duty of everyone to ensure that everyone enjoys such freedom.
- (3) Children have the right to express themselves freely in all matters affecting the child, to which it is the duty of their caretakers to give due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

ARTICLE 20

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of assembly and association, and the duty to do so peacefully.
- (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association, or to leave one without due process.

ARTICLE 21

- (1) Everybody over the age of eighteen has the right to vote, to elect or be elected and thus to take part in the government or governance of the country, directly or indirectly.
- (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in one's country and the duty to provide such access.
- (3) It is the duty of everyone to participate in the political process.

ARTICLE 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has a right to social security and a duty to contribute to it.

ARTICLE 23

- (1) Everyone has the right to same pay for same work and a duty to offer same pay for same work.
- (2) Everyone has the right for just remuneration for one's work and the duty to justly recompense for work done.
- (3) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of one's interests.
- (4) Everyone has the right not to join a trade union.

ARTICLE 24

- (1) Everyone has the right to work and to rest, including the right to support while seeking work and the right to periodic holidays with pay.
- (2) The right to rest extends to the earth.

ARTICLE 25

- (1) Everyone has the right to health and to medical insurance. It is the duty of the state or society to provide it.
- (2) Every child has the right to a childhood free from violence and it is the duty of the parents to provide it.

ARTICLE 26

Everyone has the right to free education and the right to equality of opportunity for any form of education involving restricted enrollment.

ARTICLE 27

- (1) Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community and the right to freely contribute to it.
- (2) Everyone has the right to share scientific advances and its benefits and the duty to disseminate them, and wherever possible to contribute to such advances.
- (3) Everyone has the right to the protection of their cultural heritage. It is the duty of everyone to protect and enrich everyone's heritage, including one's own.

ARTICLE 28

Everyone has the right to socio-economic and political order at a global, national, regional and local level which enables the realization of social, political, economic, racial and gender justice and the duty to give precedence to universal, national, regional and local interests in that order.

ARTICLE 29

- (1) One is duty-bound, when asserting one's rights, to take the rights of other human beings; of past, present and future generations, the rights of humanity, and the rights of nature and the earth into account.
- (2) One is duty-bound, when asserting one's rights, to prefer non-violence over violence.

ARTICLE 30

- (1) Everyone has the right to require the formation of a supervisory committee within one's community, defined religiously or otherwise, to monitor the implementation of the articles of this Declaration; and to serve on it and present one's case before such a committee.
- (2) It is everyone's duty to ensure that such a committee satisfactorily supervises the implementation of these articles.

Please forward your responses to this proposed text to Arvind Sharma, 3520 University Street, Montreal QC H3A 2A7, Canada. Fax: 514-398-2102; e-mail: Arvind.Sharma@mcgill.ca .

This document is an attempt to formulate a successor to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The occasion for drafting it arose while plans were being finalized for a World Conference, held in Montreal, December 7-9, 1998, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration. As is well known, the United Nations Declaration has been widely criticized as “Western,” a criticism rooted in the feeling that when such efforts emanate from the West they are merely a further extension of the age of imperialism, a continuing effort on the part of the West to impose its own values on the rest of the world in the guise, or rather disguise, of universalism. Accordingly, the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University approached the coalition sponsoring the conference with a proposal to include a draft of a “Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World’s Religions” in the agenda. The coalition agreed, and a draft was prepared on behalf of the Faculty; it was released at the conference in English and French.

Thereafter this draft has also served as the basic document for an independent conference, “Human Rights and Responsibilities – The Contribution of World Religions,” held at Chapman University in Orange, California, April 8-9, 1999. There it was decided that the draft should be circulated as widely as possible in the academic community so that responses to it might be incorporated in a revised text, and was therefore published in the Fall 1999 issue of the Journal of Religious Ethics.

Such a revised text was discussed at a panel in a plenary session of the International Conference on Ethics and Religion for a Global Twenty-First Century held at Chapman University and Loyola Marymount University from March 25-26, 2000. The present text incorporates the suggestions made at that panel discussion.

The text has also been the subject of presentations at the XVIIIth Quinquennial World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions or IAHR for short, when it met at Durban from August 5-12, 2000, and of the inaugural address at the Conference on Religion and Human Rights at the House of World Cultures, Berlin, December 7-9, 2001. It was also presented for discussion at the UNESCO Conference on Mystical Traditions and Interreligious Dialogue at Barcelona, May 23-26, 2002 as well as at the International Roundtable on ‘The Challenge or Globalisation: Towards a Shared Universal Spiritual and Moral Ethic’, at Genting Permai Resort, Genting Highlands, Malaysia, November 25-27, 2002. Part III (pp. 131-205) of the book entitled: Human Rights and Responsibilities in World Religions (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), edited by Joseph Runzo, Nancy Martin and Arvind Sharma is also devoted to a discussion of this document.