

## Dignity and Justice for All of Us

*“Dignity and Justice for all of us”* reinforces the vision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a commitment to universal dignity and justice. It is not a luxury or a wish-list. The UDHR and its core values, inherent human dignity, non-discrimination, equality, fairness and universality, apply to everyone, everywhere and always. The Declaration is universal, enduring and vibrant, and thus, a living document that concerns us all.

### Commitment

The drafting process of the UDHR involved representatives from all regions and drew inspiration from values, belief systems and political traditions from different cultures and societies across the globe. Initially adopted by countries worldwide as “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations”, the Declaration has over time been widely accepted as the fundamental norms of human rights that all should respect. Today, all countries have accepted the UDHR and reaffirmed their commitment to fundamental rights enshrined therein time and again.

Over the years, this commitment has been translated into law through which human rights are defined and guaranteed. Indeed, the UDHR has inspired numerous international human rights treaties and declarations, regional conventions, as well as national Constitutions. This rich body of human rights law represents a contract between governments and their peoples.

### Dignity

The UDHR demands meeting basic human needs and recognizes the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, whether they are civil and political rights, such as the right to life, and freedom of expression; or economic, social and cultural rights, such as the rights to work, social security and education. The improvement of one right contributes to the advancement of the others. Likewise, the deprivation of one right adversely affects the others. The entitlement to and fulfilment of all human rights are essential to a life of dignity.

The Declaration’s enduring relevance is more compelling still when we listen to the voices of people at the grassroots level. When the World Bank conducted its “Voices of the Poor” surveys in the late 1990s, interviewing over 80,000 people in villages and local communities on their values, needs and strongest aspirations, the results read like the list of everyday rights in the UDHR.

[Photo on poverty]

### Justice

The UDHR declares in its preamble that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” It was the first, and remains the foremost, statement of the rights and freedoms of all of us as human beings, without distinction of any kind.

The core principles of human rights first set out in the UDHR, such as universality, interdependence and indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination are crucial in achieving justice. Non-discrimination, for example, has become one of the cross-cutting principles in human rights law. The principle is present in all the major human rights treaties and provides the central theme of some of them such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The UDHR has stimulated and inspired a rich body of international treaties that seeks to strengthen and protect human rights.

### **All of Us**

The UDHR belongs to all of us. No matter where you live, how much money you have, what faith you practise or political views you hold, all the human rights in the UDHR apply to you and have everything to do with you. It was the UDHR, almost 60 years ago, which first established what have become universal values: that human rights are inherent to all and the concern of the whole of the international community. Human Rights are everyone's business.

The impressive international human rights edifice the UDHR has made possible is to be celebrated. But it has yet to benefit all of humanity equally. All of us, as rights-owners, must reclaim the UDHR, make it our own. While Governments bear the primary duty to promote and protect all human rights, non-state actors, other duty bearers and all of us also play an important role in making the universal enjoyment of human rights a reality. It is through concerted efforts of the United Nations system, its international and local partners, national ownership, and the participation of people from different corners of the world that we can truly envisage "dignity and justice for all of us".

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