

## FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DAY



**10th December, 1998**

### **Background to the day**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations on 10th December, 1948, was a direct response to the devastation brought upon the peoples of the world by the events of World War II. In an historical sense, the precedent for a recognition of human rights goes back beyond 1948. Many of the rights enjoyed by Australians today can be traced back to the struggle of people and groups who lived in much earlier times.

### **Early progress**

The signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 is considered to have been an early identification of the rights of citizens. It established the right of the church to be free of government interference. All free citizens had the right to own and inherit property, and widows who owned property now had the right to choose not to marry. The principles of due process and equality before the law were established, including provisions forbidding bribery and official misconduct.

### **Natural rights**

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries several European philosophers proposed the concept of “natural rights”, rights which belonged to each person by nature of that person being human, rather than belonging to a particular country, religious or ethnic group. The idea created a significant amount of polarised debate, with some rejecting the notion as baseless and others embracing it as the underlying principle upon which citizens’ rights and political and religious liberty were based.

At the close of the eighteenth century, two major revolutions drew heavily upon the concept of citizens’ rights: the American and the French Revolutions. The American Revolution resulted in “The Declaration of Independence”, while the French threw out the existing monarchy and established the first French Republic that later gave rise to the “Declaration of the Rights of Man”.

The philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, in considering “natural rights” in his treatise, *Civil Disobedience*, used the term “human rights”. His work significantly influenced the development of many human rights activists, such as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi.

The middle and late nineteenth century saw issues such as slavery, barbarous working conditions, and child labour, all take on greater importance in the affairs of common people and the state. Movements were initiated which resulted in increased public awareness and commitment to equal rights and more humane working conditions for all.

### **Equal rights for all**

From the nineteenth century through to the twentieth century, activism in the human rights movement largely revolved around religious and political groups. Those on the side of change pointed to repressive government policies, while governments pointed out the growth in discord within the community as the main reason for their stern approach to this form of social disorder.

From this rather tenuous start, many civil rights groups were able to effect profound social change. Labour unions brought about the reduction and then abolition of child labour, a reasonable working week, the right for workers to strike, and a right for all members to vote. National liberation groups were also able to expel colonial powers and experience the taste of self-rule.

### **The modern human rights movement**

The modern human rights movement demanded that governments everywhere recognise the fundamental rights of their citizens.

In Australia we often take these rights for granted, and little time is given to recognising that with these rights come responsibilities for our own society and others around the world. As teachers, we can use the 50th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights to focus our students on our hard-won rights as members of the global community.

## When using the following strategies

- avoid cultural stereotyping
- try to use them cooperatively to emphasise the Human Rights message
- present positive images of groups challenging their environments.

## Suggested classroom strategies for recognising Human Rights Day.

- After examining the “Summary of the Declaration of Human Rights” in small groups, create a quiz from the articles.
- Design and make a simulation game using the points from the summary. Discuss suitable models (Snakes and Ladders, Monopoly, UNO etc.)
- Collect pictures from magazines and newspapers which depict human rights abuses, both in Australia and globally. Identify the issues and how they might be addressed.
- Using local issues, examine their possible impact upon the rights of the individual and the community (e.g. gun laws, vandalism, degradation of a local environmental area, closure of work places or services...)
- Values clarification: obtain pictures which show the contrast between accessing rights and being prevented from exercising them. Discuss and present in small groups.
- Reflect upon the actions of human rights advocates through the years, in relation to how their actions affected the lives of the people (e.g. William Wallace, Pemulwuy, Aung San Suu Kyi...)
- Identify the ten most important rights for your group, compare with the Summary and present to the class.
- Discuss what happens to people without shelter, food, clothing and love. Who cares for them?
- Organise a collection (food, clothing, furniture) to be presented to organisations such as the Red Cross, the local council, the Smith Family, St Vincent de Paul Society ...
- Compare the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the rules of your school and home, looking for similarities. (Write and decorate some welcoming signs that reflect the importance your school places upon human rights. Laminate and display.)

- Read a story or short novel from the listed resources (it may be on the theme of bullying and what to do). Discuss the implications of the story.
- Design human rights cards which demonstrate one or more of the points.

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### Web sites:

#### **United Nations web site**

[www.un.org/rights/50/kit5.htm](http://www.un.org/rights/50/kit5.htm)  
(Open “Events and Celebrations”)

**United Nations** (Open “Conferences and Events”)  
[www.un.org/](http://www.un.org/)

#### **Nobel Prizes**

[www.almaz.com/nobel/nobel.html](http://www.almaz.com/nobel/nobel.html)

**Freedom From Hunger** (Open “Myths and Realities”) [www.freefromhunger.org/](http://www.freefromhunger.org/)

#### **Unicef**

[www.unicef.org/](http://www.unicef.org/)

#### **Amnesty International**

[www.amnesty.org/](http://www.amnesty.org/)

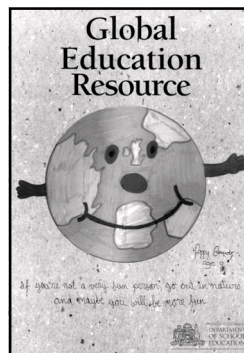
#### **Red Cross**

[www.americal.org/rc.htm](http://www.americal.org/rc.htm)



### Kits and books:

Years 5-6 **Global Education Resource Kit.**  
(1996) Department of School Education.



Paul Jennings, *Freckles, The Gizmo Again.*  
Junko Morimoto, *The Two Bullies.*  
Allan Baillie, *The Bad Guys.*  
Margaret Wild & Julie Vivas, *Let the Celebrations Begin.*  
Eleanor Coerr and Ed Young, *Sadako.*

## Summary of the Declaration of Human Rights

1. Everyone is born free and should be treated with dignity. We recognise that we have reason and conscience and should act in a spirit of sharing.
2. Everyone is born equal despite differences in sex, religion, colour, nationality, language...
3. Everyone has the right to freedom and safety.
4. No one should be treated as a slave.
5. No one has the right to be cruel or inhuman to you.
6. Everyone has the right to expect to be treated fairly in the eyes of the law.
7. All persons are equal before the law and the law should be the same for all.
8. When your rights are not respected, you have the right to seek help from the law.
9. No one should be exiled or imprisoned unjustly.
10. Everyone is entitled to a fair and public trial.
11. Everyone has the right to the assumption of innocence until proven guilty.
12. No one should fear interference with self, family or correspondence without good reason.
13. Everyone has the right to travel inside and outside your country.
14. Everyone has the right to seek protection if being targeted.
15. Everyone has a right to a nationality without fear of losing that nationality.
16. All persons have the right to marry and to have a family.
17. Everyone has the right to own property and have that ownership respected by others.
18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
20. Everyone has the right to meet and assemble in a peaceful way.
21. Everyone has the right to vote and to gain access to government services.
22. Everyone has a right to social security and to expect society to assist in developing personal skills.
23. Everyone has the right to work for a reasonable return in safe conditions. All have the right to join a union.
24. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure.
25. Everyone has a right to a reasonable standard of living, with access to health services.
26. Everyone has the right to education which is aimed at ensuring the full development of the child.
27. Everyone has the right to share in the life of the community.
28. Everyone has to respect the "social order" needed to provide these rights within the community.
29. Everyone must respect the rights of others, the community and public property.
30. No one has the right to deny anyone any of the declared rights.