The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Handout

On the 10th of December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

It was the first time in history that a document with universal value (it refers to "all members of the human family", which means all of us) was adopted by an international organisation. The drafting commission were a diverse bunch, with Eleanor Roosevelt (wife of US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt) chairing, and various members from countries such as Lebanon, China, France, Chile and the Philippines.

The UDHR begins with a **preamble**: it explains the Declaration and sets out its underlying values. Rene Cassin, the French member of the drafting commission, compared the Preamble to the steps leading to a house. It is a vital part of the UDHR because it places it within a historical context, and explains what it meant to the countries that ratified the document back in 1948.

Preamble

Whereas 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,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be **protected by the rule of law**,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of **friendly relations between nations**,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to **promote social progress and better standards of life** in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the **promotion of universal respect** for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a **common understanding of these rights and freedoms** is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore, The General Assembly, proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education **to promote respect for these rights and freedoms** and by progressive measures, national and international, **to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance**, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.