



WHAT WE DO

Since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, promoting and encouraging respect for human rights for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, as stipulated in the United Nations Charter, has been one of the fundamental goals of the organization. Human rights, together with peace and security, and development, constitute the three essential pillars of the United Nations system.



Eleanor Roosevelt holding a Universal Declaration of Human Rights poster in Spanish

LEADING GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS EFFORTS

As the principal United Nations office mandated to promote and protect human rights for all, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) leads global human rights efforts and represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human rights. It speaks out objectively in the face of human rights violations worldwide, provides a forum for identifying, highlighting and developing responses to today's human rights challenges, and acts as the principal focal point of human rights research, education, public information, and advocacy activities in the United Nations system.

Organizationally, the United Nations human rights programme started as a small division at the United Nations headquarters in the 1940s. The division later moved to Geneva and was upgraded to the Centre for Human Rights in the 1980s. At the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 in Vienna, the international community decided to establish a more robust human rights mandate with stronger institutional support. Accordingly, Member States of the United Nations created the post of the High Commissioner for Human Rights by a General Assembly Resolution in 1993. At the 2005 UN World Summit, Heads of State and Government from around the world committed themselves to an historic expansion of the UN human rights programme and recognised the importance of human rights mainstreaming throughout the UN system.

The international human rights movement is based upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was

adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Drafted as 'a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations', the Declaration for the first time in human history set out basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all human beings should enjoy. It has over time been widely accepted as a set fundamental norms of human rights that all Governments should respect. December 10, the day of its adoption, is observed worldwide as Human Rights Day. The UDHR, together with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, form the so-called International Bill of Human Rights.

ASSISTING UN HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES

Alongside the development of international human rights law, a number of United Nations human rights bodies, such as the Human Rights Council and the committees monitoring the implementation of the core human rights treaties, have been established to respond to changing human rights challenges. They rely on OHCHR for both substantive and secretariat support in discharging their duties.

The UN Commission on Human Rights, established in 1946 and reporting to the Economic and Social Council, was the key United Nations intergovernmental body responsible for human rights until it was replaced by the Human Rights Council in 2006. In addition to assuming mandates and responsibilities previously entrusted to the Commission, the newly created Council, reporting directly to the General Assembly, has expanded mandates. These include making recommendations to the General Assembly for further developing international law in the field of human rights, and undertaking a Universal Periodic Review of the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments (see Making Human Rights a Reality: the Human Rights Mechanisms).



Asma Jahangir, at the moment Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, in Afghanistan