



HUMAN RIGHTS

Video : Human rights

Sources : edeos- digital education <http://www.edeos.org>

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Definition

Text transcription of the video

The world is made up of a multitude of cultures, countries and human beings.

Despite their differences, they all have one important thing in common. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

This is the wording of the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, dated 10 December 1948.

Over time, human rights have become one of the fundamental principles of human history.

But what exactly are human rights? Who is responsible for protecting them? And do they really apply to all human beings?

Human rights are the rights that belong to every human being simply by virtue of their existence.

Human rights are innate.

They apply without exception to all human beings throughout the world. They are therefore universal.

They also apply to every human being, without distinction, in particular on the basis of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, colour, age or other characteristics that could establish a difference between human beings.



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Rights are an integral part of international law.

The UN Charter, dating from 1946, already contained passages devoted to the protection and significance of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN in 1948, was the first truly international convention on the subject.

In 1966, the UN adopted two other international covenants, the first relating to civil and political rights and the second to economic, social and cultural rights.

Together, these instruments form what is known as the International Bill of Human Rights.

It constitutes the main legal basis for human rights.

In addition, there are a number of UN conventions that apply to specific areas of human rights, such as the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



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Human rights are often classified into three generations or dimensions.

The first dimension: traditional political and civil liberties.

These include, for example, the right to life and physical integrity, the prohibition of slavery and forced labour, protection from torture, freedom of opinion, conscience and religion, a broad prohibition of discrimination, and the right to vote.

The second dimension: economic, social and cultural rights.

Like the right to work and to appropriate remuneration, the right to form a trade union, gender equality, protection of the family, pregnant women, mothers and children, the right to an adequate standard of living (including adequate food), the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, the right to education, and the right to participate in cultural life.

The rights covered by the third dimension are those of groups: for example, the right to self-determination, the right to development, the right to a clean environment, and the right to peace.



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The indivisible nature of human rights is an important principle. This means that no order of priority can be established between political, economic, social and cultural rights.

These rights can only be implemented jointly. The implementation of political and civil liberties is contingent upon the granting of economic, social and cultural rights, and vice versa.

But who is actually responsible for implementing and enforcing human rights?

States are primarily responsible for granting human rights. They have a duty to refrain from committing violations. They are required to protect them against infringements by third parties. Furthermore, they must create the conditions necessary for the full implementation of human rights where these conditions are still lacking.

The main UN body responsible for this is the Human Rights Council, a group of 47 states based in Geneva.

It regularly monitors the human rights situation in all UN member states.

It may also dispatch independent experts, known as special rapporteurs, to certain countries.



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One criticism that is often levelled is that many of the states sitting on the Human Rights Council do not respect human rights themselves.

The Security Council focuses its efforts on protecting human rights in times of war and conflict.

For example, it takes action against the recruitment of child soldiers.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is responsible for coordinating human rights action within the UN system.

It has numerous national offices around the world and can second experts to UN peacekeeping operations.

The International Criminal Court in The Hague, established in 1998, is the first court with jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute serious human rights violations, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Its powers remain limited, as it does not yet enjoy the support of certain major states, such as the United States and China.

Nevertheless, an important first step has been taken: war criminals can no longer be sure of getting away with their crimes.



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Alongside global UN institutions, there are several regional agreements and institutions: the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the American Convention on Human Rights. Civil society also plays a particularly important role.

Non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch monitor respect for human rights and report cases of violations around the world. Through their awareness-raising activities, they can exert pressure on governments. They also contribute to the development of legal frameworks.

The creation of national human rights institutes is also very important, as they play an indispensable role as guardians of human rights



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Are there also controversial aspects to human rights ?
Yes, there are two main points of contention.

Controversial point no.1 : the universality of human rights.
Some argue that the idea of human rights, which originated in the Western world, is difficult to transpose into other cultures.

This is true: the birth and spread of this idea are steeped in tradition and cultural developments. But it is also clear that no one accepts being tortured or discriminated against because of the colour of their skin or their religion.

Everyone wants to be able to express their opinion freely, without fear of persecution.

Everyone wants to be able to live in dignity, have a roof over their head and not fear hunger or thirst.

This is what the universality of human rights encompasses. It is striking, however, that the states or groups that question this universality are often the ones that are themselves accused of violating these rights.



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Controversial issue no. 2: interference by Western states.

They are sometimes accused of using human rights as a pretext for military intervention in other countries, while violating them themselves. Obviously, no state has a monopoly on human rights.

Violations also occur in Western countries. Take, for example, the measures put in place in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, which in some ways violate human rights. These measures are mostly justified by the imperatives of the fight against terrorism.

As we can see, human rights are very precious rights. Every human being enjoys them equally. States must place the protection and respect of these rights at the heart of their political action. For all policy must be designed with people in mind and serve their interests.

It is not man who serves the state, but the state that serves man.

We must never cease to invest ourselves in the struggle for and defence of human rights. In the long term, we will only be able to live in peace and stability if we respect human rights.