

Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities

On March 25-28, 1997 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO), headquartered in Paris, held the first meeting of a Committee of philosophers representing a wide range of religious, ethnic, ethical and philosophical traditions to produce a Declaration providing a philosophical basis for a global ethic. At present there is only an initial tentative draft circulating among the Committee members.

Preamble

Whereas a fundamental distinguishing characteristic of human beings is that they alone never cease asking "why?"; they inevitably and unquenchably seek the meaning of things, and then strive to live accordingly,

Whereas humans are capable of knowing both particular things and general abstractions; because they can then consequently make comparisons, they also are capable of free, and therefore likewise responsible, choices,

Whereas because both the human search for meaning and the human ability fundamentally to make choices freely and responsibly are "in-finite," that is, their horizons stretch out endlessly, the dignity of the human being is correspondingly "in-finite",

Consequently these reflections on the human reality provide a reasonable basis for the affirmation by the UN 1948 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" of "the dignity and worth of the human person",

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family - which is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world - presupposes and implies certain obligations or responsibilities,

Whereas the exclusive insistence on rights can result in self-opinionated and self-righteous attitudes,

Whereas neglect of responsibilities can lead to arbitrariness, lawlessness and chaos,

Whereas both the rule of law and human rights depend on the readiness of men and women to act justly, because rights without the corresponding commitment to responsibilities cannot long endure,

Whereas global problems such as poverty, underdevelopment, environmental pollution, population explosion, disease, crime, nuclear proliferation, corruption and fanaticism demand global solutions, and therefore ideas, values and norms valid across all cultures and societies,

Whereas all human beings, to the best of their knowledge and ability, are responsible for a better global order, which cannot be created or enforced by laws, prescriptions, and conventions alone,

Whereas the aspirations for progress and improvement of the human race on planet earth cannot be safeguarded without a minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental ethical attitudes which apply to all human beings and institutions,

Now, therefore, the General Assembly,
Proclaims this "Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities" as a common standard of commitment by all peoples and all nations to the end that every individual and organ of society shall contribute to the authentic autonomy of every individual and the justified requirements of communities.

We hereby confirm and deepen on the level of an ethic of responsibility what has already been formally proclaimed on the level of rights, namely: the full realization of the intrinsic dignity of the human person, the inalienable freedom and equality in principle of all humans, solidarity with each other, and the interdependence of all sentient beings.

Consciousness of these responsibilities of individuals and institutions are to be founded by education and teaching as well as strengthened and promoted by progressive measures, national and international.

We further recognize that dialogue - i.e., conversation whose 'primary' aim is to learn from the other - is a necessary means whereby women and men learn to respect the other, expand and deepen their understanding of the meaning of life, and develop an ever broadening consensus whereby men and women can live together on this globe in an authentically human manner.

Article 1

Every human being, regardless of social origin, sex, property, color, language, nationality or religion, ought to be treated humanely.

Article 2

All human beings should oppose all forms of inhumanity, especially fanaticism, hate, and social exclusion, and work for greater humaneness.

Article 3

No individual human or group of humans, including the state, social class, pressure group, police or military agency stands above the ethical dictates of good and evil. All should behave in a genuinely human fashion, that is: Do good and avoid evil.

Article 4

All human beings, endowed with reason and conscience, should act towards one another in a spirit of sisterhood/brotherhood. Therefore, there should be applied to all human beings, both individuals and groups, including among others families, communities, races, nations, and religions, the long-standing principle of so many ethical and religious traditions: What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others.

Article 5

Every human being is always to be treated as an end, never as a mere means, always as a subject of rights, never as a mere object, whether in business, politics, communication, scientific research or other areas of life.

Article 6

No one, except in the case of self-defense, has the right to injure or to kill. Every human being ought rather to have respect for life.

Article 7

Although every human person is infinitely precious and must be unconditionally protected, the lives of animals and plants which inhabit this planet with us likewise deserve protection, preservation, and care. That is, we humans are a part of nature, not apart from nature. Hence, as beings with the capacity of foresight we bear a special responsibility - especially with a view to future generations - for the air, water, and soil, that is, for the earth, and even the cosmos.

Article 8

Conflicts ought to be resolved without violence. This principle is valid for all institutions, especially states, as well as for individuals. Particularly public officials are obliged to work within a framework of a just order and to commit themselves, whenever possible, to non-violent, peaceful solutions.

Article 9

No one has the right to rob or dispossess in any way any person, group of persons, or the commonweal. Every human being ought rather to deal honestly and fairly.

Article 10

Property, limited or large, carries with it an obligation; ownership not only permits the personal use of property but also entails the responsibility to serve the common good.

Article 11

Economic and political power should not be misused as instruments of domination, but for service to humanity. Therefore mutual respect and the will to mediation should be fostered so as to reach a reasonable balance of interests in a sense of moderation and fairness.

Article 12

Wherever rulers repress the ruled, institutions threaten persons, or might oppresses right, human beings have not only the right but the responsibility to resist - whenever possible non-violently.

Article 13

No one should speak lies. Every human being ought rather to speak and act truthfully.

Article 14

The communications media, to whom the freedom to report for the sake of truth is entrusted and to whom the office of guardian granted, do not stand above ethics but have the obligation to respect human dignity, human rights, and fundamental values. They are duty-bound to objectivity, fairness, and humaneness. Hence, they have no right to intrude into individuals' private spheres, manipulate public opinion, or distort reality.

Article 15

Politicians, scientists and artists are doubly obliged, as individual persons and as society's leaders, to model ethical standards, and especially to serve truth.

Article 16

Religious persons, and especially religious leaders, whose religious freedom is guaranteed, ought to avoid prejudice, fanaticism and hatred towards those of different belief, let alone incite or legitimize religious wars. They rather should always be guides for truthfulness in thinking, speaking, and acting.

Article 17

All individuals and groups are obliged not to treat other persons as mere sex objects or disadvantage them because of their sexuality. Rather, men and women should treat each other in their sexual and kindred relationships with respect and as equal partners.

Article 18

Young people should learn at home, school, religion and elsewhere in society that sexuality in itself is a creative and positive - not a negative, destructive, or exploitative - force. As a life-affirming shaper of community, sexuality can be effective only when partners accept the responsibility of caring for one another's happiness.

Article 19

Marriage, which, despite its cultural and religious variety, should be characterized by love, loyalty, and permanence and guarantee mutual security and support.

Article 20

In the family, parents should not exploit children, nor children parents. Their relationship should reflect mutual respect, appreciation, and concern.

Article 21

The different professions and other societal groupings, such as medicine, business, journalism, among others, should develop current codes of ethics which will relate to the ethical principles of this Declaration by providing more specific guidelines.

Article 22

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any state, group or person the right to engage in any activity aimed at the destruction of any of the rights, freedoms or responsibilities set forth in the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights or subsequent UN documents.