

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ACTION!

The world is made up of many different countries, cultures and peoples.

Despite of all these differences they all have one important thing in common ... **all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights...** this is what is said in the very first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of December, 10th 1948.

The notion of human rights has become one of the most important in the history of human kind.



But ... What exactly are human rights?
Who is responsible for protecting them?
And do they really apply to all people?

We describe human rights as those rights which apply to every single person simply because he or she is a human being.

Human rights apply to every single person in every single part of the world. They are therefore Universal; they apply **equally** to everyone regardless of age, religion, gender, sexual

orientation, skin colour or every feature that may distinguish one person to another.

Human rights are part of international law, and they are generally divided into three dimensions.

The 1st DIMENSION includes political and civil liberty rights:

- ✗ the right to life and physical integrity;
- ✗ a ban on slavery and forced labour;
- ✗ protection from torture;
- ✗ freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- ✗ a ban on discrimination;
- ✗ the right to vote.



The 2nd DIMENSION includes economic, social and cultural human rights:

- ✗ the right to work and to a fair wage;
- ✗ the right to form trade unions;
- ✗ equality between men and women;
- ✗ the protection of families, pregnant women, mothers and children;
- ✗ the right to a decent standard of living, including adequate food;
- ✗ the right to adequate physical and mental health;
- ✗ the right to education;
- ✗ the right to participate in cultural life.



The 3rd DIMENSION includes the rights of groups:

- ✗ the right to development;
- ✗ the right to a clean environment;
- ✗ the right to peace.

The principle of indivisibility of human rights is important, this means that none of the rights listed may have priority over the others.

Non governmental organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch draw attention to abuses and pressure governments to do public campaigns.

There are some **controversial aspects** though...

...issue n°1: **the universal nature of Human Rights.**

The notion of human rights was born in the west, so it cannot be simply transferred to other cultures, in fact the development and spread of the human rights carry the marks of cultural development; but it's also true that no human being wants to be tortured or discriminated just because of skin colour or origins. Everybody wants to speak his or her opinion without fear of persecution. Every human being wants a life of dignity with a roof over his head without having to suffer hunger or thirst.

... issue n°2: **pretext for war.**

Some countries are accused of using Human Rights as a pretext for military intervention in other countries, and of committing human rights abuses themselves. No country is the sole defender of human rights, all countries must cooperate.

These rights are violated in western countries, too. Especially following the attack of September 2001 measures have been introduced that violate human rights; and the

justification has been the war of terrorism.

EXAMPLE