Human Rights Day - 10 December

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Human rights are part of everyday life: the ability to express an opinion, access to education, receive fair treatment, live safely, and participate in decisions that affect our communities are all connected to the principle that every person deserves dignity and respect. Human rights apply to everyone, regardless of nationality, background, gender, religion, disability, or economic circumstances.

Human Rights Day is observed on 10 December every year and provides an opportunity to reflect on these principles and consider how they can be protected in practice. While people often discuss human rights in relation to governments, courts, and international organisations, they also shape the everyday experiences of individuals and communities.

For HOPE Inc, Human Rights Day also offers an opportunity to explore the connection between environmental responsibility and human well-being. A healthy environment supports access to clean air and water, safe housing, food, and opportunities for people to live healthy lives.

How did Human Rights Day begin?

Human Rights Day traces its origins to the establishment of the United Nations after the Second World War. On 10 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in Paris. The declaration established a common standard of fundamental rights and freedoms for all people and nations. It was developed through contributions from representatives with different legal, cultural, and political backgrounds, reflecting an international effort to identify principles that could be shared across societies (United Nations, n.d.).

The UDHR contains 30 articles covering a broad range of rights, including the right to life, freedom and security, education and work, the right to an adequate standard of living. The Declaration has become a foundational document in international human rights law and has influenced constitutions, national laws and various international human rights agreements.

Human Rights Day was established to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration and encourage people around the world to reflect on its principles. Each year, the observance provides an opportunity to raise awareness, recognise progress and consider the fight and work that remains to ensure that human rights are respected in practice.

What can individuals do on Human Rights Day?

This day is an opportunity to learn about human rights and consider how day-to-day actions can contribute to a more respectful and inclusive society. Although individuals cannot resolve every structural problem on their own, their choices can help build awareness, support communities, and encourage positive change.



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1. Learn about human rights

One starting point is to read and inform yourself about human rights and learn about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UN website provides the full text in many languages and is accessible to everyone. Understanding these principles can help people recognise discrimination, identify when rights may be at risk, and make informed decisions about issues affecting their communities (Prestholdt, J., 2011).

Furthermore, the Australian Human Rights Commission also provides information about discrimination, workplace rights, disability rights, First Nations rights, climate change and other human rights topics, this information can help people understand where to seek advice or assistance when they have questions about their rights.

2. ***Treat others with dignity and respect***

Respecting human rights begins with how we treat one another, listening to others, and challenging discriminatory language where it is safe to do so. Respecting different backgrounds and avoiding the spread of harmful stereotypes can contribute to more inclusive communities. Every day behaviour can influence whether people feel respected, welcome and able to participate in community life.

3. ***Support community organisations***

Individuals can contribute by volunteering, donating where possible or sharing information from organisations that work to address discrimination, social disadvantage, environmental problems or community needs. Community participation can also help ensure that people who are directly affected by a problem have opportunities to share their experiences and contribute to solutions. Listening to local communities is particularly important when decisions affect housing, public spaces, access to services or the natural environments on which people depend.

4. ***Participate in community discussions***

Human rights include freedoms that let people express their opinions and participate in public life, subject to applicable laws and others' rights. Attending local community meetings, answering consultations, contacting representatives or supporting informed public discussions can help individuals contribute to decisions that affect their neighbourhoods.

Participation is also essential when environmental decisions may affect basic human rights, such as access to clean water, green spaces, safe housing, or culturally significant places. Communities should have meaningful opportunities to understand proposals, express concerns, and contribute relevant local knowledge.

5. ***Help make information accessible***

Sharing reliable information is another practical way to recognise Human Rights Day. People can recommend educational resources, discuss human rights with family and friends, or help community organisations communicate information clearly. Information should be understandable and available in formats and,2 when possible, in different languages that meet community needs.

Building a future based on dignity

Human Rights Day reminds us that dignity, equality, and freedom are principles that require continued attention. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 established an important international standard, but its principles remain relevant to the challenges communities face today.

The promotion and advocacy of human rights involves more than recognising them in documents. It also requires fair treatment and access to reliable information, meaningful participation and institutions that respect their responsibilities within human rights. This 10 December can be a starting point for learning, listening and taking practical action by treating others with respect, supporting our community initiatives, reducing environmental impacts or participating in local discussions (United Nations, n.d.).

References

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