



## What are human rights?



Human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings - they are not granted by any state. These universal rights are **inherent** to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. They range from the most fundamental - the right to life - to those that make life worth living, such as the rights to food, education, work, health, and liberty.

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, was the first legal document to set out the fundamental human rights to be universally protected. The UDHR, which **turned 70** in 2018, continues to be the foundation of all international human rights law. Its [30 articles](#) provide the principles and building blocks of current and future human rights conventions, treaties and other legal instruments.

The UDHR, together with the 2 covenants - the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - make up the [International Bill of Rights](#).

### Universal and inalienable

The principle of **universality** of human rights is the cornerstone of international human rights law. This means that we are all equally entitled to our human rights. This principle, as first emphasized in the UDHR, is repeated in many international human rights conventions, declarations, and resolutions.

Human rights are **inalienable**. They should not be taken away, except in specific situations and according to due process. For example, the right to liberty may be restricted if a person is found guilty of a crime by a court of law.

### Indivisible and interdependent

All human rights are **indivisible and interdependent**. This means that one set of rights cannot be enjoyed fully without the other. For example, making progress in civil and political rights makes it easier to exercise economic, social and cultural rights. Similarly, violating economic, social and cultural rights can negatively affect many other rights.



### Equal and non-discriminatory

Article 1 of the UDHR states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Freedom from discrimination, set out in Article 2, is what ensures this equality.

Non-discrimination cuts across all international human rights law. This principle is present in all major human rights treaties. It also provides the central theme of 2 core instruments: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.



### Both rights and obligations

All States have ratified at least 1 of the 9 [core human rights treaties](#), as well as 1 of the 9 optional protocols. 80% of States have ratified 4 or more. This means that States have obligations and duties under international law to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.

- The obligation to **respect** means that States must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights.

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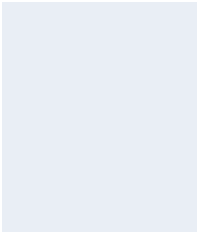
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[International Human Rights Laws](#)

- The obligation to **protect** requires States to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses.
- The obligation to **fulfill** means that States must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.

Meanwhile, as individuals, while we are entitled to our human rights - but, we should also respect and [stand up](#) for the human rights of others.

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