

## Educating for Universal Human Rights

Watching the evening news and reading the newspapers can overwhelm us as immense sufferings enter our living rooms on a daily basis – brutal violence in Syria, hunger in the Sahel, trafficking of innocent women, men and children for sexual or labor exploitation, to mention just a few. With fundamental human dignity being violated on a massive scale, these heart-breaking reports often leave us feeling powerless, if not depressed: what is there that I, as an individual, or we, as a neighborhood or women’s group, can do?

Human dignity is both the cornerstone of Catholic Social Teaching and the foundation of our international human rights system and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. How can we, as educators, insert the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into our projects with women, children and youth, refugees and migrants, and persons living in poverty? Here are two suggestions.

- Familiarize yourself with the text of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been translated into more than 400 languages, and can, therefore, be used in many of the countries where we live and work. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has a special webpage with a listing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [in the 400+ languages](#). Download the text in the language of the people with whom you work. Read it. Use it.

Human rights education and training are essential in today’s world. In order to claim their rights people have to know them. The maxim “know-your-rights” applies to every global citizen. Moreover, it demands that educators be informed and vigilant, ever ready and able to communicate and instruct the rights and freedoms designed to uphold the human dignity of all peoples. Consider how you might use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in your projects and schools.

The following are excellent online educational resources about human rights education. There are plenty more, especially from national organizations. Please feel free to share those with me so, together, we can build a more comprehensive list of resources on this critical issue of educating for universal human rights.

- Watch the 28-minute documentary film [A Path to Dignity: The Power of Human Rights Education](#). This DVD features three stories which illustrate the impact of human rights education on students in India, law enforcement officials in Australia, and women victims of violence in Turkey. The movie shows how human rights education empowers, can transform lives, and is an effective tool for social change.
- [Human Rights Education Associates](#) (HREA) is a treasure for educational resources, aimed at audiences of all ages. Explore their multi-lingual website, or visit their [human rights education library](#). HREA also offers online e-courses.
- The [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR) is the UN’s human rights arm. OHCHR’s website is worth exploring to get an idea of the vast array of topics OHCHR addresses. Of particular interest is the [World Programme for Human Rights Education \(2005 - ongoing\)](#), another good resource for the young and the older.

- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has developed three short, animated, videos about how certain international human rights mechanisms function:
  - ✓ [What is a Human Rights?](#)
  - ✓ [What is the Human Rights Council?](#)
  - ✓ [What is a Human Rights Treaty Body?](#)

The videos have subtitles in more than 15 languages – just click on “cc” in the YouTube viewer.

- Helpful web sites for teaching human rights to children and adolescents include:
  - ✓ the UN’s [CyberSchoolBus](#) targets young people and contains an explanation of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) as well as suggestions on how to use it in an educational setting.
  - ✓ the [Training and Education](#) page of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has valuable resources. I particularly recommend publication Nr. 4, *ABC - Teaching Human Rights: Practical activities for primary and secondary schools*; you can download the entire book in separate parts.
  - ✓ Unicef’s web site for [Voices of Youth](#).
  - ✓ the page on [Human Rights Education](#) by [UNESCO](#).

### **Background to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

The UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins with the recognition of “the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” as “the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” A total of thirty articles follow to articulate in more detail what those universal human rights and fundamental freedoms are: civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed as a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations” and is the world’s moral yardstick. It is an ethical compass for addressing today’s challenges.

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*"Human rights education is much more than a lesson in schools or a theme for a day; it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity."*

*Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General*