

AI INDEX: ACT 30/27/97  
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## **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights An unfinished revolution**

**by Pierre Sané  
Secretary General, Amnesty International**

Six billion! Six billion of us live on this planet. A planet so rich and diverse, a planet which has sustained the livelihoods of billions and billions of human beings throughout history. For some it has been a life of riches, for many a life of rags. For some it has been a long and very fulfilled life, for others life has been short and at times brutal. For all those who have suffered and endured servitude and deprivation, other human beings, and not nature, have been their greatest tormentors.

This is still true today.

Forty nine years ago today, leaders of the 56 independent states agreed to a code of conduct delineating the equal rights and duties of all human beings and entrusted the protection and promotion of those rights primarily to governments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights born out of the ashes of World War II was the “humanist” response to the cries of the victims of Auschwitz and Nagasaki. The holocaust and the nuclear bomb established that mankind had achieved the technological capacity to destroy humanity AND the planet, and its readiness to do so. “Never again” wrote the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To prevent war and destruction, to guarantee peace and justice international and national social orders had to be founded on human rights everywhere. The world needed to pursue the dual objectives of freedom from fear and freedom from want, for all, at once and concurrently.

Almost 50 years on where are we? 1.3 billions human beings survive with less than a dollar a day, 35,000 children die everyday of malnutrition and preventable diseases, words that we thought had disappeared from our vocabulary, haunt our daily conscience: genocide, ethnic cleansing, gang rape. The ugly face of armed conflicts dominate the reality of hundreds of millions of people in 30 countries -- one nation out of six! In most of these wars the enemy is not necessarily an armed combatant, but rather ‘the other’. The one with a different faith, or a different ethnic identity: the approach is to first dehumanize the enemy, thereafter the language of rights does not apply since rights only belong to humans, then “seek and destroy”. In some societies “at peace” the same logic is more often than not applied to criminals and migrants from poorer nations.

While the language of rights has made considerable headway, while the system of international human rights monitoring and reporting now integrates all states and covers more and more areas, while popular consciousness and demands about rights and obligations permeate most societies, violations of international human rights law continue unabated. The rich and powerful continue to do as they please, the poor and the weak continue to endure what they must as the dogma of neo-liberalism triumphs everywhere, and in every sphere of social relations, and threatens even the livelihoods of future generations.

Protection and promotion of human rights is not just a moral imperative. It is, as explicitly stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundation of freedom, justice and peace. For all of us six billion inhabitants of the earth, social and economic development is only sustainable in the long term if it enhances the dignity of all, if it secures the equal right of men and women, if it provides for decent standards of living and greater freedoms.

The world today has the resources and the knowhow to achieve these goals. The future therefore does not have to be one of chaos and misery.

In 1948, a silent revolution started with a manifesto called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With it we are facing the right direction, all we have to do now is to keep on walking. And this is precisely what human rights defenders throughout the world are doing and Amnesty International has committed itself to accompany and protect them. What about you?

This is our planet, for all six billion people. The resources and knowhow are our patrimony to us all. But a human right denied to some ultimately puts us all at risk.

To echo the words of Mahatma Gandhi: *"Be the change you want to see in the world"*.

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