

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS TO HIGH-LEVEL EVENT MARKING THE 70TH
ANNIVERSARY OF
THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:
A PREVENTION TOOL TO ACHIEVE PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT****New York, 26 September 2018**

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, Dear friends,

It's a pleasure to be here with you to mark the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The rights enshrined in this foundational document belong to everyone, everywhere; they have no physical or moral frontier.

Human rights are not the sole purview of north, south, east or west; or of developed or developing countries. They are independent of nationality, circumstances, gender or sexual orientation, race, religion or belief.

The first article of the Universal Declaration is clear: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

Human rights are of value in themselves; they are not at the service of any other agenda. And no one ever loses their human rights, no matter what they do.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Over the past 70 years, the concept of human rights set out in the Universal Declaration has had a revolutionary impact. It has permeated policies and constitutions, from the global level to regional and national frameworks.

In this way, the Universal Declaration has unleashed the power of women's full participation; it has spurred the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance – including the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, as Nelson Mandela told the General Assembly twenty years ago.

The Universal Declaration has heralded movements by groups of all kinds, from indigenous people to people with disabilities, to claim their rights.

There is now broad recognition that, as Kofi Annan said, “The human family will not enjoy development without security, it will not enjoy security without development, and it will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.”

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Sadly, we still have a long way to go before respect for human rights is truly universal.

Many people around the world still suffer from abuse of their rights. Gender inequality is one of the greatest human rights challenges we face. Refugees and migrants, people who do not conform to gender norms, and minorities of all kinds are frequently targeted for denial and abuse of their rights.

There is still resistance to supporting human rights, often linked to a false dichotomy between those rights and national sovereignty. But human rights and sovereignty go hand in hand.

Human rights strengthen States and societies and reinforce sovereignty. We have ample evidence that state-sponsored human rights abuses are a sign of weakness, not strength. They are often precursors to conflict and even collapse.

I urge all Member States to heed these lessons and to strengthen support for United Nations action on human rights, including the Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner. It is a pleasure to see Madame Bachelet here today.

And I call on Governments that have not signed or ratified the two human rights Covenants, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to do so urgently.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Every social movement for human rights and solidarity in history has been led by young people.

It was the fight for human rights and democracy in my country, under Salazar's dictatorship, that triggered my own interest in political action.

There is a special place in my heart for young women and men who are speaking out for social justice.

On Monday, I launched my new strategy, Youth 2030, to bring young people into the centre of our work.

I urge young people to make this space your home, to bring your energy and passion here, to challenge our ways of doing things and to take up the torch for our common humanity.

You are the true custodians of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I entrust you with keeping it alight for another seventy years, to show us the path to a world of peace, dignity and opportunity for all. Thank you.

The UDHR: A prevention tool to achieve peace and sustainable development

High level side event

Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet

26 September 2018

Distinguished Ministers,

My dear predecessors as High Commissioner,

Distinguished panelists,

Colleagues, friends,

It is a great honor to be present among you, as the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in this 70th year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Seventy years is a lifespan. But the Universal Declaration is strong and alive.

It has stirred the hearts of generations.

It has empowered millions to march, to come together and to build progress.

Women and men have demanded an end to discrimination, tyranny and exploitation. They have affirmed their rights to greater freedom and independence, and to fair access to justice, fundamental services and economic opportunities.

We can measure the power and the value of those achievements. Globally, human life has immensely improved – in health, education, sustained development, less marginalization and abuse of many minorities.

Conflicts have been prevented. Disputes have been resolved by the impartial workings of justice.

In many cases, discrimination has grown less harsh. Societies have become more open, more inclusive, and more respectful. And governments have grown in their understanding that they should serve the needs and rights of their people.

We still have a long way to go, but in the past 70 years, humanity has moved a thousand steps forward.

I am convinced that the human rights ideal has been one of the most constructive movements of ideas in human history – as well as one of the most successful.

But today, that progress under threat.

In many countries, the fundamental recognition that all human beings are equal, and have inherent rights, is under attack. And the institutions set up by States to achieve common solutions are being undermined.

Excellencies,

Human rights are the interlocking elements that build resilient and confident societies – societies able to withstand and surmount threats, peacefully resolve disputes, and facilitate sustained progress in prosperity and well-being for all their members.

Every step towards greater implementation of the human rights agenda is an act of prevention – strengthening the bonds between communities, and reinforcing inclusive development and peace.

Every step away from it tugs us down, towards suffering, injustice, hatred and conflict.

When human rights are wronged – when violations and abuses generate explosive crises and conflicts – bloodshed, wrecked economies and human devastation are the unbearable results.

Excellencies

This anniversary is an important reminder of why the United Nations came to be, and the purpose we must serve today.

The core of the UN – its backbone – is our shared conviction, forged out of destruction and suffering, that every human being is equal in dignity and in rights.

We can achieve this vision. There is a way forward – and it is to fight back.

We must marshal our convictions, our values, and overcome hatred, exploitation and division.

And we must work towards this vision together: Nations, United.

Because human security is indivisible. Our world is connected. We are all connected. Crises, conflict and deprivation generate negative spillover. And, as the Universal Declaration tells us: it is fairness and dignity, which sustain development, for all humanity.

It is justice, and equality, that bring peace.

I thank you.



**Conmemoración del 70 aniversario de la Declaración
Universal de Derechos Humanos: una herramienta de
prevención para el desarrollo sostenible y paz
26 de septiembre 2018, 11:15 - 13:00, (CR2)**

Vice Presidenta 3 minutos

Excelentísima Señora Alta Comisionada de Naciones Unidas
para los Derechos Humanos

Excelencias,

Distinguidos invitados,

El 70 aniversario de la adopción de la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos, es una efeméride que nos obliga como comunidad internacional a renovar nuestro compromiso, de forma inequívoca con la promoción y protección de los derechos humanos, incluido el derecho al desarrollo.

Luego de siete décadas es hora de hacer un balance sobre los avances que hemos realizado a nivel universal para garantizar las libertades y derechos fundamentales de todas las personas sin discriminación alguna por razón de nacimiento, raza, sexo,



género u orientación sexual, religión, opinión o cualquier otra condición o circunstancia personal o social.

Es también una oportunidad para enumerar los desafíos pendientes y comprometernos a trabajar conjuntamente para superar las brechas de inequidad, la pobreza y luchar contra la violencia y la corrupción, fuentes de violaciones a los derechos humanos a nivel internacional.

La defensa de los derechos humanos debe ser el horizonte al que aspiramos para lograr sociedades más justas, sociedades que no “dejen a nadie atrás” y que garanticen un entorno de no discriminación, que promueva la paz social sostenible con el pleno respeto al medio ambiente con un firme compromiso con el empoderamiento de las niñas y mujeres como agentes de cambio en nuestras sociedades actuales.

La Declaración Universal no es solo un instrumento de defensa y promoción de los derechos humanos, sino también de prevención. La realización de los derechos humanos permite el desarrollo de sociedades más justas y equitativas. Costa Rica así lo ha entendido e impulsa dentro del sistema de las Naciones



Unidas iniciativas sobre educación en derechos humanos y derechos humanos y medio ambiente.

Hoy más que nunca, es imperativo, recordar el carácter universal, indivisible y de interdependencia de estos derechos, cuando en muchos rincones del planeta, se han desatado corrientes nacionalistas y extremistas, que van en contra de valores que hemos definido como universales. La comunidad internacional enfrenta hoy día el gran desafío de robustecer la promoción y protección de los acuerdos alcanzados en 1948 con la adopción de la Declaración.

Las grandes victorias de la historia deben reivindicarse cada cierto tiempo; sobre todo cuando sus logros se ven amenazados por antivalores sociales e individuales, en beneficio de los intereses de unos pocos.

Vengo de un país, en el que nuestra máxima aspiración y compromiso, es con los Derechos Humanos, y les invito a que juntos, podamos seguir fortaleciendo las instancias internacionales, que velan y tutelan por la defensa de estos.

**The Elders at UNGA High-Level Side Event: 26 September 2018,
11.15 – 13.15**

**Human Rights (UDHR) as a Prevention Tool in the Fight against
Climate Change: Talking Points for Mary Robinson**

- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a product of its times. It was born in the aftermath of World War II and the shadow of the Holocaust, and it was drafted mostly by liberal-minded Westerners. But its contents have stood the test of time, and it has been adopted and referenced in many UN Resolutions and Declarations over the last 70 years. Its fundamental principles remain strong enough, and flexible enough, to apply equally to the new challenges that our planet and peoples face today like climate change, as they did to attempts to exterminate another people or deny their equality.**

- **Human rights are there to protect all of us, and particularly the most vulnerable amongst us. This is why it is so critical that we view climate change as a human rights issue. Who is more vulnerable than those who risk losing their ability to grow food to feed their families, those who face daily health problems due to fossil fuel emissions, those whose very countries are at risk of disappearing and are forced to leave their homes and ancestral lands for a precarious future as a displaced person?**

- **I would like to encourage every vulnerable country and in particular the forty-eight countries of the Climate Vulnerable Forum to insist on telling loudly and clearly how their human rights are being undermined by climate change and to demand urgent action on this.**

- **Climate change however was not on policymakers' agendas [when the UDHR was drafted], and fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas were seen as integral parts of countries' development and growth strategies. However, we do now know that fossil fuel companies themselves were aware at least four decades ago of the environmental damage posed by their activities – just as the tobacco industry knew about the health risks posed by smoking but sought to systematically deny and obscure the evidence. So there has always been a justice, equity and human rights aspect to climate policy; fortunately, today there is also much more clarity and acceptance of fundamental scientific facts.**
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- **A little personal note; when I became High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office was preparing for the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So I want to wish Michelle Bachelet all the best for the seventieth anniversary. One good thing that happened was that I got the Guinness Book of Records for the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights during that year became the most translated document in the world. And being Irish I hung that Guinness Book of Records award with great pleasure. But now I have to confess that I came late to understanding the link between climate change and human rights. I didn't make a single significant speech on climate change when I was High Commissioner during my five years because it was another part of the UN that was dealing with it. And I was in my silo for human rights and gender etc.**
- **It was when I did work on the ground in Africa on economic and social rights that I became aware of how significantly African countries were already affected in 2003, 2004 and on by the impacts, the negative impacts of climate change.**

- **When the UDHR was adopted, the General Assembly consisted of 58 states. Today there are more than three times as many, thanks mainly to decolonisation and liberation struggles. Most of these new, developing states bear little or no responsibility for causing climate change. Yet they are the most vulnerable and are already suffering the heaviest consequences. We need to view this not fatalistically, as an inevitable consequence of an unequal economic order, but with anger and urgency as a massive human rights violation.**

- **As the preamble to the Universal Declaration makes clear, all members of the human family are entitled to “equal and inalienable rights”. This is the bedrock on which its articles rest. That preamble also speaks of “freedom from fear and want”. As has been heard many times in recent years, climate change is a direct cause of the denial of those fundamental equal rights to which all states – at least nominally – subscribe. It is also a prime driver of fear and scarcity. Vulnerable groups in all our societies, particularly women, the poor, and the most marginalised suffer the most.**

- **Article 25 of the UDHR, which refers to the right to an adequate standard of living in terms of food, clothing, housing, medical care and security, is directly relevant to climate change.**

- **Article 13 on freedom of movement and residence, also allows people to think about the concerns now of some Pacific Ocean states whose people inhabit low-lying atolls threatened by rising sea waters. For these people, climate change is an existential crisis; if their islands are submerged, how will all their other human rights be respected? Who will offer them sanctuary, and how will their migration status be recognised and respected?**

- **Linked to this are Articles 19 and 20, which provide for freedoms of opinion and expression, coupled with peaceful assembly and association. Without them we would not have had the peoples' movements which have done so much globally to challenge powerful vested interests and galvanize governments into action – but none of us can afford to be complacent amid the worsening climate for human rights globally.**

- **In some quarters, unfortunately, the UDHR is today falling into disregard – and here I am not only referring to authoritarian or undemocratic states, but to those that had previously held the torch highest. This, then, should be the moment when we all rededicate ourselves to the collective responsibility our forebears took on in 1948.**

- **I believe that climate change denial is not just ignorant, it is malign, it is evil and amounts to an attempt to deny human rights to some of the most vulnerable people on the planet. The evidence about the effects of climate change is incontrovertible, and the moral case for urgent action indisputable. The time for talking is over; if we do not act now, and fast, future generations will never forgive us.**

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Check against delivery

**Remarks by Louise Arbour
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
International Migration**

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**High-level Side Event on the 70th anniversary of the
Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

New York, 26 September 2018

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is very fitting that this event invites us to reflect on the contribution of human rights to peace and development. The linkage between the three has been celebrated throughout the history of the UDHR's rich 70-year lifespan.

I believe it is also fitting that we anchor our discussion squarely within the text of the UDHR. Let me turn first to a critical part of the preamble, but one that we rarely hear emphasized:

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge.

There are some who, in the pursuance of their own interests and in defiance of the common good, seek to destroy our “common understanding of these rights and freedoms”. I suggest to you that this may be today our greatest challenge. Like all great foundational documents, the UDHR must survive the passage of time and yet remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

As we face the truly universal challenges posed by climate change and increased human mobility, we will be well served by turning again to the Preamble of the UDHR which asserts that the highest aspiration of the common people is to be free and to be safe. It shouldn't be that hard to find a common understanding to achieve that.

In fact, we could find a good start in the many articulations of the relationship between sustainable development and the advancement of rights throughout the UDHR. Far from being a luxury that will emerge as a by-product of development, human rights are fundamental to the well-being of all people, not only of some, as they call for development to be rooted in equality and social justice.

Where would we be had we paid more than lip service to this basic entitlement, which leaves no room for the poverty of billions of us, a poverty rendered even more unconscionable by the conspicuous wealth of millions of others.

The UDHR truly called for a better, more equitable, more peaceful world.

Though it emerged at the end of apocalyptic international wars, it was ominously prescient about the rise of internal armed conflicts that have plagued our planet, particularly in recent decades. In that regard, the third paragraph of the Preamble is a puzzle of moral ambiguity. It reads as follows:

“Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.”

The ambiguity rests, in my view, on whether the reference to “rebellion against tyranny and oppression” is meant to be descriptive or prescriptive.

In other words, is it just a recognition that people are likely to rebel if their fundamental rights are not protected by law, or does it offer a justification for the compulsion to stand up to tyrants and oppressors?

Either way, the clear antidote to rebellion is the protection of rights by the rule of law. And that, in turn, requires a common understanding of those rights, and a united effort to face up to those who seek to destroy this common understanding in the pursuit of their own interest, regardless of the cost.

This is both the legacy and the open challenge that the UDHR presents to our generation.

Thank you.

**The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Prevention Tool to
Achieve Peace and Sustainable Development
26 September, 11:15-13:15, Conference Room 2, UN Headquarters**

**Draft Remarks for Hina Jilani (for opening intervention of 4-5 minutes on
a panel), on the UDHR as a Driver against Discrimination:**

Let me begin by mentioning the UDHR as a driver against discrimination which is a pervasive (and perverse) trait that consciously or unconsciously infects all our societies. It takes many shapes, forms and colours. I believe we have all witnessed discrimination in our lives against others, or else faced it ourselves. At the same time we have also witnessed many acts of courage to fight against this insidious evil at the national and international levels.

- As a lawyer and human rights defender I have repeatedly been confronted with examples of discrimination committed on grounds of gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. Minorities in particular have been denied opportunities for political, social and economic advancement because of discriminatory laws policies. In many countries of the world, the situation of women and girls is of particular concern. Their rights are violated in the name of religion and culture and they become particularly vulnerable to prejudice, to exclusion and to public repudiation for claiming rights, not only by State forces but by social actors as well.
- While states have progressively enhanced their powers of control the role of the state in protection has diminished. These trends continue to impede prospects for democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and the potential for development and have left vast sections of populations vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion.
- As we commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights I am sure that we are all fully conscious that deviations from and non-compliance with the principles expressed in the Declaration have presented the global community with some of the most complex social, political and economic problems. The pace at which consensus evolved to lay down these standards as a measure of state conduct or social progress, has been overcome all over the world by a rapid sequence of events. These events have generated conditions causing more grievous violations of human rights than were witnessed during the war that preceded the Declaration. Human rights today are hostage to territorial disputes, ideologies based on religious or economic doctrines, and conflicting security interests.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is meant to be an affirmation of our collective beliefs. Yet we witness an unacceptable level of tolerance for injustice, exploitation and abuse. It is because of this adverse environment that emphasis on the universality of human rights has become essential for the protection and promotion of human rights. These values emanate from human experience limited neither to one part of the world nor to a single culture or society. Arguments against the concept of universality are no more than attempts to justify human rights violations and to legitimize action contrary to human rights norms taken in the name of religion, nationalism or ethnic identity.
- Laws and social policies adopted by states play a crucial role in eliminating social trends that result in discrimination and exclusion. States bear the responsibility to uphold commitments, which they have solemnly entered into as a part of the international community. They are also obliged to enforce these against all those elements and non-state actors that perpetuate prejudices, denigrate the merits of diversity and commit gross violation of human rights.
- The UN Security Council and Human Rights Council have established many independent mechanisms to investigate gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. However, the value of their work of these mechanisms is yet to be sufficiently appreciated by states. This has resulted in weakening accountability and assurance of non-repetition. Lack of political will and cynicism over international law are the root causes of this malaise.
- I agree with the view that the principles of the UDHR are under threat and I want to warn that one important factor that could weaken the UDHR, and jeopardise its moral foundations, is the selective application of its provisions. This selectivity has allowed many situations of serious human rights violations to remain immune from international scrutiny or accountability. The adoption of the UDHR was a significant advancement in multilateralism and the growing recognition of collective responsibility for the promotion of human rights, peace and development. The assurance that no one would be left unprotected must be sheltered against any trends that could undermine faith in the values enshrined in the Declaration or in the efficacy of the multilateral initiatives to end impunity.
- An intelligent and creative use of national and international mechanisms is now vital not only to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, but also to effectively counter trends that pose a threat to these prospects. Informed electoral processes that ensure genuinely representative democracies with

ample space for citizen participation and credible accountability systems need to be promoted. Effective judicial systems must be supported by complete judicial independence if people are to draw benefit from protections that are normally available under a constitutional framework. Initiatives for legal empowerment of the poor to relieve social exclusion and discrimination, exploitation of labour, eviction from land and displacement, and for conferring the right to control over natural resources would contribute towards giving effect to the letter and spirit of the UDHR and the human rights framework that it has inspired.

- Such a move forward requires a productive relationship between states and the civil society so that people's dignity and security is placed at the centre of any approach towards governance. The civil society has an important role to play in promoting understanding, tolerance and peace amongst diverse communities. Civil society actors make critical contributions towards advancement of democracy, institution building and monitoring the processes for accountability.
- Vigilance by well-informed civil societies, especially human rights organisations, and public exposure of double standards and politically motivated selectivity is the best way to honour and foster the values of human rights. In this way the Declaration could live up to its promise to reduce, if not completely end, the discrimination that plagues so many lives around the world.

ENDS