



# DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

BY THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

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## PREAMBLE

Whereas it is imperative that the world's religions be included as a positive resource for human rights;

Whereas the communities of faith have determined that the fullest account of human life includes material well-being as well as social, cultural, communal, environmental, and spiritual well-being;

Whereas religions urge human beings to create and sustain a just society that includes the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights;

Whereas religions of the world teach the fundamental truth of the oneness of the human family;

Whereas the various communities constituting the people of the world must exchange not only ideas but also ideals;

Whereas the conscience of people of faith has been shaken by individuals and authorities within the world's religions who have failed to defend human rights and have committed atrocities and violations of human rights in the name of religion, including acts of terrorism;

Whereas forms of violent ideological extremism, religious and secular, continue to threaten the realization of human rights;

Whereas the human rights of an individual deserve protection independently of the fulfillment of duties by that individual, but the conception and implementation of human rights are integrally related to the performance of moral and legal duties;

Whereas religions recognize that the full realization of human rights depends on the fulfillment of duties at many levels of society;

Whereas the failure to acknowledge and redress the injustices done to victims of racism, sexism, religious discrimination, nationalism, imperialism, classism, casteism, and any other form of oppression is inimical to the full realization and flourishing of human rights;

The following Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions is proposed to complement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.



## ARTICLE 1

Everyone has the right to be treated with respect as a human being and has the duty to treat others with respect as human beings, in the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood.

## ARTICLE 2

As members of one human family, everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national, indigenous, or social origin, caste, class, ownership of property, birth, physical or mental disability, or other status.

## ARTICLE 3

1. Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.
2. Everyone has the right to healthy food and clean water necessary for sustenance and survival.
3. Everyone has the right to a safe and healthy environment and sustainable access to resources, such as land, shelter, food, water, and air.
4. Everyone has the duty to promote the full realization of the right to life, liberty, and security of a person.
5. Everyone has the right to be cared for with compassion and respect for one's wishes regarding medical treatment at the end of life, and everyone has the duty to respect this right.
6. Everyone's choices regarding the disposition of one's body should be honoured, and bodies of the deceased should be treated with respect.

## ARTICLE 4

1. No one shall be subjected to slavery or servitude, the slave trade, forced labour, bonded labour, child labour, sexual exploitation or abuse, or human trafficking. These human rights abuses shall be prohibited in all their forms.
2. Everyone has the duty to take reasonable steps to prevent and end slavery or servitude, the slave trade, forced labour, bonded labour, child labour, sexual exploitation or abuse, and human trafficking, in all their forms.



## ARTICLE 5

1. Everyone has the right to freedom from violence, in any of its forms, individual or collective.
2. No one has the right to employ violence or the threat of violence to advance a religion, religious beliefs, or religious laws.
3. No one shall be subjected anywhere to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, inflicted either physically or mentally, whether on secular or religious grounds, including inside the home.
4. No one shall subject anyone to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
5. Everyone has the duty to take reasonable steps to prevent and put an end to torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
6. Everyone has the right and duty to promote peace and the peaceful resolution of disputes.
7. Everyone has the duty, to the best of one's ability, to counter all forms of violent ideological extremism, whether secular or religious, because they pose a serious threat to fundamental human rights and world peace.

## ARTICLE 6

1. Everyone has the right to legal recognition and protection of one's human rights as a person before the law, and everyone has the right to recognition and protection by everyone everywhere as a human being possessing human rights, even when law and order has broken down.
2. Everyone has the duty to recognize and respect the moral and legal human rights of others.

## ARTICLE 7

All are equal before the law and everyone has the right to equal protection under the law, without any discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national, indigenous, or social origin, caste, class, ownership of property, birth, physical or mental disability, or other status. Everyone has the right to equal protection against any incitement to such discrimination.

## ARTICLE 8

1. Everyone has the right to effective remedies in the legal systems for acts violating one's human rights.



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2. Everyone, individually and collectively, has the duty to take reasonable steps to help prevent injustices of a historical, social, economic, religious, or cultural nature, as well as other injustices that have resulted in human rights violations.

## ARTICLE 9

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile by the state or by anyone else. Everyone has the duty to respect the liberty of others.

## ARTICLE 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality under the law to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal in the determination of one's legal rights and obligations and the adjudication of any criminal charge against oneself. Everyone who cannot afford a lawyer must be provided one by the state free of charge.

## ARTICLE 11

Everyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a public trial at which one has enjoyed all the guarantees necessary for one's defense. In determining the appropriate punishment for a crime, it is the solemn obligation of governments to give due respect to human dignity, the moral imperative of reformation and social rehabilitation where possible, and the right to life. Prisoners shall be treated humanely and with appropriate respect for their human rights and for their religion or moral beliefs.

## ARTICLE 12

1. Everyone has the right to privacy. In particular, everyone has the right not to be subjected to arbitrary interference with one's own privacy or that of one's family. These rights include rights to privacy regarding one's home, spaces of religious observance, and communications, including electronic communications.
2. Everyone has the right not to be defamed or subjected to attacks on one's good name and reputation.
3. It is the duty of everyone to respect the privacy of others and not to defame them or attack their good name and reputation.

## ARTICLE 13

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.



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2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to one's country.
3. Everyone has the right to have access to and protect the religious sites of one's religion and the duty to allow the followers of other religions to have access to and protect the religious sites of their religions.

## ARTICLE 14

Everyone has the right to seek and secure asylum in any country from any form of persecution on religious or other grounds, and the right not to be deported pending final resolution of one's claim for asylum. It is the duty of governments to provide such asylum. Everyone is entitled to fair proceedings in the determination of one's claim for asylum.

## ARTICLE 15

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of one's nationality or denied the right to change one's nationality.
3. Everyone has the duty to promote the emergence of a global order that protects human rights.

## ARTICLE 16

1. Women have the right to full equality with men in the enjoyment of all human rights, without any discrimination. Everyone has the duty to promote the equal enjoyment of human rights by women and to help eliminate prejudices based on ideas of the inferiority or the superiority of any of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women. The state has a special duty to ensure that women enjoy equal rights with men, which may require taking temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women.
2. Women and girls have the right to be free of violence in all its forms, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence, wherever occurring, including in the family. Religious beliefs, customs, or traditions can never justify or excuse such violence.
3. Men and women of full age, without any discrimination, have the right to marry a person according to their choice, and to found a family under civil law. They are entitled to equal rights regarding the entering into marriage, during marriage, and regarding dissolution of marriage.
4. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.



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5. The family is the natural and fundamental unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.
6. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. Everyone has the duty to extend special consideration to mothers and children.
7. Children have a right to enjoy fundamental human rights without discrimination, and in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
8. Every child has the right to a childhood free from violence or abuse. Parents and legal guardians have the duty to protect their children from violence or abuse to the extent reasonably possible. They should strive to create an atmosphere of love and understanding within the family. Religious institutions have a special duty to protect children in their care from violence or abuse. The state also has a duty to protect children from violence or abuse, including violence or abuse perpetrated by parents, legal guardians, or other family members.
9. It is the duty of everyone, including religious institutions, to take all appropriate measures to respect the rights of children, act in their best interests, and ensure a violence-free childhood for them.
10. Every child has the right to have his or her own origins and identity recognized and respected, and it is the duty of everyone to do so.
11. Everyone shall promote the outlook that everyone in the entire world constitutes a single extended human family.

## ARTICLE 17

1. Everyone has the right to own property, alone as well as in association with others. An association, including a religious association, also has a right to own property.
2. Everyone has a right not to be deprived of property arbitrarily. Property shall be understood to include intellectual and aesthetic property as well as tangible property.
3. It is the duty of everyone to respect the property of others.

## ARTICLE 18

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to choose, retain, or change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in a community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.
2. There shall be no compulsion in religion or belief.



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3. Everyone has the right to share his or her religion or belief with others and to teach it to others.
4. Parents and legal guardians have the right to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with the parents' or guardians' convictions. However, parents and legal guardians should provide such education in a way that respects the human rights of their children. In particular, parents and legal guardians should respect their children's own freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of each child.
5. Everyone has the duty to promote peace, tolerance, and understanding among people adhering to different religions, beliefs, ideologies, and worldviews.
6. Everyone has the right to choose a celibate religious life, or join a monastery (or return to lay life), provided that adequate arrangements have been made for one's dependents.
7. Freedom of religion or belief includes specifically, among other rights, the right to worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes; the right to establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions; the right to make, acquire, and use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief; the right to write, issue, and disseminate religious publications; the right to teach a religion or belief; the right to solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions; the right to train, appoint, elect, or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief; the right to observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief; and the right to establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels.

## ARTICLE 19

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers. The term "expression" includes not only the language one speaks, but also the food one eats and the clothes one wears, as well as prayer and other forms of religious expression.
2. It is the duty of everyone to promote the full realization of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

## ARTICLE 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of assembly and association for peaceful purposes, and has the duty to exercise this right peacefully.



2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association, or leave one, without due process.
3. Indigenous individuals and individuals belonging to racial, national, ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities, or other historically oppressed groups, have the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language.
4. Indigenous individuals, individuals belonging to racial, national, ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities, or other historically oppressed groups, and individuals with physical or mental disabilities have the right to full equality with others in the enjoyment of all human rights, without any discrimination. Everyone has the duty to promote the equal enjoyment of human rights by such individuals and to help eliminate prejudices against them, and in particular, prejudices based on ideas of the superiority of particular groups over others. The state has a special duty to ensure that such individuals enjoy equal rights with others, which may require taking temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality. It also has a duty to provide reasonable accommodation to individuals with disabilities.

## **ARTICLE 21**

1. Every adult citizen of a country has the right to vote and to elect others or be elected to government office, and thus to take part in the governance of the country, directly or indirectly.
2. Elections shall be periodic and genuine and shall be by universal and equal suffrage. They shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.
3. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in one's country and the duty to help promote such access.
4. Everyone has the duty to participate in the governance of one's country where possible, at least through voting, in a way consistent with one's religion or beliefs.
5. It is the duty of governments to ensure the full realization of these rights.

## **ARTICLE 22**

1. Everyone has economic, social, and cultural rights as a human being and member of the human family.
2. Everyone has the duty to promote, to the best of one's ability, the full realization of the economic, social, and cultural rights of others.
3. Everyone has a right to social security and the duty to contribute to a reasonable social security program adopted by the government.



4. Governments should recognize the constructive role of civil society and faith-based organizations in promoting the full realization of economic, social, and cultural rights.

## ARTICLE 23

1. As work in all its various forms is an essential component of human dignity, everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment. Protection against unemployment should include governmental assistance while employment is sought.
2. Everyone, without discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
3. Everyone has the right to just remuneration for one's work, and when employing others, has the duty to remunerate them justly for their work.
4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of one's interests.

## ARTICLE 24

1. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay. This right includes the right to reasonable periods of leave for medical reasons, to care for a child (including maternity or paternity leave), or to care for another member of one's family.
2. Everyone has the right to have one's religious observances and holidays respected by one's employer. It is the duty of every employer to reasonably accommodate, and grant leave to employees to participate in these observances and holidays.

## ARTICLE 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for one's health and well-being, and that of one's family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond one's control.
2. Everyone has the right to health care and to medical insurance. It is the duty of the state or society to provide it.
3. It is the duty of everyone, including religious institutions, to take all appropriate measures to promote the full realization of the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to health care and medical insurance.



## **ARTICLE 26**

1. Everyone has the right to education. States have a duty to offer free public education through the secondary school level. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available, and higher education shall be accessible to all on the basis of equality of opportunity and capacity.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote knowledge, mutual understanding, tolerance, dialogue, and friendship among all nations and members of all religions, communities, and groups, and shall further the activities of nations, communities, and groups to foster peace, human rights, and global harmony. States have a duty to ensure that children acquire an adequate knowledge of the religions of the world.

## **ARTICLE 27**

1. Everyone has the right to freely participate in and contribute to the cultural life of one's communities, and to the production and enjoyment of the arts.
2. Everyone has the right to share scientific advances and their benefits and the duty, whenever possible, to disseminate them and to contribute to such advances.
3. Everyone has the right to the protection of one's cultural heritage, including sacred ceremonies, ritual objects, and sacred sites central to the practice of one's religion.
4. Everyone has the duty to protect and enrich one's own cultural heritage and to respect the cultural heritage of others in a way that is consistent with respect for human rights.

## **ARTICLE 28**

Everyone has the right to a socio-economic and political order at the global, national, regional, and local levels that enables the full realization of these rights, and the duty to contribute to the full realization of these rights to the best of one's ability.

## **ARTICLE 29**

1. Everyone has duties to one's communities, including the global community, through which alone the free and full development of one's personality and spiritual purpose is possible.
2. In the exercise of one's rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order, public health, and the general welfare in a democratic society.



3. Everyone has the right and duty to resist injustice nonviolently, either individually or collectively.
4. Everyone has the duty, when asserting one's rights, to respect the rights of others, to take into consideration the rights of past, present, and future generations, and to give due respect to the protection of nature and the earth.
5. Everyone is duty-bound, when asserting his or her rights, to prefer nonviolence over violence.

### **ARTICLE 30**

1. Everyone has the duty to promote the implementation of the rights proclaimed in this Declaration.
2. Everyone has the right to help establish an independent supervisory committee within one's community, defined religiously or otherwise, to monitor the implementation of the articles of this Declaration. Everyone who believes that one's rights under this Declaration have been violated should have the right to bring one's complaint to such a committee. The committee may express views and make nonbinding recommendations regarding such complaints, as well as regarding implementation of the Declaration generally.

This document is an attempt to formulate a successor to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The occasion for drafting it arose while plans were being finalized for the World Conference on Human Rights, which met in Montreal from December 7-9, 1998, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations.

The United Nations Declaration has often been criticized as essentially Western in orientation, a criticism rooted in the feeling that when such efforts emanate from the West they are merely an extension of the imperialist mentality, and represent another attempt by the West to impose its own values on the rest of the world in the guise, or rather disguise, of universalism. Accordingly, the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University approached the coalition sponsoring the above-mentioned conference with the idea to include a draft of a proposed "Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions" in its agenda. The coalition agreed, and a draft was prepared on behalf of the Faculty, which was released at the conference in English and French.

This draft then served as the basic document for an independent conference entitled Human Rights and Responsibilities—The Contribution of World Religions, which was held at Chapman University in Orange, California, from April 8-9, 1999. It was decided at this conference to circulate the draft as widely as possible in the academic and faith communities, so that responses to it could be incorporated in a revised text. Such a revised text was then published in the Fall 1999 issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics*.

The revised text was discussed at a panel in a plenary session of the International Conference on Ethics and Religion for a Global Twenty-First Century at Chapman University and Loyola Marymount University from March 25-26, 2000. The text was then revised again to incorporate the suggestions made at the panel discussion.

The text was also the subject of deliberation at the eighteenth quinquennial World Congress of the International Association of the History of Religions (IAHR), when it met in Durban from August 5-12, 2000, and, subsequently, at the conference on Religion and Human Rights at the House of World Cultures, Berlin, from December 7-9, 2001. It was then deliberated upon at the UNESCO conference on Mystical Traditions and Interreligious Dialogue in Barcelona, from May 23-26, 2002, as well as at the International Round Table on The Challenge of Globalisation: Towards a Shared Universal Spiritual and Moral Ethics at Genting Permai Resort in Malaysia, which was held from November 25-27, 2002. The book entitled *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions* (2003), edited by Joseph Runzo, Nancy Martin and Arvind Sharma also contains a discussion of the document at this stage in its evolution (see Part III, 131-205).



The then current version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions, which appeared in *The New York Times* on November 14, 2005 (F1, 34) was released for discussion in the academic and faith communities by the Nobel Peace laureate, Madam Shirin Ebadi, at the first global conference on World's Religions After September 11, when it met in Montreal from September 11-15, 2006. It was attended by 2,025 delegates from 84 countries and a number of suggestions were received in its wake. The document was also discussed, through several presentations, at The Parliament of World's Religions when it met in Melbourne, Australia, from December 3-9, 2009. A revised version was prepared in light of the suggestions received, which was then released for further discussion at the second global conference on World's Religions After September 11, when it met on September 7, 2011 in Montreal. This conference was inaugurated by the Dalai Lama, who is a patron of the project, along with four other Nobel Peace laureates: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Madam Shirin Ebadi, Bishop Belo of Timor-Leste, and the late Professor Elie Wiesel. An overwhelming majority of the 3,007 participants present at this conference voted in favour of bringing the project to a conclusion. A small conference was therefore organised from June 1-2, 2013 on Religion and Human Rights in Montreal to vet the text, which was made possible through a generous grant from the Uberoi Foundation in Denver, Colorado.

Once it became clear that a third and final global conference on World's Religions After September 11 was going to be convened on September 15, 2016 in Montreal, an ad hoc committee was constituted to give final shape to the draft, so that it could be released at this conference. It consisted of Brian Lepard, Amir Hussain, Vivian Lee-Nyitray, Daniel Cere, and Arvind Sharma. It met in the summer of 2015 in Montreal and began the process of producing the final text which is now available at [www.worldsreligions2016.org](http://www.worldsreligions2016.org).

## PATRONS OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

His Holiness The Dalai Lama (1989 Nobel Peace Prize laureate)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1984 Nobel Peace Prize laureate)

Madam Shirin Ebadi (2003 Nobel Peace Prize laureate)

Bishop Belo of Timor-Leste (1996 Nobel Peace Prize laureate)

Professor Elie Wiesel (1986 Nobel Peace Prize laureate)

### DISCLAIMER

*\*\*\*The endorsement of the Patrons means that they support the idea of the various religions of the world coming together to produce a Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions. This endorsement does not imply the Patrons have read the final document.\*\*\**