



## Embracing Commonwealth Values in Youth Development

### Human Rights: Universal Values

#### Introduction

Welcome to Unit 2 *Human Rights: Universal Values*. In Unit 1, you learned about *The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles – The Singapore Declaration* of 1971 and the *Harare Declaration* of 1991. These two documents together list the principles and priorities that guide the Commonwealth in all its work. We noted that human rights were one of the main themes found in these documents.

In this unit, we look at human rights more closely. We ask: Why are they important? Does everyone even agree on what they are? How can they be protected? Can they be prioritised? Where do they begin?

We ask you to consider that it is only by protecting *all* the human rights and fundamental freedoms described in the conventions examined in this unit, that a government can be sure to create the conditions for real and sustainable development that benefits all its citizens. It will take you roughly 6 hours to review and reflect on the material in this unit.

#### Learning Outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should:

- understand the core principles of human rights philosophy
- be able to reflect on why human rights are considered important
- be able to identify how different human rights are protected
- recognize the importance of various key human rights documents.



#### What are Human Rights?

You are a human being. You have rights inherent in that reality. You have dignity and worth that exists prior to law.

~Lyn Beth Neylon

Human rights are the rights that every person is entitled to simply by virtue of being human. At the root of the human rights concept is the idea that all people should be able to live with dignity. Violations of our human rights amount to denials of our

basic humanity. There were many important people throughout history that contributed to the notion and understanding of human rights. Plato believed in universal truth and virtue. This idea has continued on to become universalism, that human rights are universal, and as such are above the laws of individual states.

Human rights are often discussed and defended by the key philosophers. For example, Kant argued that human rights are based in the fundamental moral right to be treated as an end in oneself, a view that he felt was completely justified by the value of human reason: a species that has the extraordinary reasoning power of human beings is special enough to have natural, basic rights. So, he argued, because these rights arise from and are an inseparable part of our basic human nature, they are 'inalienable' – they cannot be treated like commodities that are given to us or taken away from us.

Based on this argument, as long as we are human, in principle we always have fundamental human rights. This is true whether we are free or in prison, or whatever our circumstances. However, human rights can't just be based on the rights-holder's personal needs and interests. Rights are normally considered to be above practical considerations of that sort: instead, they exist at the level of the moral duties we owe each other as reasoning beings.

There are two main sets of principles that underpin the concept of human rights:

- o natural law principles
- o positive law principles.

We look at these next.

## Natural Law Principles

The concept of human rights is deeply rooted in the idea of 'natural law'. Natural law comes from the moral principles common to all people by virtue of their spiritual or rational nature as human beings.

Natural law is seen by some people as coming from God, though others (like the philosopher Kant) see it as deriving from pure reason. What makes us special is our reason, and our treatment should be determined by the principles of pure reason.

Natural law assumes that there are underlying rational principles of justice and morality that are universal in their nature, and apply in all societies and at any time in history.



## Positive Law Principles

'Positive law' means man-made law, created by governments and responsive to the needs of the state. However, many theorists believe that the positive laws should all be in conformity with the 'higher' principles of natural law.

Legal positivism denies the existence of natural law and accepts only the justice implied in the law of the state: it says that you can't determine the law by looking for underlying rational or spiritual processes. The law is seen as a construction of the general will of the people of a state, and cannot be wrong, because a whole people can do no wrong in creating their own laws for their own state. Rights in positive law are freedoms or protections which are written down in statutes and legally enforceable.

This is no mere talking-point. For example, in Britain in 2006, the Al Qaeda terrorist campaign pushed the government into the making of laws that clearly threaten what many people consider their natural law rights of movement around the country. Other examples we have already mentioned (in Unit 1) include the Commonwealth choosing to sanction South Africa, albeit unevenly, so that it was forced to quit the organisation in 1961. Also, in 2002, Zimbabwe was suspended for a year from the Councils of the Commonwealth after the critical report by the Commonwealth Observer Group studying the presidential election. Both states insisted that, while their laws did threaten certain natural law freedoms, those laws were necessary for the well-being of the state i.e. that they were positive law principles.

## The United Nations (UN)

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization whose goals include facilitating cooperation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress, human rights, and achievement of world peace.

The work of the United Nations reaches every corner of the globe. Although best known for peacekeeping, peacebuilding, conflict prevention and humanitarian



assistance, there are many other ways the United Nations and its System (specialized agencies, funds and programmes) affect our lives and make the world a safer and better place for this and future generations. Some of these include:

- o sustainable development
- o environment and refugees protection
- o disaster relief
- o counter terrorism
- o disarmament and non-proliferation
- o promoting democracy, human rights, gender equality and the advancement of women
- o governance, economic and social development
- o International health
- o clearing landmines
- o expanding food production

## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The [\*Universal Declaration of Human Rights\*](#) is probably the best known list of human rights. The United Nations adopted it in 1948, when the whole world was recovering from the wounds of the Second World War, particularly from the horrors of genocide. After a period that showed some of the worst of human potential, the world community tried to focus on and promote the best of human potential. The Preamble to the Declaration implies that making sure that every person knows about and understands the Declaration will be one of the best ways of ensuring that human rights are respected around the world. The Declaration is a key starting point for understanding human rights – most other human rights conventions expand on specific parts of it. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights are summarised below.

1. We Are All Born Free & Equal. We are all born free. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way.
2. Don't Discriminate. These rights belong to everybody, whatever our differences.
3. The Right to Life. We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.
4. No Slavery. Nobody has any right to make us a slave. We cannot make anyone our slave.
5. No Torture. Nobody has any right to hurt us or to torture us.
6. You Have Rights No Matter Where You Go. I am a person just like you!
7. We're All Equal Before the Law. The law is the same for everyone. It must treat us all fairly.
8. Your Human Rights Are Protected by Law. We can all ask for the law to help us when we are not treated fairly.
9. No Unfair Detainment. Nobody has the right to put us in prison without good reason and keep us there, or to send us away from our country.
10. The Right to Trial. If we are put on trial this should be in public. The people who try us should not let anyone tell them what to do.
11. We're Always Innocent Till Proven Guilty. Nobody should be blamed for doing something until it is proven. When people say we did a bad thing we have the right to show it is not true.
12. The Right to Privacy. Nobody should try to harm our good name. Nobody has the right to come into our home, open our letters, or bother us or our family without a good reason.
13. Freedom to Move. We all have the right to go where we want in our own country and to travel as we wish.
14. The Right to Seek a Safe Place to Live. If we are frightened of being badly treated in our own country, we all have the right to run away to another country to be safe.
15. Right to a Nationality. We all have the right to belong to a country.
16. Marriage and Family. Every grown-up has the right to marry and have a family if they want to. Men and women have the same rights when they are married, and when they are separated.
17. The Right to Your Own Things. Everyone has the right to own things or share them. Nobody should take our things from us without a good reason.
18. Freedom of Thought. We all have the right to believe in what we want to believe, to have a religion, or to change it if we want.
19. Freedom of Expression. We all have the right to make up our own minds, to think what we like, to say what we think, and to share our ideas with other people.
20. The Right to Public Assembly. We all have the right to meet our friends and to work together in peace to defend our rights. Nobody can make us join a group if we don't want to.

21. The Right to Democracy. We all have the right to take part in the government of our country. Every grown-up should be allowed to choose their own leaders.
22. Social Security. We all have the right to affordable housing, medicine, education, and childcare, enough money to live on and medical help if we are ill or old.
23. Workers' Rights. Every grown-up has the right to do a job, to a fair wage for their work, and to join a trade union.
24. The Right to Play. We all have the right to rest from work and to relax.
25. Food and Shelter for All. We all have the right to a good life. Mothers and children, people who are old, unemployed or disabled, and all people have the right to be cared for.
26. The Right to Education. Education is a right. Primary school should be free. We should learn about the United Nations and how to get on with others. Our parents can choose what we learn.
27. Copyright. Copyright is a special law that protects one's own artistic creations and writings; others cannot make copies without permission. We all have the right to our own way of life and to enjoy the good things that art, science and learning bring.
28. A Fair and Free World. There must be proper order so we can all enjoy rights and freedoms in our own country and all over the world.
29. Responsibility. We have a duty to other people, and we should protect their rights and freedoms.
30. No One Can Take Away Your Human Rights.

## Human Rights and What They Mean to You

<video clip>



### Reflection

Which of the articles in the Declaration did you know about already? Are there any that surprise you?



### Reflection Activity for Certificate Students

#### eJournal Reflection Activity 2.1 (about 15 minutes)

Log in to the [Mahara ePortfolio Website](#). Make a note of your observations in your journal. Title the entry, "Reflection Activity 2.1".

If you need help writing an eJournal, please refer to the [Learning Journal](#). If you need help posting your reflection, please refer to the [Mahara Learning Journal Guide](#).

## Why do We Need to Set Down Human Rights?

When the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was written, it was controversial. No one had ever tried to set down a full list of rights that applied universally. Looking back at it now, many of us would be surprised by some of the debates, especially if we have been raised with the language of human rights.

Below are three reasons why human rights are necessary.

### 1. Moral vision

We need to set down human rights because they give us a moral vision of human nature and human dignity. They create a vision of what life would look like if everybody's basic humanity was equally respected and protected. If our needs for survival and protection were met, then we could focus on developing our individual and collective potential through educational and cultural activities.

The reality is that war, violence, intolerance and poverty around the world result in daily violations of human dignity. Human rights remind us of what is possible and what is due to people, even in the worst of situations.

## 2. Political vision

Human rights also give us a political vision or an agenda for change. If we evaluate our own schools, communities or countries against the standards set out in the Declaration, we can develop an agenda for social and political change. New policies and procedures, new development projects and new laws can be constructed in order to try to improve the achievement of human rights for all.

No Commonwealth country can really claim to have fully implemented human rights – there is always room for improvements, like reducing the inequalities between the very poor and the very wealthy, or between women and men.

## 3. Protection

We need human rights for protection when our legal rights are violated by the state, and to encourage justice and fairness within our societies. Ironically, we may be most aware of our human rights when they are being threatened or denied. Human rights can be matters of life and death.

For example, in many countries during times of unrest the police have been used to detain opponents of the government or to confiscate their property, even though such actions may be against the written laws.

Because of these three widely-accepted reasons, human rights are occasionally protected by raising both national and international awareness of human rights violations. This can help draw attention to and resolve such situations, by creating moral pressure on governments. This kind of strategy has been successfully used by groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. During the period of Ian Smith's illegal occupation of Southern Rhodesia, Amnesty International ran a concerted campaign against the mistreatment of black activists by the state.

In the next section we look at some other ways in which human rights are protected.

## Important Human Rights Conventions

Four important human rights conventions are described briefly below. They each represent aspects of Commonwealth values that you will continually encounter in this course, and in work with youth development. These values are:

- o democratic rights
- o social development and the eradication of poverty
- o equality for women
- o protection for children and youth.

The four human rights conventions that correspond to these values are:

1. The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.
2. The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.
3. The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.
4. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

The first two of these were drafted together and adopted by the UN in 1966 but did not come into force until 1976. They are intended to be a more concrete elaboration of the *Universal Declaration*. Together, the *Universal Declaration* and the two Covenants are known as the *International Bill of Human Rights*.

We will look at these four human rights conventions one by one.

### International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Civil and political rights include:

- o freedom of speech and assembly
- o freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention
- o equal treatment before the law
- o due process of law and presumption of innocence during legal proceedings
- o the right to vote and participate in public life.

The [\*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)\*](#) differs in two primary ways from its counterpart on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

First, it contains a list of 'non-derogable' rights (rights that no government can curtail for any reason, even in times of public emergency). These non-derogable rights are:

- o the right to life
- o freedom from torture
- o freedom from slavery or servitude
- o protection from being imprisoned solely because of failure to meet a contractual obligation
- o protection from punishment under retroactive laws
- o the right to recognition as a person before the law
- o the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Second, it also has two 'Optional Protocols' that states may ratify separately. Because they are optional, only states that ratify them are held accountable for implementing them.

The first Optional Protocol (OP) allows for individuals to make direct appeals to the *ICCPR* monitoring committee, provided that they have used all legal procedures available in their own country before bringing a complaint to the committee. This is unusual, because usually only governments are able to raise complaints in discussions of the implementation of international treaties.

The second Optional Protocol is aimed at the abolition of the death penalty.

## **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

Economic, social and cultural rights include the rights to:

- o social security
- o work, rest and leisure
- o a standard of living adequate to ensure health and well-being
- o education
- o participation in cultural life.

The [\*International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\*](#) formally recognises that securing these rights requires progressive action over time. For example, protecting rights to education and health requires that people have access to schools and medical facilities, which many countries are still struggling to create. These rights are bound to be dependent to some degree on the resources available to any particular country, either on its own or in combination with international financial or technical assistance.

Many developing countries that have ratified this Covenant and see the value of its provisions for their citizens, have at the same time been faced with pressure to do things that are directly contradictory: to implement economic structural adjustment programmes. This has meant allowing market forces to determine state spending to a more significant extent, and that involves cutting down the spending on welfare programmes e.g. health, education and social support to the poor.

The Commonwealth has been a strong, vocal advocate for a newly designed approach to structural adjustment, one that protects poverty alleviation programmes and maintains those services essential for human development, because, without them, the slower development of human resources makes it less rather than more possible to repay debts.

## **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**

Women's empowerment is intertwined with respect for human rights.

– Mahnaz Afkhami

Also known as the 'Women's Convention', the [\*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women\*](#) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1979.

The conventions we have mentioned state that all human rights apply equally to women and men.

There are enormous challenges that require concerted and innovative action from humankind, and we will only be successful in tackling them if we work together – women, men and children. The world cannot afford to ignore 50% of its human resources,

its human potential. Women and girls make up over half of the world's population. In the Commonwealth, that's over one billion people. By educating them, giving them accessible health care and making sure they are treated fairly and have the same opportunities and protection as men and boys, we can go a long way towards addressing the many problems of the world. But the reality is that all over the world girls and women are still discriminated against in access to education, food, health care, land, employment and decision-making.

The *Women's Convention* recognises these areas of discrimination and obliges states to work to correct them through legal and social action. Discrimination is defined as 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex' that denies recognition of women's human rights or stops either married or unmarried women from exercising particular rights and freedoms guaranteed by the other conventions.

The Convention protects the rights of women and girls:

- o to participate fully in decision making
- o to have equal access to education and training
- o to have equal access to employment opportunities, without discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or marital status
- o to support services that enable them to combine work and family responsibilities
- o to health services and adequate nutrition during pregnancy and delivery
- o to financial credit and to equal access to property in marriage
- o to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent
- o to decide on the number and spacing of their children.

An Optional Protocol was added to the *Women's Convention* in 1999, which serves a similar function as the first ICCPR Optional Protocol, mentioned above. That is, it provides a mechanism where individuals or groups of women can complain in writing to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women about violations of the Convention. This Optional Protocol also enables the Committee to conduct inquiries into grave or systematic abuses of women's human rights in countries that have signed the Protocol.

Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's/Gender Affairs took the lead in developing the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2004–2015, which was negotiated and agreed in 2004. The Plan of Action reflects the Commonwealth's principles and values and incorporates its responses to the differential effects of global changes and challenges on women and men, girls and boys.

## **Women as agents for change**

The challenges facing women around the world are a clarion call for the Commonwealth member states to lead the international community towards improvements in economic growth, meaningfully reducing poverty, ensuring the promotion of human rights, and ultimately establishing good governance.

~ Dr. Dambisa Moyo

Women as Agents for Change was the theme for Commonwealth Day 2011. Celebrated throughout the year, the theme raises awareness that by investing in women and girls, we can accelerate social, economic and political progress.

<Video File>

## **Convention on the Rights of the Child**

There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they can grow up in peace.

~ Kofi Annan

Also known as the 'Children's Convention', the [\*Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)\*](#) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1989. The *Children's Convention* covers some of the same civil, political, economic and social rights outlined in the *Universal Declaration* and the International Covenants. It defines 'child' as young people up to the age of 18. Whilst most adolescents do not want to be seen or treated as children, they are still included under the

Convention, because, despite their growing autonomy, they remain dependent on adults to meet many of their basic needs for health and development. These needs are defined by the Convention as 'rights'.

The Convention recognises that all children should grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding, as provided by families. Parents or guardians have the right to provide direction and guidance to their children, but they also have responsibilities to respect the child's rights and to recognise the growing capacity and judgement of young people as they grow from the dependency of childhood to the independence of adulthood. The grounding principle of the Convention is that in all matters concerning children, the best interests of the child should have priority.

## Children's rights

All of the rights set out in the Convention apply to all children and adolescents regardless of race, colour, sex, language, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, or other status. These are the right to:

- o life
- o protection under the law
- o freedom of expression
- o freedom of thought
- o freedom of association (the right to meet with others)
- o health, education, social security, and an adequate standard of living.

In addition, the Convention goes into new areas such as the rights of children:

- o to have their views considered in all decisions that affect them
- o to adoption and care for those without families
- o to have contact with their parents
- o to protection from economic or sexual exploitation, neglect and abuse
- o to support for those with disabilities
- o to protection during situations of armed conflict.

The *Children's Convention* has two additional optional protocols, which have been added due to growing international concern about particular rights violations: one deals with the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the second addresses the inter-related problems of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

In addition to the four conventions outlined here, there are a number of other important international human rights conventions that you may want to research on your own.



## Reflection

Look back at the rights of women and children that are supposed to be protected. Consider the following questions. If possible, discuss them with your family, friends, colleagues or fellow students.

- o Do you think that all the rights of women are really protected in your country? In your community? If not, what kinds of rights violations have you seen or heard about? Who were the victims? Who was responsible for the abuse or violation of their rights?
- o Do you think that all the rights of children are really protected in your country? In your community? If not, what kinds of rights violations have you seen or heard about? Who were the victims? Who was responsible for the abuse or violation of their rights?



## Reflection Activity for Certificate Students

eJournal Reflection Activity 2.2 (about 20 minutes)

Log in to the [Mahara ePortfolio Website](#). Make a note of your observations in your journal. Title the entry, "Reflection Activity 2.2".

If you need help writing an eJournal, please refer to the [Learning Journal](#). If you need help posting your reflection, please refer to the [Mahara Learning Journal Guide](#).

## Protection at Regional Level

International conventions are not the only means of making human rights legally enforceable. Regional governmental organisations are also able to negotiate binding treaties that apply to their members. Three regional organisations have developed human rights conventions that strengthen and elaborate the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in ways that show the unique history and characteristics of each region. These are set out in the table below.

Regional Human Rights Protection	
Regional organisation	Human rights instrument
African Union	<a href="#">African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights</a>
Organisation of American States (OAS)	<a href="#">American Convention on Human Rights</a>
Council of Europe	<a href="#">European Convention on Human Rights</a>

## Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review "has great potential to promote and protect human rights in the darkest corners of the world.

~ Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States once every four years. The UPR is one of the key elements of the new Council which reminds States of their responsibility to fully respect and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The ultimate aim of this new mechanism is to improve the human rights situation in all countries and address human rights violations wherever they occur.

## Can you Prioritise Human Rights?

The debate over whether human rights are universal or depend on the culture you live in is partly concerned with the question of whether some rights are more important than others.

Frequently, rights are divided into three different categories:

- **civil and political rights:** these are rights such as the right to freedom of speech or the right to vote – they can also be viewed as liberty or freedom rights. Earlier in this unit, we have seen that these rights are protected by the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.
- **economic, social and cultural rights:** these include things like the right to work or health care for all – also conceptualised as 'equality rights'. These rights are protected most comprehensively by the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.
- **collective rights:** these are rights that apply to people together or as a whole, such as the right of all peoples to self-determination, or the rights to development, a healthy environment, peace or food security. These rights are also known as 'fraternity' or 'solidarity' rights. To date, the UN General Assembly has endorsed a *Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace* (1984), and a *Declaration on the Right to Development* (1996). These address collective rights, but they are declarations rather than conventions and do not have the same legal force.

East and West championed the first two groups of rights. Collective or solidarity rights also have their own champions, mostly among developing countries and non-governmental organisations advocating greater equity in the international economy. However, collective rights are controversial. As these rights are essentially about creating new forms of international co-operation and a more equitable balance of power internationally, they are seen as 'threatening' to established political and

economic elites in both developed and developing countries. There is also a perennial tension between group rights and individual rights – which are to have priority?

Collective rights are particularly challenging when we consider the conflict of inter-generational collective rights: the rights of future generations versus the rights of our own generation. This is a central ethical issue raised in almost all discussions about the environment: limits to our use of resources today are justified because future generations will be the ones who have to deal with the consequences and who are not here yet, to be able to voice their concerns. Our *de facto* definition of collective rights seems however to be entirely selfish, since we take only a short-term perspective and prioritise our own needs.

## The Universality of All Human Rights

At the start of this unit, we noted that human rights become most important when they are most threatened. When we think about the rights we or others need the most, it is natural for us to prioritise the rights of those we feel are important to us. People in different circumstances and in different parts of the world are likely to prioritise their rights in other ways that they perceive to be important. But perspectives change and priorities change, and new challenges to human rights are emerging constantly. The only way to deal with that is to insist that all human rights are in principle protected all of the time.

Consequently, rather than concentrating on distinctions and hierarchies among rights, human rights organisations, scholars and governments are increasingly referring to all human rights as 'universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated'. This was the language adopted by governments at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, in their final Declaration and Programme of Action. The danger with that is that it is so sweeping that it is easy to submerge real issues under the generality of the philosophy. There's a danger that 'human rights' simply takes the place of 'justice' and that discriminates badly against some people unless we are very careful.



## Gender challenges

Graça Machel raises the issue of gender, and challenges us to see that, even though we may talk about the indivisibility of rights, and the right to equality between men and women, there is still a significant gap between this rhetoric and the reality of women's lives around the world. The *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* is one of the most ratified human rights conventions, yet gross injustice still occurs widely.

The article suggests that, while mechanisms for promoting and protecting human rights do need to be strengthened, the long-term sustainability of equal rights lies in positively influencing people's values and behaviour. It challenges us to see how our own actions in our own families either can promote gender equality or can stop it from becoming a reality.



## Do young people have special rights?

Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline.

~ Kofi Annan

Should young people have special rights and their own convention? This is a difficult question to answer. There is no single document called a 'Convention on Youth Rights' that you can turn to for a list of youth rights that have been agreed to and are being protected by all governments.

Recent attempts to develop a youth rights charter or convention have proved controversial in many governments, some youth organisations and some human rights groups. Some people argue that these rights are already defined and protected in other declarations. Others argue that they deserve re-iteration.



## Judge human rights records with a critical eye

Commonwealth values and principles, though they have roots in natural law principles, have emerged from political and economic struggles, often against the powerful. These values continue to be formulated and reformulated through such struggles.

It is important to recognise that claims made about human rights records are often statements made from within a particular political ideology and may well be only strategic claims made by one of the struggling groups. The obvious case is the USA, which has a very good basis for challenging the human rights records of some other countries such as North Korea, but is also responsible for cases like the illegal long-term detention of terror suspects in Guantanamo Bay, without bringing specific charges against them. This has been condemned by the USA's own courts.

Often, economic and political interests underpin what are represented as responses to human rights concerns. When you evaluate the situations you face in your own country, try to look into the political and economic complexity of the situation. Individual rights often come into conflict with each other, or with today's collective rights or the collective rights of future generations.

Government policies or actions are often based on making practical choices among competing interests. It is important to maintain an open but critical mind in analysing these choices: Who wins? Who loses? Are there any other options that might produce different outcomes?

Except for a few rights like the 'right to life' and the 'right to be free from torture' – which everyone needs just for staying alive – it is likely that any two people's lists of priorities will contain many differences, even if they are small.

It is perhaps only by protecting *all* the human rights and fundamental freedoms described in the conventions we have examined in this unit, that a government can be sure to create the conditions for real and sustainable development that benefits all its citizens.

## Where do Universal Rights Begin?

Give to every human being every right that you claim for yourself.

~ Robert Ingersoll

Where do universal rights begin? As citizens, you have the power to stop discrimination, to eliminate oppression, and to bring an end to ignorance and indifference. You can choose to help end human rights violations, or you can choose to ignore them. The decision is yours. Either way, your choice will have a profound impact on the people around you.

Where do universal rights begin?

In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

~ Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Chair of the United Nations Commission that wrote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.



### Reflection

Where do universal rights begin? You have the power to stop discrimination, to eliminate oppression, and to bring an end to ignorance and indifference. You can choose to help end human rights violations, or you can choose to ignore them. The decision is yours.



### Reflection Activity for Certificate Students

### eJournal Reflection Activity 2.3 (about 20 minutes)

Log in to the [Mahara ePortfolio Website](#). In your journal, make a note of how you can impact on the people around you. Title the entry, "Reflection Activity 2.3".

If you need help writing an eJournal, please refer to the [Learning Journal](#). If you need help posting your reflection, please refer to the [Mahara Learning Journal Guide](#).

## Unit Summary

In this unit you have covered the following main points.

- the nature of human rights, and the main principles generating human rights
- the theoretical reasons for defining human rights, including moral vision, political vision, and the protection of those rights
- a summary review of important international human rights conventions, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*
- the argument for the universality of human rights and the debate over whether rights are culturally relative
- identifying issues related to the three categories of human rights and the setting of priorities for human rights.

To check how you have got on, look back at the learning outcomes for this unit and see if you can now do them.

In the next unit, we look at democratic values and structures.

## Unit Summary

In this unit, you have covered the following main points:

- an overview of the history of the Commonwealth (including official statements of Commonwealth principles from heads of government)
- the diversity of the Commonwealth member states, and also what the Commonwealth countries have in common – some common history, institutions and language
- how the Commonwealth originated with the British Empire, and the legacies of colonialism
- the evolution of the modern Commonwealth and its roles – including co-operation and assistance to member states
- the establishment of Commonwealth principles and ways in which these principles are put into practice.

In the rest of the course we explore various aspects of Commonwealth values, and look at examples of how these have or have not been put into practice by the Commonwealth and other organisations.



## Unit 2 Quiz

1. As long as we are \_\_\_\_\_ we have fundamental human rights.
  - Alive
  - Human
  - Adults
2. Why are human rights necessary? Select all that apply.
  - because they give us a moral vision of human nature and human dignity
  - because they give us a political vision or an agenda for change
  - because we need human rights for protection when our legal rights are violated by the state, and to encourage justice and fairness within our societies
  - all of the above

3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the best known list of human rights. Making sure that every person knows about it: (select all that apply)
- is one of the best ways of ensuring that human rights are respected around the world
  - promotes the best of human potential
  - is not important
  - is for lawyers
4. Human rights can be protected by: (select all that apply)
- raising both national and international awareness of human rights violations
  - human rights conventions
  - regional governmental organizations
  - The Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
  - all of the above
5. True or False: Human rights are 'universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.'
- True
  - False

## References

There are several translations of, and comments on, Immanuel Kant's 1781 work '*The Critique of Pure Reason*' and they are widely available.

United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <http://www.youthforhumanrights.org/what-are-human-rights/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/introduction.html>

Commonwealth Day. Women as Agents of Change. <http://www.womenasagentsofchange.org/commonwealth-day/>

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