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## UN's Human Rights Day

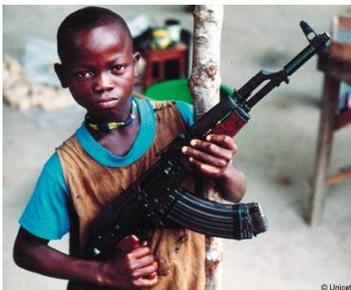
♦♦ 10 December ♦♦

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

*(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1)*

Imagine a life where you have no way to feed or protect your child, and no voice to call for help.

Imagine living in a home made of reclaimed cardboard, trying to provide a clean home, no clean water, forced to engage in the hazardous and demeaning practice of open defecation. At best, you might have a plastic bag so you can toss a “flying toilet” into the street or onto your roof. Imagine the endless fear of disease outbreak and lost hope.



UNICEF Photo: Congo

Imagine being a young child, forced to kill or maim a family member and then to take up arms as an expendable soldier. Ostracised from your family and community, never able to return home.

Your innocence and sense of humanity stripped away, forever.

Imagine being the target of arbitrary arrest or coerced, abducted, sold or deceived into prostitution, forced labour, genital mutilation or forced organ harvesting. Ashamed, terrified, powerless, dehumanized.

What if you found the courage to speak out against injustice in your world, only to be harassed, intimidated, beaten or even murdered. While stories like Malala Yousafzai - the courageous young Pakistani advocate for girls' right to education who was shot in the face by Taliban assassins - are a beacon of hope for millions, these stories also perpetuate fear and self-protective silence in others.

### Human Rights Stats

- 1.5 billion people live on less than \$1.25/day
- 215 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are currently working. More than half are exposed to the worst forms of child labour, including hazardous environments, forced labour, armed conflict, drug trafficking and prostitution
- 130 million children are denied primary school education. 70% of them are girls
- There are 250,000 child soldiers in the world. 40% of them are girls, often forced to be sex slaves to male combatants
- 2.5 billion people, i.e. a third of the population, do not have access to proper sanitation. Over 1 billion have no facilities at all
- Indigenous peoples make up 5% of the world's population, yet constitute 1/3 of the world's impoverished rural people. Their life expectancy is up to 20 years less than their non-indigenous counterparts
- Globally, only 17% of parliamentarians, 13% of national lawmakers and 3% of the global corporation CEOs are women
- The majority of the world's women can't own, inherit or control property, land and wealth on an equal basis with men

*Sources: International Labour Organization, United Nations. UNICEF. UN Women*

No one should have to live without hope, or in terror. Yet this is what the world is like for billions of people for whom Declarations of Rights and International Conventions are hollow.



UN Photo: by John Isaac, Pakistan

Every human being, everywhere, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Everyone, without exception, inherently has the right to life, liberty and security. The right to freedom, not just from injustice, but from fear and want. The right to standards of good behaviour by governments, including protection under the rule of law and the establishment of citizenship rights, including the right to vote, nationality, cultural expression and participation in public life.

Freedom of assembly and expression, from rallies to social media. Equality. Education. Health. The right to food, clean water and shelter. The right to work and provide for ourselves, to own property, to practice our culture and religion, to speak our language, to live in peace, and to be free from harm.

The principles of all human rights are infused throughout the work of the United Nations. From the original UN Charter in 1945, to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, to legally-binding treaties that protect vulnerable groups such as women, children, minorities and the disabled, the UN has established, and continues to enhance and defend, international standards for human rights.

Every day, UN staff hold countries to shame, address deep injustices, and move legislators from thinking about rules to thinking about lives. They monitor human rights issues worldwide, oversee major human rights programmes, and assist parliaments in enhancing legislation that allows democracy to thrive. They advance women's rights, assist refugees, fight hunger, improve global health, meet humanitarian needs, prosecute war criminals, provide electoral assistance and promote the elimination of all forms of discrimination, including gender, racial, religious, cultural and age.



UN Photo: Elections, Kurdistan

No matter where you live in the world, who your parents are, what your background is, or what kind of government you have, human rights are *your* rights. They allow you to fully develop your human abilities and contribute to the world. When one person's rights are abused, we are all diminished. It is our collective responsibility to advance and speak up for human rights, to expose wrongdoing, and to protect the most vulnerable. And everyone has – you have! - that power.

You can be a human rights champion. Join our movement of “*We the Peoples*” and help us to promote equality and justice, and to build hopeful futures. A better world starts with YOU.

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Together, we will look beyond what is, to what could be, and take positive action toward a just, peaceful and prosperous future for all.