

Human rights include but are not limited to the right to be free of unnecessary suffering (pain that is inflicted by other people, organizations, or neglect). Human beings have a right to live with food, shelter, the society of others, and all the necessities of a moderately healthy lifestyle, both physically and mentally.

It must be acknowledged that humans have a capacity to experience ranges of emotion in ways that other living creatures do not, such as emotional distress and delight. Therefore, beyond the basic rights to survival, human rights include the right of people to enrich their lives in ways that they choose, to individualize their human experience (in other words, the right to pursue happiness). Without this additional component, human rights may as well be animal rights, and human beings, objects.

We are the only living being that kills with motives beyond our instincts. War, genocide, slavery, discrimination - when we look back at our history, we realize that we have gone and are going through a lot of conflict because of this nature.

At the same time, we are the only living being with the ability to understand each other despite our own self-interest. We have solved as many conflicts as we have created through understanding each other.

And we will, as long as we try to understand other people. "Human rights" are words that remind me of this extraordinary ability of our species.

For Darfur, for Burma, for the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust, for those fighting for democracy and freedom in Iran and Pakistan, for those murdered and tortured for their faith in China, for East Timor, for Bosnia, for Kenya, for those sold into sex slavery, herded into being drug mules, kidnapped from parents and relatives, raped and ignored, vilified and casted out, trampled and denigrated because of their sex, color, orientation, religion, political beliefs, nationality, ethnicity, education.

That's why.

Journalists for Human Rights...

...is Canada's largest international media development organization. By building the capacity of the media to report effectively on human rights issues, JHR's work pressures abusers to stop and empowers victims to fight back.

...at the University of Washington is a student chapter of the non-profit, non-governmental organization Journalists for Human Rights based in Toronto, Ontario.

...hope to bring awareness to every generation and community about domestic and global human rights issues.

...believe that everyone is capable of promoting and sustaining human rights through communication and advocacy.



JOURNALISTS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Much of the movement is about empowerment.
If you would like to participate...

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Why HUMAN Rights?

Answering the question "Why Human Rights?" in words, let alone 100 words, is an impossible task. You can't depict the massive slaughter of innocent people or confine the yearning cries of hunger to mere letters on a page. But that inadequacy doesn't invalidate the fact that the right to live needs to be maintained. It shouldn't prevent us from asking ourselves why we should care. It won't stop the injustices from happening.

Attempting to explain why the sole common characteristic of humanity is reason enough for the concern of others, is insufficient in writing, but we're still going to try.

As citizens of nations, we enjoy the benefits that are provided by the state – such as roads or military protection. As individuals, though, we are left with a void; how are we to afford ourselves lives of equality and justice if the state fails us? The answers to this question are both ambiguous and complex. Some argue that as humans, we are moral beings inherently entitled to universal rights; others charge that cultural differences render these “human” rights as relative, and exclude any but the most paramount of needs. However defined, the human rights movement enables individuals to become agents and make visible the violations of rights. With this empowerment – and the recognition of the movement’s theoretical and practical histories – humans can arrive at a consensus that delivers the dignity we all deserve.

Human Rights are predicated on the principle that “all human beings [by virtue of being human] are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UDHR, Article 1). They are encoded in both customary and established national law to hold all humanity accountable to a minimum standard of treatment and provision of freedoms. They are the collective conscience and consciousness of what all humans deserve at the very least.

When thinking of a term such as “human rights,” so many different concepts come to mind. First, written law should not define human rights, but rather protect them. Also, we as a cognitively complex species have the ability to know if simple circumstances are right or wrong, good or evil, etc. Human rights are natural and shouldn’t be hindered in any way. The right to be happy, produce a family, worship your chosen deity, have access to shelter, clean water, along with the basic necessities to live. Murder, stealing, rape—all of those things are conversely the act of taking away human rights from another...their life, their possessions, and their dignity.

As demonstrated by our personal contributions, the term Human Rights cannot be easily defined nor universally understood. Each of us has our own set of beliefs and values that drive our interpretation of Human Rights. Because the term invokes diverse meanings, Journalists for Human Rights would like to pose to questions that facilitate your own responses:

- 1) Where do our own definitions of Human Rights emerge from? Religious beliefs? Family traditions? Social norms? Education? Personal Experience?
- 2) How do you make sense of the diversity in our belief systems?
- 3) Are Human Rights purely a Western liberal concept?
- 4) Can Human Rights be universal? If so, what are the Universal Human Rights?
- 5) Is the term Human Rights necessary as an umbrella category? Or should categories of rights (i.e. Women’s Rights, Children’s Rights, Labor Rights, Legal Rights, etc.) be isolated from each other?
- 6) Does the Human Rights movement leave you with hope? Why or Why not?

Human Rights is about having care and understanding for a universe with respectfulness. Maybe our generation is aware of this at a basic level, but maybe each individual accompanied by their home societies treads in this arduous task only to not show this respectfulness. In the quest for our dignified destiny for those universal rights, sometimes to seem tragic, the generation that we are responsible to and apart of has the challenging problems for insistence of a truly good ethical appreciation to honor these respects. In other words, our future matters today because respect for human rights establishes the strength and courage of empowerment that these problems take to resolve. Along with this practice, then maybe our global respectfulness will at once show itself to be shared. For a focused, less extreme world by which human rights in fact will be respected and honored, will require global care and understanding, indeed unequivocally.

A human right is a basic right and freedom to which all humans are entitled, often held to include the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression and equality before the law.

- Journalists for Human Rights

Defining the term ‘Human Rights’ can be extremely problematic as it runs across multiple planes and easily transcends a single definition. Conceptualizing Human Rights as a universal right extended to everyone by virtue of being born of the human race should be at the heart of this elusive term. However, it is not. Instead, the term Human Rights is relocated all over the world and demands contextualization. Human rights are not inherently universal in the world in which we exist. Rather it exists in our ideologies and our ambitions, where our hearts are compelled to be an active part of humanity that recognizes the falling standards of human rights. They have the potential to be rectified. As members of the human race, we have the capacity to recognize pain, injustice, and love, and to turn our backs on these innate human qualities and conditions is to turn our backs on the human race.