

**AMNESTY
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UDHR 60: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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Has there been significant progress in human rights since the UDHR was signed?

Progress has been made in the human rights field since the UDHR was signed 60 years ago, yet millions of people have been left behind. There is a disparity between governments' promises and performances. The hallmarks of our world today are injustice, inequality and impunity. Many of our leaders have put political self-interest and abuse of power before the interests of the people they represent.

We are seeing the:

- Targeting of civilians by armed groups and government forces with impunity;
- Pervasive violence against women;
- Promotion of torture and ill-treatment as acceptable modes of intelligence gathering;
- Suppression of dissent and attacks on journalists and activists;
- Lack of protection for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants;
- Denial of economic and social rights; and
- Evasion of corporate accountability for human rights abuses.

What difference has the UDHR made? Is it still relevant 60 years on?

The UDHR has made a difference, it took extraordinary vision and courage for the leaders sixty years ago to adopt such a declaration at the end of the Second World War. It outlines a set of complete rights from political to social and cultural, for all people across the world. It is true that many people still don't enjoy these rights, but it is not the fault of the UDHR. In our divided and insecure world, it remains as relevant today as it was then, it is governments who have failed to protect people's rights at home and abroad and must put this right.

Aren't human rights just a Western agenda?

No they protect the rights of everyone across the world. The values of human rights can be traced back to numerous cultures, and the UDHR itself was drafted by individuals from all regions of the world.

Nowadays, the human rights crises around the world today – Myanmar, Gaza, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Afghanistan – demand immediate action and reflect the need for collective leadership of established and emerging powers.

AI believes the biggest threat to the future of human rights is the absence of a shared vision and collective leadership.

What has been the progress of the last sixty years?

Amnesty International has noted the progress made over the last six decades, in particular laws and institutions on human rights, growing support for an end to the death penalty, prosecution of some cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity by international tribunals and national courts.

If the past 60 years have been a total success for human rights, so is there still a need for AI?

AI has been working to promote human rights for almost five decades – but there is still much to be done. Every person who is saved from death row, who is released from prison if they have been unfairly detained, or who is allowed to finally speak freely makes our efforts worthwhile and still relevant today.

In addition, while we are using the anniversary to mark the importance of human rights, there is still a fundamental reality that we are living in a world where 8 out of every 10 people are living in poverty and denied access to their rights, this makes our work as relevant today as when we were first founded.

What are the prospects for human rights over the next 60 years? What is the outlook for the UDHR?

The future for human rights lies in the hands of world leaders. Time has come for them to act by forming new alliances across political and regional lines to ensure respect for human rights.

The UDHR is as valid a document now as it was when it was drafted in 1948 after the Second World War. What is needed is for governments to adhere to it, to recommit not renegotiate the text.

What's new and what are the main trends today?

The abuse and violation of human rights is very different in the modern world to that of the post-war era when the UDHR was signed and the trends in human rights that now prevail include:

- Targeting of civilians by armed groups and government forces with impunity;
- Pervasive violence against women;
- Promotion of torture and ill-treatment as acceptable modes of intelligence gathering;
- Suppression of dissent and attacks on journalists and activists;
- Lack of protection for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants;
- Denial of economic and social rights; and
- Evasion of corporate accountability for human rights abuses.

Why does AI mainly focus its calls on governments to act? Are human rights not everyone's responsibility?

The reality is that it was government leaders who signed the UDHR and it is government leaders who have a duty to protect their citizens' human rights, as laid out in several human rights treaties and conventions.

Specific reasons that we focus on governments include:

- Armed groups may not recognise international treaties, but they can still be held accountable to Common Article 3 of the 4 Geneva Conventions, and AI calls on them to respect human rights.

Governments must also protect individuals from harming other individuals: domestic violence, female genital mutilation, violence against elderly/children
Corporate sector: duty to respect legal and labour conditions, and prevent discrimination, harassment, environment.
All actors now have obligations.

But of course as global citizens we all have a role to play too: we should use our human rights to protect others.

You say that the sixtieth anniversary of the UDHR is a moment to look at the rights of the world's poor. Why is Amnesty International commenting on this?

The simple fact is that as we look back on the sixty years since the Declaration was signed we can see many changes around the world, from the end of the Cold War to independence across the former colonies. But this is not enough. We have to look at the lives of people around the world and realise that while we can talk positively about the achievements of the last six decades, the reality is that eight out of 10 people around the world still do not have access to their rights – and these are people who live in poverty.

We cannot look at the context of human rights worldwide without addressing this key issue.

Let me give you some specifics:

The right to adequate housing includes protection from forced eviction and access to affordable, habitable and culturally appropriate housing;

The right to education includes the right to free and compulsory primary education and to progressively available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable education;

The right to food including freedom from hunger and access at all times to sufficient nutritious food or the means to obtain it;

The right to health is the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including healthy living conditions and available, accessible, acceptable quality health services;

The right to water and sanitation is the right to sufficient water and sanitation which is physically and economically accessible, and is safe;

The right to work and rights at work is the right to freely chosen work and to just and fair conditions of employment, protection against forced labour and rights to form and join trade unions.

But isn't Amnesty International about Civil and Political Rights? What are you doing in this field?

Amnesty International believes that everyone, everywhere has the right to live with dignity. This means that no one should be denied their rights to education, adequate housing, food, water and sanitation, the highest attainable standard of health, and other economic, social and cultural rights.

For more than 45 years, Amnesty International has mobilized millions of people around the world. It has constantly adapted its focus to address the pressing human rights concerns of the day. Today its work also addresses:

The global epidemic of mass forced evictions;

The widespread denial of access to essential health services;

Discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS;

Discrimination against girls and minorities in access to education.

Hunger, homelessness and preventable disease are not inevitable social problems or purely the result of a lack of resources – they are the result of laws, policies and action that undermine people’s human rights.

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