Lahore Leads university

Submitted to : Mam sadia sattar

Submitted by : M Bodi sher

Roll No: S24 1085

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Department: LLB

Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is the first international document that recognizes and protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of all human beings. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948 in Paris.

The declaration was created after the Second World War to promote peace, justice, and respect for human dignity. It is regarded as a “Magna Carta of Mankind” and forms the foundation of modern international human rights law.

Historical Background

- The idea of human rights existed long before the UDHR — in documents like the Magna Carta (1215), the American Declaration of Independence (1776), and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789).
- However, the massive human rights violations during World War II, including the Holocaust, created a need for an international agreement to protect people everywhere.
- In 1945, after the establishment of the United Nations (UN), one of its main purposes was to promote and protect human rights. The UN Commission on Human Rights, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, drafted the UDHR. After long discussions among representatives from different cultures and nations, it was adopted on December 10, 1948, with 48 votes in favor, 8 abstentions, and none against.

Structure of the UDHR

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights consists of a Preamble and 30 Articles.
- The Preamble explains the purpose of the declaration — to recognize the inherent dignity and equal rights of all people.
- The 30 Articles describe the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that every person should enjoy.

Main Principles of the UDHR

1. Equality and Non-Discrimination (Articles 1–2)

- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
- Rights are given without any distinction such as race, color, sex, language, religion, or nationality.

2. Right to Life, Liberty, and Security (Article 3)

- Every individual has the right to live in safety and freedom, without oppression.

3. Freedom from Slavery and Torture (Articles 4–5)

- Slavery and slave trade are prohibited.
- No one should be subjected to torture or cruel treatment.

4. Rights to Law and Justice (Articles 6–11)

- Everyone has the right to recognition before the law.
- Right to fair trial, presumption of innocence, and protection against arbitrary arrest.

5. Freedom of Movement and Nationality (Articles 13–15)

- Right to move freely within one's country and to leave or return to it.
- Right to a nationality and freedom to change it.

6. Family and Property Rights (Articles 16–17)

- Right to marry and found a family.
- Right to own property individually or collectively.

7. Freedom of Thought, Expression, and Religion (Articles 18–20)

- Right to hold opinions, express views, and practice any religion.
- Right to peaceful assembly and association.

8. Participation in Government (Article 21)

- Right to take part in government and have equal access to public services.

9. Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (Articles 22–27)

- Right to social security, work, fair wages, rest, and leisure.
- Right to education, cultural participation, and adequate living standards.
- Right to health, housing, and well-being.

10. Duties to the Community (Article 29)

- Everyone has duties toward the community that enable the full development of human personality.

11. Protection Against Abuse of Rights (Article 30)

- No one may use their rights to destroy the rights and freedoms of others

Significance of the UDHR

- The UDHR laid the foundation for international human rights law.
- It inspired more than 60 international human rights treaties, including:
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR
- It influences national constitutions and legal systems around the world.
- It provides a moral and ethical guide for governments, organizations, and individuals.
- December 10 is celebrated every year as Human Rights Day.

Implementation of the UDHR

- Although the UDHR is not legally binding, it has become a standard of achievement for all nations.
- The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) monitors and promotes its principles.
- Many countries have incorporated the UDHR into their domestic laws and constitutions.
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Red Cross work to protect these rights globally.

Challenges to the UDHR

- Poverty, discrimination, and inequality still exist in many countries.
- Wars, terrorism, and political instability continue to violate human rights.
- Some governments restrict freedom of speech and religion.
- The rise of digital surveillance threatens the right to privacy.
- Despite these challenges, the UDHR continues to be a universal symbol of human dignity and equality.

Conclusion

- ✓ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most remarkable achievements of the United Nations and the global community. It emphasizes that all people are entitled to freedom, equality, and justice, regardless of nationality, race, or religion.
- ✓ Even though the full realization of these rights remains a challenge, the UDHR continues to inspire efforts toward peace, democracy, and human dignity around the world. It remains the cornerstone of international human rights protection.