

Human Responsibilities

The opening section of this report summarises the main points discussed in the ISFiT 2009 Human Rights workshop session on human responsibilities. It presents the agreed declaration of human responsibilities.

Definition of responsibilities

The general consensus was that human rights and responsibilities are intimately related. Thoughts shared included,
“They’re two sides of the same coin.”
“Every right in the universal declaration has a partner responsibility.”

The question of primacy of rights and responsibilities was considered: which comes first? This too elicited a variety of responses,
“Rights are born from responsibilities” and vice versa.
“A chicken and egg question.”

In an attempt to capture the important interdependency between rights, our first attempt at defining what we mean by human responsibilities took as its starting point our proposed definition of human rights.
Requirements of humans by virtue of being born.

However, there exists an important distinction between rights and responsibilities. We hold that all persons, from birth, have rights. We do not usually consider infants and children to have the same responsibilities as adults. “With great power comes great responsibility”. Can we truly say that humans have responsibilities *from birth*?



Points of Discussion

The workshop split into five smaller groups to discuss the nature of human responsibilities and whether we would wish to encode them in an international document, analogous to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the **Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities**. Each group was tasked with writing down five human responsibilities that we all share.

There were many points of view and much disagreement:

- 1) Disagreement over whether a Declaration of Human Responsibilities is necessary or desirable.
 - a. From a legal point of view, in criminal law, a right is held to entail responsibility by definition. We therefore don't need a separate document.
 - b. However, criminal law outlines responsibilities. Constitutions define rights.
 - c. The argument in a) requires a universally applicable legal definition of right, but such a thing does not, in fact, exist.
- 2) Human responsibilities exist on a national level – so do we need an international equivalent?
 - a. We have both national and international level of human rights, so why not a similar document for human responsibilities?
- 3) International law is not binding. The responsibilities outlined are ignored by signatories.
 - a. International law can become binding and the norm.
 - b. Written documents are always considered both more legitimate and more binding.
- 4) The alternative to two separate rights and responsibilities documents is to include them both in as single declaration. We therefore don't need a separate declaration of human responsibilities.



Review of Responsibility Document

In the final stage of our session, the groups came together to present their five human responsibilities. The entire workshop then voted on which of the 25 responsibilities should appear on the declaration. Several participants abstained from the vote, because they disagreed with the very principle of such a document. Of the 20 participants who voted, a simple 2/3 majority (14 participants) was required to include the responsibilities in our declaration. All of the responsibilities we accepted are reproduced below.

The Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities

Preamble:

This declaration strives to set common standards of achievement of responsibilities for all peoples of all nations, keeping in mind the right of future generations to exercise fully their fundamental rights.

We are held to have:

- 1. The responsibility to protect the life, liberty and security of each and every person.**
- 2. The responsibility to future generations, i.e. to bequeath future generations a world we would wish to live in.**
- 3. The responsibility to ensure sustainability of our natural environment.**
- 4. The responsibility to ensure sustainable development.**
- 5. The responsibility to provide humanitarian aid in dangerous situations.**
- 6. The responsibility to secure a clean and safe environment or to abstain from harming it.**



Sanctions

There was some dispute over the precise definition of sanctions: should the meaning be taken in a strict and purely legal sense or is there a more broadly conceived understanding of the term?

A provisional definition was taken in the broader sense and defined sanctions as measures that are used to limit countries' behaviour, which probably would not change without them. International sanctions are imposed on countries whereas sanctions on individuals are mostly solved within national jurisdictions. There are two types of international sanctions, one applied by United Nations Security Council and the other between countries (multilateral or bilateral contracts).

Why do we need sanctions?

They can be a very effective tool to avoid human rights violations if they are used properly.

Types of sanctions

- 1) Economic: boycott of trade imposed by United States of America on Cuba.
Effectiveness relies on the level of the sanction because some self-sufficient countries can increase their power even though being isolated.
Pro: Creates political pressure.
Con: Damages real lives, affects human rights.



- 2) Military intervention: USA in Iraq.
It must¹ be considered as a last solution.
Pros:
 - Immediately effective.
 - International pressure.Cons:
 - Violates sovereignty of nation.
 - Temporary tool.
 - Creates confrontation.
 - Usually violates human rights.

- 3) Political/ diplomatic: boycotting Olympic Games in China.
Pro:
 - Peaceful method.
 - Easy and fast tool.Con:
 - Temporary solution.

- 4) Media pressure.
Pro: Independent way of expressing resistance.
Con: Has its own interests.

To impose sanctions is the last step. It is always necessary to keep in mind the consequences they could bring, because sometimes the cost of imposing sanctions can be higher than the benefits.

¹ Note: there was disagreement over the use and implication of the word must here.



What can students do to promote a human rights culture²?

Foremost, we have to be students in the strictest sense of the word—active participants in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and the pursuit of truth and social justice. We should take advantage of our time inside our learning institutions to engage in critical thought.

We should constantly strive to conscientise (reach the ultimate level of awareness) ourselves and others about the struggle for human rights. We can achieve this by effective usage of the areas within and outside our campuses, creating visibility and raising awareness via peaceful means, such as through gatherings, seminars, and distribution of materials. Students should actively participate in political life and utilize the media as a valuable tool to aid their advocacy.

We should create or join networks, both formal and informal, which will maximize cooperation and allow the sharing of resources between us. Simultaneously, we should set aside our differences and eliminate any form of sectoral territoriality.

² Note: there was some concern expressed over the use of the term culture here.



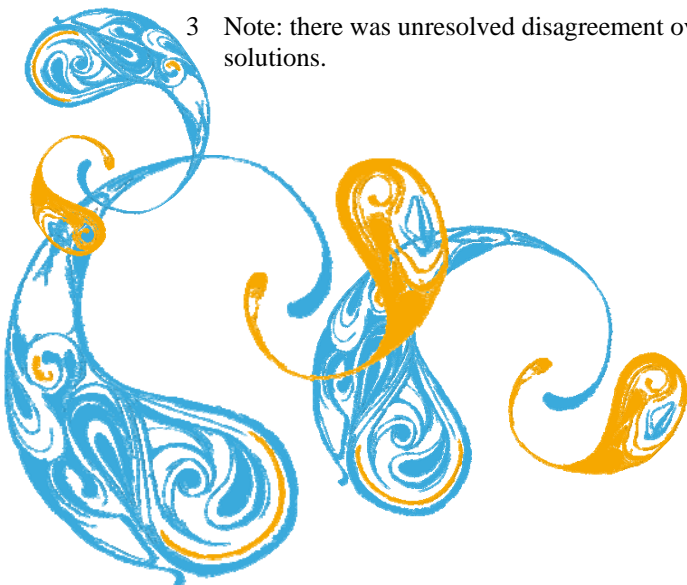
Human rights improvement and other challenges for the future

Human rights have been and will be still a hotly-debated issue to which every country must pay attention. Despite much effort by many countries, human rights issues still need improvement. The closing section in this final document proposes possible solutions to improve human rights as well as point out the challenges that people may encounter in the future.

Part 1: Solutions³

- Create more awareness of human rights among people, especially young generations. Education on human rights plays a key role. In this context, we refer to education in a much broader sense than formal education.
- Human rights can be improved when people's lives are improved (and vice versa), particularly in term of economic conditions.
- Human rights violations are not discovered or examined by the international community. People must be aware of their rights and put pressure on the government to make it take action.
- More cooperation and dialogue need to take place among the international community to solve human rights issues together .
- Identify the root cause of the problem (political, economic, religious or cultural) and find the solutions accordingly.
- The international community should pay more attention to conflict areas and human rights violations.
- People should be proactive by participating in the media to fight for human rights.

³ Note: there was unresolved disagreement over the phrasing and intention of several of these solutions.



Part 2: Challenges

- Poverty and illiteracy are still big challenges to human rights issues.
- Unequal distribution of resources creates social, economic and political gaps.
- Lack of mutual understanding and cooperation among the international community in attempting to solve universal issues.
- Depletion of natural resources and climate change threaten the survival of human beings.

Human rights improvement is a big challenge to human beings. Tackling the challenge will take much effort and a long time. We believe that the process can only be achieved with effort from each and every individual, undertaken with mutual respect, understanding and cooperation.

