



*United Nations Educational
Scientific and Cultural Organization*



**UNESCO Chair & Institute of Comparative Human Rights at the
University of Connecticut
10th Annual International Comparative Human Rights Conference**

Tenth Annual UNESCO Chair & Institute of Comparative Human Rights Conference

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- End Poverty and Hunger
- Universal Education
- Gender Equality
- Child Health
- Maternal Health
- Combat HIV/AIDS
- Environmental Sustainability
- Global Partnership

Human Rights and
HEALTH

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“Human rights education is much more than a lesson in schools or a theme for a day; it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity.”
--Former United Nations Secretary- General Kofi Annan

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Which one of these things would you be willing to give up?



Immunization



Clean Water



Plenty of Healthy Food



Adequate Housing



Available Medical/ Mental Health Care



Clean Environment

Was it hard to choose? None of us would like to give up any of these basic health privileges. But many people are forced to live without them every day.

“It is my aspiration that health finally will be seen not as a blessing to be wished for, but as a human right to be fought for.”
--Former United Nations Secretary- General Kofi Annan

Being healthy is an essential human right. But how are human rights defined? How does health relate to human rights? And most importantly, what can you do to help?

What are “human rights”?

Human rights are the essential rights of **every single** human being. Every person in the world is born with these rights, and they **cannot be taken away**. These rights apply to **everyone**—regardless of any distinction between peoples.

Human rights are based on three basic principles:

- The equality, dignity and freedom of all people;
- Reciprocal respect for the dignity and rights of all people;
- The universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of all human rights.¹



Because every person is entitled to these essential rights, every person must respect them. It is the duty of government to protect and respect these rights as well. Some of the most essential human rights include the right of every person to life, liberty, and security.

What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Human rights are defined by a document called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted this document on December 10, 1948, with the intention to declare the universal and inalienable freedoms of every citizen of the world. Today, every country of the world has agreed to the views outlined in the UDHR, and it has become an inspiration for many countries’ own constitutions and policies.



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlines the intrinsic, universal, essential freedoms of every individual.

These include the freedom from slavery and the right to adequate food, social services, and medical care for every individual and his/her family. This document is an international standard for human rights, and the foundation on which many international human rights organizations, including UNESCO, base their work.

To read the entire Declaration, go to: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

What is the United Nations?

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945 by 51 nations of the world whose goal was to build a peaceful international community. After World War II many countries felt that international cooperation was essential to build a peaceful global community. The UN is a forum where countries from every corner of the world can discuss international and worldwide issues. Now including



192 countries, United Nations works to promote human rights, social progress, and better living conditions for people around the world.²



What is UNESCO?

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. It was created on November 16, 1945, by the United Nations and is made up of 193 Member States and six Associate Members. Its mission is to promote international cooperation through creating universal agreements on ethical issues. UNESCO also works to share information and knowledge, and to create dialogue between nations.³

In May 2001, UNESCO awarded the first UNESCO Chair in human rights in the United States to Professor Omara-Otunnu of the University of Connecticut. At UCONN, UNESCO's mission is to promote research, education, training, and information sharing in the field of human rights, and to facilitate collaboration between University faculty and human rights researchers and institutions worldwide.⁴

Through UNESCO, the Chair in Comparative Human Rights at the University of Connecticut is mandated to:

- Promote an integrated system of research, education, training, information, and documentation in the field of human rights;
- Facilitate collaboration between high-level internationally recognized researchers and teaching staff of the University and other institutions in the United States and other countries, particularly South Africa;
- Share the results of research in the field of human rights.⁵

*Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares:
“Everyone has the rights to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of...sickness disability... old age, or lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”*

What is the relationship between global health and human rights?

Good health is an inalienable right for all humans. Access to clean water, clean air, adequate food and medical care are basic human rights that support the healthy development of all members of society. Conditions that support healthy development and basic health care are a human right.

What are some health concerns worldwide?

Water

The availability of clean water is one of the most important issues facing the world today. ‘Unclean’ water can carry bacteria and pathogens that can cause diseases such as dysentery and diarrhea. These diseases lead to high infant mortality rates in areas where clean water is unavailable. At any one time, half of the hospital beds in the world are filled with people suffering from water-borne diseases. Every week, 42,000 people will die as a result of these diseases.⁶ The combination of hygienic sanitation systems and clean water are key to improving health worldwide.

FACT: Around the world, 1.1 billion people—about 18% of the world’s population, lack access to safe drinking water. 42% of the world’s population—or 2.6 billion people lack access to basic sanitation.⁷



A young girl from an Arab nomad tribe carries water to her village on a donkey.

Malnutrition



Children suffer from a drought in Ethiopia.

In developing nations, one out of every four children under five years old is underweight. This is 145 million children—more than 27% of young children worldwide.⁸ Children are the most susceptible to the effects of malnutrition, and also the most likely to suffer from diseases contracted because of a poor diet. However, malnutrition can affect all sectors of the population. The increase in food prices over recent years is expected to add another million people to the current global total of 854 million people who are undernourished.⁹

FACT: Every minute, 12 children die as a result of malnutrition.¹⁰



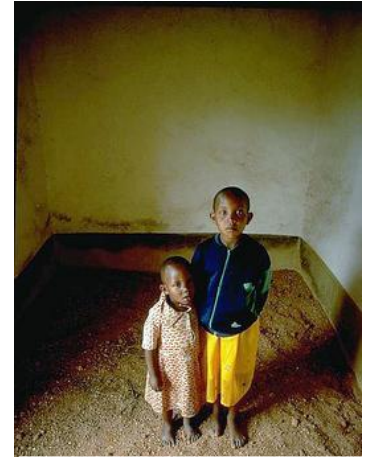
Portrait of Iren Maduwa of Zimbabwe who died of AIDS after discovering only two months earlier that she had the disease.

Infectious Diseases

Infectious diseases are one of the greatest health concerns worldwide. All of these diseases are preventable either through the use of effective vaccines, or simple preventative measures. Some of the most deadly and widespread diseases include the following:

HIV/AIDS

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and the resultant condition, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is one of the most prevalent and deadly infectious diseases in the world. The World Health Organization projects that deaths from HIV/AIDS will rise from 2 million in 2008 to 6.5 million by 2030.¹¹



Two Rwandan orphans in their home in Rwanda. Since the death of their parents, the children have had to take care of themselves.

FACT: To date, more than 22 million people have died from AIDS.¹²

HIV/AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease that is most prevalent in developing countries. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most heavily affected region, and claims 75% of AIDS related deaths. However, HIV/AIDS continues to spread in some developed regions as well, such as Indonesia and Russia.¹³ AIDS-related deaths have created a large population of orphaned children. By 2010, about 30 million children are expected to be orphaned by AIDS.¹⁴

FACT: Almost 7,400 people are infected with HIV every day.¹⁵

Tuberculosis



A monk TB patient in Myanmar.

Tuberculosis (TB) is a highly contagious disease that usually affects the lungs, though it can affect other systems in the body. Tuberculosis is most deadly in Africa and Southeast Asia, where the mortality rate approaches 74 deaths per 100,000 people.¹⁶ The World Health Organization estimates that there are an estimated 9 million new cases of Tuberculosis each year, which result in 2 million deaths.¹⁷

FACT: Every second, someone in the world is infected with Tuberculosis.¹⁸

Malaria

Malaria is an infectious disease caused by parasites transmitted through mosquito bites. If left untreated, malaria can cause death. Every year, about 250 million people are infected with Malaria, and nearly one million of those people die from it. In Africa, 1 in every 5 childhood deaths is caused by Malaria.¹⁹ Malaria is easily preventable—the regular use of insecticide and the use of long lasting, insecticide-treated mosquito nets are cost-effective ways of dramatically reducing the incidence of Malaria. These methods of prevention are especially useful in regions where there is little medical care available.



A woman gets her child tested for Malaria in the Congo.

FACT: Every second, a child dies of Malaria.²⁰



UN Peacekeepers help in a Medical Outreach Program in Liberia.

In developing nations, diseases such as polio and typhus, which have been eradicated in the United States, still kill thousands of people each year. Education about healthy practices is one of the most important parts of preventing the spread of these diseases. Additionally, the use of effective vaccines and medications are key to both preventing and curing diseases. In many developing nations, effective medication is either unavailable or unaffordable.

FACT: One billion people throughout the world suffer from hunger, a figure which has increased by 100 million because of the global financial crisis, says the UN.²¹

Women and Children

Women and children are particularly susceptible to health-related human rights violations. Every year, over half a million women die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth; this figure includes many deaths resulting from inadequate pre-natal care, and nearly 70,000 deaths resulting from unsafe abortions.²² While the infant mortality rate in United States is 6.26 deaths for every thousand births, in Angola, the country with the highest infant mortality rate, the rate is 180.21 deaths for every thousand births. This is more than 28 times the United States' rate.²³ Limited availability of pre-natal care, the lack of clean and safe conditions for childbirth, and limited well-child care, contribute directly to increased mortality among women of childbearing age and among infants under the age of one year.



Children wait for medical care in Haiti.

The Environment



Garbage in Nairobi, Kenya.

Many diseases are the direct result of environmental pollution. Exposure to high levels of toxins, or exposure to low levels of toxins over a long period of time, can cause health problems such as respiratory disorders, immune system problems, neurological disorders, and even cancer.²⁴ Stricter environmental standards are needed to improve air quality and protect water sources from pollution. According to Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the

security of person”—security which includes freedom from dangerous environmental conditions and environmentally imposed illnesses.

Mental Health

Too often, “health” is defined as just physical health. However, mental health is a significant concern across the world. In many countries, individuals with disabilities do not have access to the medication or treatment they need to fulfill their potential. In many countries, people with disabilities are discriminated against, and even denied essential human rights.



Rwandan refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Exposure to trauma including war, genocide, and famine can lead to mental disorders such as depression or PTSD. In many parts of the world no mental health services are available to provide counseling or medication to people with mental illness. Currently, there are more than 15.2 million refugees worldwide being supported by the UN organizations.²⁵

Many of these refugees and people living in areas of conflict live in constant fear for their lives, fear of oppression, and fear for the lives of their loved ones.

What is the UN is doing?

The United Nation has created groups to help prevent or treat many of the health concerns we talked about earlier. The UN has provided leadership in the ongoing battle for good health and human rights across the world.



UN Peacekeepers distribute food in Ethiopia

In 1962, the United Nations founded the World Food Program (WFP), to help reduce chronic hunger and malnutrition around the world. Today, the WFP has delivered more than 3.9 million metric tons of food to the hungry across the world.²⁶

The UN has declared the years from 2005 to 2015 as the “Water for Life International Decade for Action”. The goal of UN-Water is to halve the “proportion of



UN Peacekeepers in Haiti.

people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation,” by 2015. Since 1990, the UN has succeeded in giving 1.1 billion people access to safe drinking water, and has increased water access in South Asia from 71 to 84 percent.²⁷

In 2001, the UN General Assembly established the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. At the World Summit in 2005, the UN resolved to increase its response to these pandemics through mobilizing

additional resources, and supporting prevention, care, and treatment efforts worldwide.

Nothing But Nets is a UN affiliated campaign that works to reduce the incidence of malaria in Africa by distributing insecticide- treated mosquito nets. By December, 2007, Nothing But Nets had raised \$18,114,147.12, and distributed 719,812 nets.²⁸ The United Nations also supports the Measles Initiative—a partnership committed to reducing

measles deaths across the globe. Every day, an estimated 540 children die from measles, despite the fact that a safe and effective vaccine is available for less than \$1. Since 2001, the Measles Initiative has supported the vaccination of more than 600 million children in over 60 countries. This has resulted in a 74% drop in measles outbreaks worldwide, and an 89% drop in measles outbreaks in Africa alone.²⁹ The UN is also working to eradicate polio worldwide, and so far has decreased the number of polio cases by 99% since 1988.³⁰



UN Peacekeepers in Medical Outreach Program in Liberia

The World Health Organization Project on Mental Health and Human Rights supports countries around the world in their goal to promote and protect the rights of people with mental disorders. The WHO Project on Mental Health and Human Rights focuses specifically on the development of legislation that protects the human rights of people with disabilities. In Geneva on October 9th, 2008, the WHO launched the mental health Gap Action Program (mhGAP), a program that is aimed at improving mental health services in countries where proper care is lacking.

“The destiny of human rights is in the hands of all our citizens in all our communities,”
--Eleanor Roosevelt

What can I do?

Human rights are interdependent. For everyone to enjoy their own human rights, people must respect each other's human rights.

In order to improve access to healthy conditions and healthcare, we must first be **educated** about current world health issues. Attending conferences such as the one at UCONN this fall will help you become educated about the conditions that support health and human rights worldwide. Awareness is the first step to helping—learn more about health and

healthcare across the world, and share the information you learn with others. Talking about health issues in everyday life can help to keep health concerns in the forefront of everyone's minds.



US President Barak Obama and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Too often, health concerns are overlooked in political decision-making, with the result that politics either ignore health concerns, or have unintended negative consequences. If you think health and human rights is an important issue in our world, write to your congressman or congresswoman and share your opinion. You can also choose to buy eco-friendly products or support companies that protect clean air and water. You may not be able to change the entire system immediately, but you will be a voice for change. Over time, many single voices can truly change the course of history.

Involvement is key. Supporting organizations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, and the World Health Organization allows them to continue to do the important work of improving health foundations worldwide. Working in your own community by fundraising, collecting goods and supplies, or even by spreading awareness in your school can help to open peoples' minds to health concerns and human rights. Participating in groups such as Amnesty International, raising funds for Nothing But Nets, or trick-or-treating for UNICEF can all help to solve the problem of health and human rights worldwide.



Internally displaced indigenous children in Columbia.



Children in East Timor.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has,”
--Margaret Mead

If you want to learn more about Health and Human Rights, visit these websites:

United Nations Website: www.un.org

World Food Program's website: www.wfp.org

The World Health Organization: www.who.int

Nothing But Nets Campaign: www.Nothingbutnets.net

The Malaria Initiative: www.malariainitiative.org

United Nations UNESCO website: www.unesco.org

UCONN UNESCO website: www.unescochair.uconn.edu

Kelsey Barton- Henry

Kelsey Barton- Henry is a senior at the Connecticut International Baccalaureate Academy in East Hartford, CT. She interned with the UNESCO Chair Office at the University of Connecticut in the summer of 2009. At her high school, Kelsey is a member of the Model UN and Mock Trial clubs and is a long term participant in National History Day. Kelsey plays violin and does Irish step dancing as well. She is hoping to attend college after high school, and is very interested in the areas of history, political science, and human rights.

End Notes

Meeting the MDG Drinking Water and Sanitation Target: A Mid-Term Assessment of Progress

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