

Sunday, Dec 10, 2023

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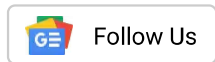
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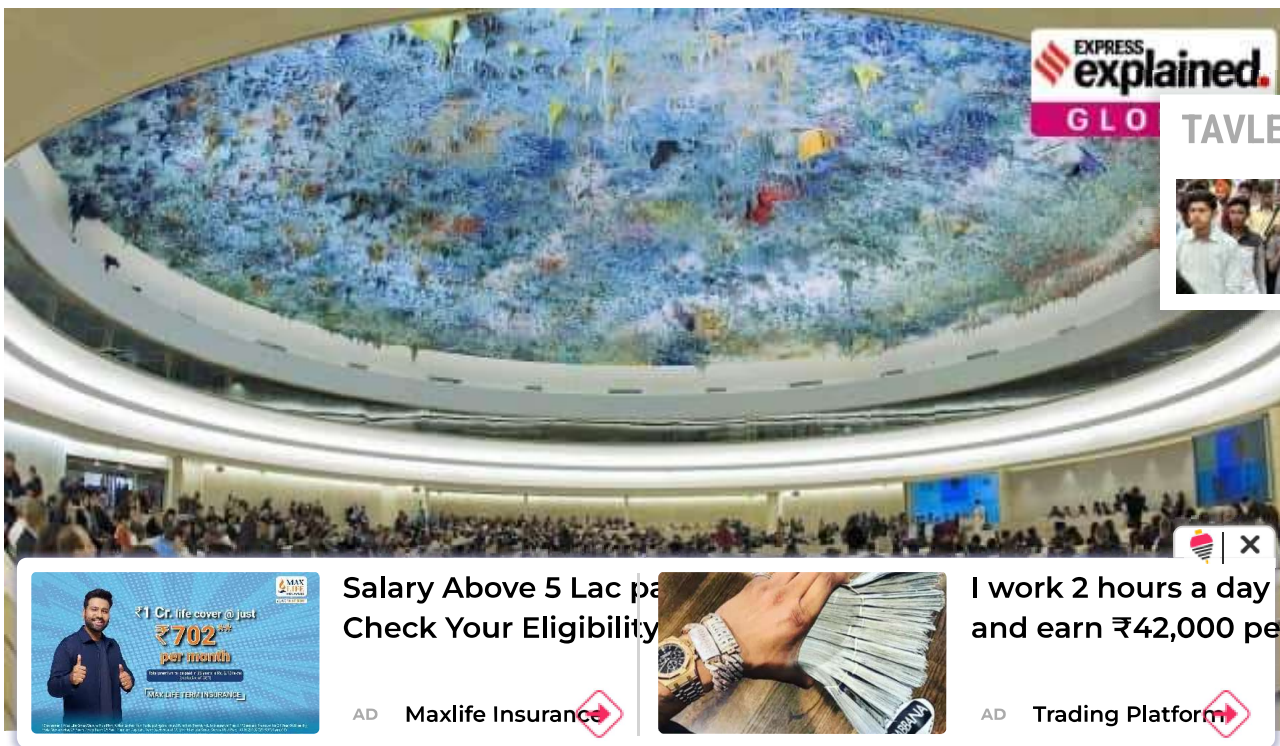
What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is marking its 75th anniversary?

A relatively compact document, the declaration consists of a preamble and 30 articles setting out fundamental rights and freedoms.

By: **AP**

December 10, 2023 11:40 IST





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The assembly hall during the opening of the Human Rights Council's Commemorative session marking the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, at the European headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Dec. 12, 2008. (AP Photo/File)

Seventy-five years ago on Sunday, the UN General Assembly approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at a meeting in Paris – laying one of the foundation stones of the international order that emerged following the horrors of World War II.

The declaration was proclaimed as “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.” In practice, it hasn’t always turned out that way over the subsequent decades. As the document turns 75, U.N. human rights chief Volker Türk said this week that the world is at a “somber moment in history,” wracked by conflicts and crises. But he insisted that “human rights have not failed.”

What is the Universal Declaration?

A relatively compact document, the declaration consists of a preamble and 30 articles setting out fundamental rights and freedoms.

Article 1 states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” And Article 2 says that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms the declaration sets out, “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex,

language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

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Other articles state that “everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person,” and that no one “shall be held in slavery or servitude” or “subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

The declaration says that “all are equal before the law” and that everyone is entitled to “a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.” And it says that “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” The declaration enshrines the rights to freedom of religion; to freedom of opinion and expression; and to freedom of peaceful assembly. And it says that everyone has the right to education.

Why and how was it drawn up?

The declaration was born of the “never again” sentiment among political leaders after two world wars and the Holocaust. On top of the U.N. Charter, the document that founded the United Nations in 1945, countries decided to draw up what the U.N. calls a “road map” to guarantee the rights of every individual.

A formal drafting committee was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and consisted of members of the new Commission on Human Rights from eight countries, selected to reflect geographical distribution.

Over 50 U.N. member countries participated in the final drafting in 1948, and the U.N. General Assembly approved the result on Dec. 10, 1948, with eight countries abstaining but none voting against. Human rights group Amnesty International notes that the declaration was drawn up at a time when much of the world’s population lived under colonial rule but says that “its drafting ultimately could not be controlled by the powerful alone.” It says that smaller nations “outmaneuvered the large,” ensuring that the final text promised human rights for all without

distinction, and that female delegates ensured equal rights for men and women were affirmed.

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What did it achieve?

The declaration isn't a treaty and isn't legally binding in itself, but the principles it sets out have been incorporated into many countries' laws and it is viewed as the basis for international human rights law.

It is recognized as having inspired and paved the way for more than 70 human rights treaties at global and regional levels, according to the U.N. "It inspired the decolonization movement, it inspired the anti-apartheid movement and it inspired freedom fighters all around the world, be it on gender issues, be it on LGBTIQ+ issues, be it against racism," U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Türk said on Wednesday.

"If we did not have it, we would be even in a more serious situation because then you would have different standards, and let's also be very clear: It is the universal standard," he said. He acknowledged that some have said it doesn't apply to a specific religion, culture or region, but called that "absolute nonsense." Türk's own job emerged from one of the agreements that built on the 1948 declaration: the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action of 1993.

What is the situation now?

The 75th anniversary comes as human rights are challenged in the war between Israel and Hamas, Russia's war in Ukraine, internal conflicts in Myanmar and Sudan and in a host of other places and situations.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the universal declaration has been "too often misused and abused." "It is exploited for political gain and it is ignored, often, by the very same people," Guterres said in a speech in February to the U.N. Human Rights Council – itself frequently criticized because of some member countries' own poor rights records. "Some governments chip away at it. Others use

a wrecking ball.” Still, Amnesty International says the declaration “is living proof that a global vision for human rights is possible, is doable, can be realized.” And Türk says despite the many times the declaration has been ignored or exploited, it is still relevant, and the world should honour its successes and learn from its failures.

“Human rights are inherent to every human being. Leaders who ignore this truth imperil the people they are meant to serve,” he said.

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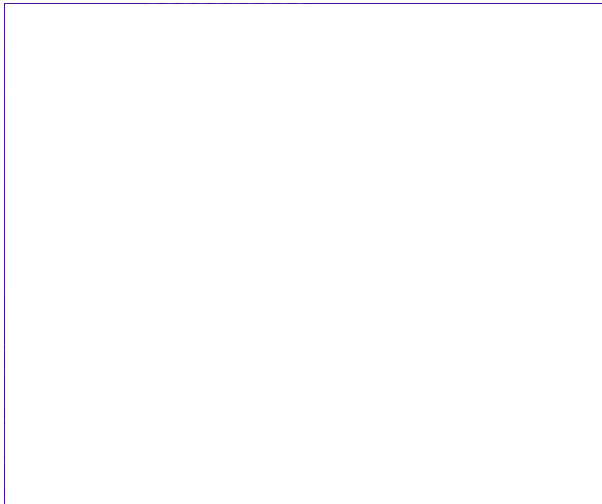


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First published on: 10-12-2023 at 11:40 IST

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