

**WORLD  
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COMMENTARY**

**THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS:  
SIGNPOST TO FREEDOM**

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# WORLD GOODWILL COMMENTARY

*A bulletin on current trends in world affairs*

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## NO. 25 THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: SIGNPOST TO FREEDOM

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*This Declaration is based upon the spiritual fact that man must have freedom in which to develop his full stature and through common effort to raise the level of human dignity. We have much to do to fully achieve and to assure the rights set forth in this Declaration...*

*As we here bring to fruition our labors on this Declaration of Human Rights, we must at the same time rededicate ourselves to the unfinished task which lies before us. We can now move on with new courage and inspiration to the completion of an international covenant on human rights and of measures for the implementation of human rights.*

Eleanor Roosevelt

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## THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: SIGNPOST TO FREEDOM

### *Introduction*

A little over 200 years ago, Thomas Paine produced a book entitled *Rights of Man*. In it, he argues that human rights are inherent in all human beings, and that government's sole purpose is the safeguarding of the rights of individuals. Of course, he was not the first thinker to talk in these terms. Others, such as John Locke, had preceded him; and ideas that would lead to the modern concept of human rights can be historically traced back to such documents as the Edicts of Ashoka (the emperor who ruled most of India from 273 to 232 BC), and the declaration issued in 539 BC by the Persian emperor, Cyrus the Great. Nevertheless, it was only by the time when Paine was writing, that Human Rights were beginning to be accepted as a concept that applied not just to an élite, but to all people.

Now, we live in a time where human rights are widely regarded as unexceptional, and are seen as the most useful way to guarantee morality in the public sphere. So much so, that, even in countries where governments are oppressive, they still feel obliged to defend their human rights records. It is easy to underestimate what a huge advance this is. Much of the credit for this fact is due to the worldwide influence that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereafter UDHR) has achieved in its sixty years of existence. Written in the aftermath of World War Two, it was intended to give effect to the UN Charter's provisions on human rights. It has become a kind of gold standard, against which national behaviour is measured.

In the light of this widespread influence, it is worth taking a closer look at the Declaration from a spiritual angle. We live in an era where spirituality has effectively been freed from exclusive identification with faith traditions, to the extent that it is now becoming quite normal to speak of people outside the major faiths as spiritual in focus. Of course, those who explicitly identify with a specific faith tradition also have an equal claim on this perspective. The reason for focusing the commentary in this way is because it is quite clear that the UDHR is itself a major statement of spiritual values, and it deserves attention and analysis in these terms.

Before looking at the Declaration itself, we are justified in asking what is the ultimate basis of rights? In the writings of Alice Bailey, there is reference to the Principle of Essential Divinity. This can be interpreted as the idea that every single sentient being is a manifestation of the One Life, an expression of the Divine Purpose immanent in the Cosmos. Thus, every being is equally valuable, in the deepest possible way. This is the basis for the claim, voiced in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration that "*All* human beings are born free and *equal* in dignity and rights..." (*emph. added*), in other words, the notion that human rights are universal. This may be *the* most controversial element of the Declaration. By claiming this fundamental equality of all human beings, it cuts across all differences of culture and religion.

If the principle of equality is controversial, the principle of freedom, also enunciated in Article 1, is even more fundamental. Freedom is a necessary precondition for the flourishing of all the other spiritual values and capacities mentioned throughout the Declaration. It is easy to presume we understand the implications of freedom. But do we really? Alice Bailey draws a clear distinction between the personality, which is focused in the world of mundane affairs, and the Soul, which provides the link to Divinity, and is the ultimate source of consciousness. The personality may understand freedom as freedom *from* arbitrary constraint by other personalities. But there is much more to the mystery of freedom than this. It may well be the most profound spiritual principle cited anywhere in the Declaration. Here are two quotes that are worth pondering: (N.B. in the first quote, the term "ego" is used to refer to what Alice Bailey would call the personality).

“True freedom is not freedom to do whatever we want; true freedom is freedom FROM what we, as egos, want. It is liberation from ego, no less! When ego is released, the problem of self resolves into the realization of Self – our Divine spiritual reality.”

(From: [www.soulprogress.com/html/Undoing/Intro.shtml](http://www.soulprogress.com/html/Undoing/Intro.shtml))

“The principle of freedom is a leavening energy which can permeate substance in a unique manner;... This principle of freedom is one of the attributes of Deity (like will, love and mind) of which humanity knows as yet little. The freedom for which men fight is one of the lowest aspects of this cosmic freedom, which is related to certain great evolutionary developments that enable the life or spirit aspect to free itself from the impact, the contact and the influence of substance.” (Alice Bailey, *A Treatise on the Seven Rays* Vol.V p.416)

It is because freedom is a largely unexplored mystery that we do not yet have a clear picture of a society within which each and every member is truly free. But if we take the hint from the first quote that a free person is essentially selfless, we can at least begin to imagine a society where each person is working at all times for the good of the Whole, where the Whole is certainly no less than all of humanity (another way of stating the principle of brotherhood, also cited in Article 1) and would also include all other species.

We will return to these principles when we take a more detailed look at the Declaration. For the moment, let's consider the question, what is a right? At first glance, it seems to be a form of claim that an individual can make on the society of which he is a part. This claim is generally seen as directed to the government. But if we take seriously the notion, made explicit in the American Declaration of Independence, that governments can be created or destroyed by the governed, and govern by the consent of the governed, we could say that the claimant of a right is ultimately claiming it from his fellow citizens. The government, in this view, is acting simply as the mechanism through which this claim is transmitted, and by which it is ultimately implemented. This implementation is carried out through the legal system, which means that rights have to be given specific form within the laws of a nation. In later chapters, we will briefly look at a few examples of this. But we should not forget that, prior to their formalisation within legal systems, and their implementation by governments, rights are essentially what we are asking of our fellow citizens to do unto us, just as we would do unto them in return.

The idea cited above, that governments govern by the consent of the governed, naturally leads into reflections on the suitability of different systems of government with regard to implementing rights. Is democracy the best political system for guaranteeing human rights? Well, one would think so, given that democracy is the system most openly concerned with empowering the individual, and, as proposed above, human rights are all about the individual, and what he can expect from his fellow citizens, as mediated through the government. This would suggest that the UDHR is particularly suited to democratic societies. Further reasons for this can be derived from a consideration of the different kinds of societies which are possible. This will also help reveal how the emergence of Human Rights is an important spiritual event in planetary history.

Without going into the infinite variety of political arrangements that is conceivable, we can make a very broad distinction between three different types of society, with regard to where they locate sovereign authority. The first kind of society, monarchy, is one which locates sovereign authority within a single individual – quite literally, the sovereign, or monarch. In historical terms, these societies have now largely disappeared. It seems that the general consensus in early societies of this kind was that the monarch derived his or her authority directly from divine sources – either through literally being a God, as were some of the Pharaohs of Egypt, or through somehow being selected by God. This idea was formalised in Christian monarchies as the Divine Right of Kings. One might say that, in a monarchy, even if his subjects do have rights, the rights of the king (or emperor or tsar etc.) over-ride them.

Over the course of time, societies shifted towards systems where sovereign authority was located within a small group, which, initially at least, would also usually include the monarch. This system is called an oligarchy, meaning, the rule of the few, and this small group might be distinguished by royalty, wealth, family, military powers or religious authority. One well-known historical document which effectively shows the transition from a monarchy to an oligarchy, is the Magna Carta of 1215, which outlines limitations on the power of King John of England, limitations he was forced to accept by his nobles. Here we see a shift from privileging the rights of the king, to privileging the rights of a small group.

Finally, when we come to democracies, we see that it is the rights of every member of society which count. So we could argue that the emergence of Human Rights is a sign that Humanity is being given increased responsibility for its spiritual destiny, because the ability to access and to implement ultimate divine values has been stepped down – from a ‘divinely inspired’ king, to a small group, to humanity itself. In other words, access to divinity has been *universalised*. This will naturally lead to the questioning of previous structures which privilege specific groups, whether these are political, religious or economic: a process that we can see going on right now, in a wide variety of contexts. While this process may seem rather chaotic, and even potentially destructive, it is important to realise that it is the result of an increasing spiritual maturity within the human kingdom. Humanity is slowly growing into its full evolutionary responsibility, and the emergence of Human Rights is surely an important marker on the way.

Another way of capturing the key insights of equality and universality that lie at the heart of the UDHR is summed up in a concept that Alice Bailey says should be taught to every child: namely, the value of the individual and the fact of the One Humanity. The value of the individual is central to the rights enshrined in the UDHR. However, the fact that it grants equal rights to every person contains within it an essential corollary: that every person is responsible for upholding the rights of others – and indeed, ultimately, *all* others. The same idea is contained in the fact of the One Humanity. The fact of the One Humanity makes it explicit that responsibility cannot stop at any point short of the whole world. It implies that there will eventually *have* to be global systems of distributing the wealth of the Earth fairly that *every* human being has some say in; and while these systems may take decades or even centuries to fully implement, all who are currently conscious of this need must play their part in laying the groundwork *now*. This groundwork does not mean simply proclaiming this vision and demanding that all immediately conform to it. Instead, the difficult task before people of goodwill is to identify those trends and movements in human consciousness and affairs that are clearly working to create some of the practical *foundations* of such a future society. Identifying groups involved with this process is no easy matter, but one crucial test will be whether they are sounding the note of goodwill in their activities, for it is only through working with the principle of goodwill that right human relations can be accomplished. The following quote from the late spiritual thinker Lex Hixon is extremely relevant:

“Relying on Buddhist insight – and I tend to rely on traditional teachings rather than on my own bright ideas – we should be careful to be concerned equally about the relative and the ultimate, and that's a difficult balance to keep. So, for instance, when someone says that we're just about to peek over the mountain range into the New Age and there will be a totally different way of doing things, and we won't have money and competition, that is, I would say, a failure of concern about the relative.

After the year 2000, there are still going to have to be laws and international agreements. On the other hand, I believe a world civilization of great beauty can unfold, and really must unfold. There is a division in culture now between people who are visionaries and people who focus themselves entirely on the relative.

We need people to take responsibility to bring these two positions together. There's nothing more depressing than someone who's always harping on the relative. Many social radicals are this way. Yet, on the other hand, there's nothing more debilitating than someone who's always referring us to some grand vision, without a deep sensitivity to relative concerns.”

(From an Interview with Lex Hixon, 8 August 1995, retrieved from [www.mightycompanions.org/page6.html](http://www.mightycompanions.org/page6.html) on Nov 6 2008.)

This difficult reconciliation of the relative with the ultimate, of the material with the spiritual, of old, authoritarian institutions with newer, more democratic ways of life, represents the challenge that faces all people today. The UDHR can act as a road map to guide us along this path, but only if it is taken seriously, and not regarded as a nebulous wish-list that receives lip service but no commitment from either governments or individuals. In the next section, we will examine the UDHR in more detail, to see just how significant and wide-ranging its recommendations are. In the concluding section, we will take a look at some of the difficult work involved in putting these recommendations into practice.

### *The Declaration in detail*

Preamble

**Whereas** recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

**Whereas** disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

**Whereas** it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

**Whereas** it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

**Whereas** the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

**Whereas** Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

**Whereas** a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore,

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

**Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.**

To begin our reflections on the Declaration, we look first at some of the points that the Preamble raises.

(a) Rights are *inalienable* – this means that one can't be deprived of them. The inalienability of rights can be seen to be a direct consequence of their origin in the indestructible, eternal realm of spirit. What about the case where society determines that a crime has been committed? Rather than say that the perpetrator is then *deprived* of some of his rights, especially the right to liberty, it might be better to talk about certain rights being temporarily set within narrower limits, to prevent a repeat of the violation of the rights of others. Provision for this is explicitly made in Article 29 (2). This harks back to the earlier point that rights are entitlements with regard to society – so when a person is deemed to have gone beyond the limits of society, by the same token, society is entitled to limit certain rights. Where there is much scope for cultural variation is in which rights are limited, and by how much. The ultimate limitation, which is in fact a full deprivation, is the death penalty. This explains why Human Rights campaigners are generally against the death penalty.

(b) The Four Freedoms – of speech and of belief, and from fear and from want – advanced by President Roosevelt during World War 2 are identified as “the highest aspiration of the common people”; and this is evident in the way in which the Four Freedoms are implicit or explicit in a number of articles (e.g. Articles 17, 18, 25)

(c) Human Rights are to be protected by the rule of law (once again making it explicit that Human Rights are a social phenomenon).

(d) Both “peoples” and “Member States” are cited as defenders of rights. We can see that civil society organisations have, since 1948, taken up the peoples' responsibility in many creative ways – but that does not absolve any of us from our own duty in this matter.

(e) “*Every individual and every organ of society*” is enjoined to keep the Declaration “*constantly in mind*” (emph. added). This aspiration to hold a set of principles continually in mind is reminiscent of the Psalm where the blessed man is he who ponders the law of the Lord day and night: and Alice Bailey also speaks of a constant and uninterrupted meditation upon the Divine Plan.

### *Articles*

We begin with Article 1, which, by its nature, is the most profound and far-reaching.

*(1) All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

Note firstly that this is a kind of expansion into the form of a moral axiom of the famous slogan from the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”. Reason implies mind, and conscience heart. And a spirit of brotherhood is one way of hinting at right human relations.

There is a question whether the article is aspirational, or a statement of moral fact, for we read they “*are* born free...”, but they “*should* act towards one another...” Perhaps it is a combination of both. Perhaps the implication is that, when a human being is born into freedom and equality, and is endowed with reason and conscience, it is difficult, but possible, to conceive that they would act in any other way.

The root meaning of ‘dignity’ is *worthiness*, which returns us to the notion explored in the introductory section that every person, as a reflection of Divinity, is *intrinsically* worth the same. Here is a major example of where the timeless ideals of the Declaration come into rather harsh contact with the time- and culture-bound nature of societies. It would be difficult to name any society through history that has not focused mainly on the *instrumental* value of individuals to society. Whether the decision on this value, and the reward for it, are mediated via the economy, or through some other social mechanism, the fact is that societies are generally structured in ways that reward individuals unequally. And while this will not usually affect their enjoyment of civil and political rights, it certainly impacts unequally on their economic, social and cultural rights\*, to the extent that, in a disappointingly large number of current societies, it is only a minority who can really claim the full enjoyment of even the first part of Article 25 (1), “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...”. Thus, the very first article of the Declaration sits in tension with how we live now, even on a conservative interpretation of equality as equality of opportunity; for who could sensibly argue that the opportunities for those born into deprived slums or shantytowns are on a par with those born into inherited or purchased privilege?

So while the Declaration is not tied directly to any one political ideology, the essential egalitarianism of Article 1 sets limits on the kinds of societies that would be in full accord with it. Subsequent Articles narrow these limits further, leading some to claim that the Declaration is inherently biased. However, let us not underestimate just how large a step forward in human ethical understanding this idea of equality expressed in Article 1 is. It is scarcely two hundred years ago that the transatlantic slave trade was abolished; scarcely a hundred years ago that universal suffrage came to Europe; and less than twenty years ago that apartheid ended in South Africa. All of these advances are rooted in the idea of equality of rights; as will be the future advances still needed before we have a world of right human relations.

A world of right human relations is necessarily one in which individuals “act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” What is the relationship between brotherhood and equality of dignity and rights? And where do “reason and conscience” fit into this equation? One way to think about it is to begin with conscience. It is really the “still small voice” of conscience – in fact, the voice of the soul – that provides the initial insight of intrinsic equality. And once we are convinced of the truth of this insight, then it is only *reasonable* to act in such a way that we acknowledge this, treating all people as our equals, without fear or favour. This, at least, is the ideal towards which the spiritual person aspires: although the promptings of our own selfish desires act as powerful obstacles – for what, in the end, is selfishness, except the desire to be treated unequally, to get more than our fair share of the Earth’s resources?

The beginning and the end of brotherhood is goodwill. There are many ways of defining goodwill, but one that is particularly suited to our current discussion is to say that it is the power to believe and strive for the best in others. People of goodwill can do this because they have a compassionate insight into the temptation to selfishness in themselves, which gives them the same insight into the temptation in others. So even if another person or group may occasionally fail to live up to the highest of which they are capable, and attempts, temporarily, to get more

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\* The distinction between civil/political and economic/social/cultural rights is explored further in the discussion of Article 2 below.



than their fair share, the way of goodwill is to forgive and to support the return to equality and brotherhood. But this does not imply weakness: if someone becomes a repeat offender, then it may well be necessary for society to impose the temporary limitation of rights spoken of in the remarks on the Preamble.

Finally, as we saw in the introductory section, freedom is perhaps the most profound spiritual principle cited anywhere in the Declaration.

It should be evident from the previous paragraphs what a deeply spiritual statement Article 1 is. In some sense, it is the key to the whole Declaration. We might even say that, if all the other Articles were lost, it should be possible to re-construct the Declaration from Article 1 alone. Thus it will repay deep reflection. It alone justifies the claim that the Declaration is a spiritual document. The fact that this is not referred to explicitly may be as a result of the caution of the framers, as it could lead to the potential for disagreement with certain aspects of the Declaration by some within the established faith traditions. But unless the Declaration is grounded in the spiritual realm, which transcends all fashions and habits and customs, then it fails from the beginning to establish the universality it claims for itself.

*(2) Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, 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. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.*

This Article may be one of the most controversial, for right at the beginning it makes the claim that Human Rights are INDIVISIBLE, i.e. that all of these rights stand or fall together. The difficulty with this claim is that many thinkers make a distinction between civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights on the other. Civil and political rights (sometimes called negative rights) are those which governments protect simply by existing: e.g. the right to life (Article 3), the right to be recognised as a person before the law (Article 6) etc.. Economic, social and cultural rights (sometimes called positive rights) require governments to actually *do* something: e.g. the right to social security (Article 22), the right to education (Article 26) etc.. Now, depending on their political ideology, some governments believe that it is the civil and political rights that should be the main focus of protection, while others believe both categories must be fully protected. This debate explains why the Declaration, which contains both kinds of rights, was, when implemented into law, split into two Covenants, one for each kind. So what might a spiritual perspective on indivisibility be?

We have already observed that the spiritual perspective on the right of the individual to the Earth's resources is that all should have an equal share. And we have also noted the current tendency in societies to reward individuals unequally. So for the spiritual person, it seems inevitable, at least in the short term, until there are major changes in society, that governments must play a role in redistributing resources to those who are unable to secure their fair share through the operations of the market. Thus, it is states' duty to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights, making indivisibility a necessity.

*(3) Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

This article partially echoes the famous passage from the preamble to the United States Declaration of Independence that, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." We have already focused on the deeply spiritual dimension of freedom/liberty in the introduction, and a more detailed concrete

analysis with regard to the individual citizen is given in Articles 9 and 18-20. The right to life is both obvious, as a necessary precondition, and controversial, when one contemplates just who “Everyone” may be – does it include the foetus? Does it, even more controversially, include generations yet unborn, in which case the actions of those now living can directly impact this right? The case of foetal rights is a complex one, as it is intimately entwined with women’s rights, and we would not claim to have a definitive answer, leaving this to the conscience of the individual. But it is interesting to note just how far-reaching the ethical ramifications of these apparently simple statements are – in the case of future generations, reaching far beyond us in time and asking us to assess just how our current actions might impact the future integrity of the planet’s ecosystems. Climate change is one component of this which nearly everyone is now aware of. “Security of person” is essentially an extension and elaboration of the right to life, requiring the State to guarantee the individual’s physical integrity. As such, it requires no further comment.

*(4) No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.*

This Article hardly requires comment from the spiritual angle. From the angle of everyday reality, it is deeply regrettable that slavery and other forms of servitude such as forced labour are still present in the world. Only weeks before the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Hadijatou Mani of Niger won her case in the court of the Economic Community of West African States, in which Niger’s government were found guilty of failing to protect her from slavery. This is in spite of slavery being against the law in Niger. So the need for this article is still evident. Further reflections on the nature of slavery in the modern world can be found in the Problems of Humanity Study Set on Capital, Labour and Employment (Available on request from World Goodwill, and downloadable from our website, [www.worldgoodwill.org](http://www.worldgoodwill.org))

*(5) No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*

*(See overleaf)*

Again, an article that needs no comment from the spiritual angle, yet at the same time, in the real world, the need for this article could scarcely be more topical.

*(6) Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.*

*(7) All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.*

*(8) Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.*

*(9) No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.*

*(10) Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.*

*(11) 1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.*

*2. No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was*

*committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.*

*(12) No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.*

These seven articles naturally form a group as they are all concerned with the direct relationship between the citizen and the law of the land. When we discuss the law, we are implicitly referring to the great controlling Idea behind all law, that of Justice. The following reflections on this theme are drawn from recent articles in the World Goodwill newsletter.

Where does law come from? What are its roots? If we approach this from a sociological angle, we will locate its source in the customs and practices of communities that have preceded us, customs and practices that have, in various ways, been codified to produce laws. But that only displaces the question, for where did these customs come from? What was it that inspired our predecessors to act in particular ways? The key lies in the word “inspired” – for a deeper inquiry traces the nature of law back to the origins of being itself, to the pristine source of all created forms, to Spirit. Spirit inevitably manifests through Matter in lawful ways, as physics shows, and human society echoes this pattern. But Spirit does not simply produce laws ready-made, for human minds to discover. Otherwise, all societies at all times would present an unvarying sameness. Rather, Spirit expresses itself through eternal Ideas, abstract Principles which are then contacted by minds of differing times and places, and given diverse forms, suited to the societies in which they emerge. In the case of laws, the principal Idea is that of Justice.

“Justice” can be interpreted or defined in a multitude of ways. For example, an influential recent work of philosophy is titled not *The Theory of Justice* but *A Theory of Justice*. The root of “Justice” can be traced back to the Sanskrit word “Yu”, “to bind together”, which shows the role that Justice should play in binding a community together. Interestingly, “yoga”, which in our time implies raja yoga, the yoga of the mind or meditation, can also be traced back to a root of very similar meaning, which shows its purpose of integrating the physical, emotional and mental forces of the individual. So we could think of Justice as a kind of raja yoga on the scale of a community – a concerted thinking through into concrete forms of those laws and institutions that will create a well-integrated society. At a time when people of many different cultures are to be found within almost every nation, this concept of “social integration” has taken on a new urgency, and it is clear that Justice must be seen to govern this process. A science of social integration must produce right relations between all the diverse groups in a nation. The close relationship of this task to the Aquarian theme of service is indicated by the following quote from Alice Bailey’s *Esoteric Psychology* Vol.II:

“Service is, par excellence, the technique of correct group relations, whether it be the right guidance of an anti-social child in a family, the wise assimilation of a trouble-maker in a group, the handling of anti-social groups in our big cities, the correct technique to be employed in child guidance in our educational centres or the relation between the religious and political parties, or between nation and nation. All of this is part of the new and growing Science of Service. The imposition of this soul law will eventually bring light into a distracted world, and release human energies in right directions.” (p.130)

This leads to two further thoughts: first, that all those who are formally involved in realising Justice in society, either through formulating laws or carrying them out, should ponder deeply on the nature of service and their role as *public servants*; and second, that all those groups which are motivated by the urge to serve others, including NGOs and civil society organisations, are also helping in this process of thinking through Justice into concrete laws – it is *not only* politicians and judges. This second point is an important safeguard in a time when politicians in particular may be subject to pressure from business and other moneyed interests to bias laws in

their favour, which would damage the overarching goal of social integration. It also ensures that a wider section of the population has a more active say, both in the laws which are produced, and in how they are carried out. If we reflect that laws should in some sense be a codification of the values of the whole community, the importance of this latter point is clear.

Every phenomenon has its shadow. In the case of an increasing understanding of Justice, leading to a call to improve laws, its shadow is an excessive tendency to use the laws we already have for selfish gain. This arises where the individual forgets that laws are created to serve the common good of the community, and confuses liberty with licence. The writer Philip K. Howard has highlighted this tendency in: *The Collapse of the Common Good*.<sup>\*</sup> This sets out the increasingly litigious nature of American society, where the fear of being sued has led, for example, to doctors practising defensively instead of using their professional judgement, and to teachers finding that their authority to maintain discipline has been undermined. And in every country, there are those who seek to over-extend the intended meaning of the law for their own advantage, or to attempt to avoid the legitimate responsibilities of citizenship through 'loopholes' in legislation. Such actions indicate a focus on the dead letter of the law, not its living spirit, the inspiring principle of Justice.

On a more positive note, in the writings of Alice Bailey, there is much discussion of laws of various kinds, and two interesting definitions that shed light on both temporal life and spiritual life. The definitions run: "A law is an expression or manifestation of force applied, under the power of thought, by a thinker or group of thinkers." (*Discipleship in the New Age* Vol.I, p.42) and; "...a law is in reality the effect of the life of a greater entity as it encloses a lesser within its living processes. It embodies [the] formulated purpose or organised will of an enfolding life..." (*Esoteric Healing*, p.522) Although these definitions are definitely spiritual in implication, they can also be applied to temporal laws.

This raises an interesting question regarding the nature of international laws. The very existence of international laws already presupposes that a global good can be identified and worked towards; and by the second definition of law, isn't the creation of international laws tantamount to declaring that there is a *global* purpose? It is not surprising then, that so much international law has emerged from the work of the UN, which is the only centre dedicated to the whole agenda of human betterment that is truly global in scope. The sense of emerging planetary purpose, inchoate though it may be, is surely strongest in its halls.

(15) 1. *Everyone has the right to a nationality.*

2. *No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.*

What, you may be wondering, happened to Articles 13 & 14? The reason why we have presented Article 15 before Articles 13 & 14 is that 13 & 14 both refer to states/countries, and the rights contained in them rely for their enjoyment on the individual having a nationality. Identification with a particular nation has in the past been seen as perhaps the widest identification of which a person is capable. But in an increasingly globalised world, this is now beginning to change. People are now talking of 'world citizenship', and there are various organisations dedicated to the idea of some kind of future world government. Certainly, the primary recognition of identity with the One Life that the spiritual person acknowledges may give a warrant for this idea. However, it is also important to temper such idealistic thinking with a recognition of where the centre of gravity of human consciousness still lies. And at the moment, in spite of the increasing flows of people and information, it would seem that most people still regard themselves as being of a particular nationality. This provides an interesting test for those who would seek to expand

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<sup>\*</sup> Philip K. Howard, *The Collapse of the Common Good: How America's Lawsuit Culture Undermines Our Freedom*. Ballantine Books, New York, 2002. And contact Common Good, 675 Third Avenue, 32nd Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA; Fax: +1-(212)-681-8221; Email: [hq@cgood.org](mailto:hq@cgood.org); Web: [commongood.org](http://commongood.org) for the Common Good movement that has been set up to continue this discussion.

their identity beyond national boundaries – where are the institutions through which they can articulate this sense of world citizenship? Short of the rather unrealistic idea of creating them from scratch, what can they do to further their agenda? The more practical ‘world citizens’ tend to identify with, and seek to constructively engage with, the body from which the Declaration originally came, viz. the UN. They see the UN not as a perfect or complete organisation, but as a first stepping-stone towards any future world government. Rather than contemplating a misty vision of the far future, and/or demanding its instant manifestation, they are willing to grapple with global issues through the most comprehensive instrument that humanity has yet devised for the purpose. As such, they are taking to heart the important spiritual lesson that the most important step in the spiritual path is always the very next one – that there are no real short-cuts to the mountain-top.

In the meantime, we live in a world of nations, so the guarantee of nationality, which is really the guarantee of being in relationship with a national government and therefore entitled to its protections, is essential.

*(13) 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.*

*2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.*

*(14) 1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.*

*2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.*

These two articles, dealing as they do with the international movement of individuals, naturally fall together. Deep questions are raised by the existence of national borders: questions of national identity and culture; of the present distribution of money and power in the world; and of the turbulent effects of globalisation. The latter phenomenon sends money and products and ideas whirling around the globe at breakneck speed. Yet the ultimate control over these movements remains in large measure stubbornly rooted in a small number of nations, and in the hands of a small group within these nations. And when people try to join in this motion, they find that, except for a select few individuals, many state borders are more or less impenetrable.

Why do states guard admission to their societies so jealously? There are two main reasons. The first is economic, as governments worry that migrants and refugees will absorb more money than they contribute. The second is cultural, as the deep-rooted fear and distrust of the other surfaces in concerns that the national culture may be “diluted”. But both of these concerns can be viewed in a positive light. A number of studies suggest that immigrants do *not* act as a drain on the economy. And cultures are often enriched by cross-fertilisation, as the fields of pop music and cinema show. There is a third reason, given added prominence since September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, namely security. But while it is only common sense to increase the diligence with which legitimate checks on identity and intended purpose of entry are conducted, it is dangerous to extend this to policies that significantly curtail the human rights and liberties either of those seeking to enter a country or of those who are already citizens. Democracy depends on finding a balance between individual liberty and collective security, and where this balance swings too far in one direction, then both individuals and society suffer.

What is currently lacking in this situation is a generous willingness to share in the Earth’s bounty which is our common inheritance, and the attitude of goodwill towards all, which recognises our common humanity. If generosity and goodwill were the keynotes of global society, then the ‘problem’ of migration would vanish. For a more equitable distribution of riches among the nations would make it less likely that people would wish to leave their native land; and an open-armed and carefully thought-out programme of integrating immigrants into societies would disarm misunderstanding. This is not to pretend that such processes of re-distribution and

integration would be easy to accomplish – human thought and emotion are still strongly conditioned by separateness and selfishness. But it would certainly be worth all the intelligent and imaginative effort needed.

*(16) 1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.*

*2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.*

*3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.*

This article is, in cultural terms, another possible source of controversy. This is hardly surprising, as marriage exists at the meeting-point of sex, religion, culture and social policy. It raises profound issues in women's rights, and in the rights of future generations. It concerns individuals' most intense desires and, often, their most self-sacrificing behaviour. No doubt, humanity's understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage will continue to evolve, as will the associated rights.

*(17) 1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.*

*2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.*

This article is the most purely economic of all. It makes no specific commitment to any particular economic system – for even under most forms of communism, the individual would not be excluded from owning some personal property. Where the right to own property might come into conflict with other rights is where the accumulation of property by an individual or group reaches a point at which it begins to interfere with the potential for others to acquire sufficient resources to live a decent life. In our overcrowded world, which contains vast disparities of wealth, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that this is already the case. And while some of the financially wealthy are actively engaged in re-distributing the wealth they have acquired, not all are. So global economic systems clearly have some way to go before they reflect this article in its full context: indeed, it might have helped if the drafters had spelled out the implications of this article in more detail. Going beyond this, if we take into account the notion that all are born with an equal share in the Earth's resources, then one can imagine a future society where, freed from the shackles of selfishness, human beings are able to share the world in perfect equity. Given both the current economic systems in place, and the stage of evolution of human consciousness, it may be some time before this happens. However, the beginnings of this aspiration are clearly in place in such experiments as the Simple Living Network ([www.simpleliving.net](http://www.simpleliving.net)). And given the ever-growing human population, which places demands on planetary ecosystems that seem increasingly unsustainable, such an attitude is not just unselfish, but eminently sensible.

*(18) Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*

*(19) Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

*(20) 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*

*2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.*

These three articles may be taken together, as they concern the freedom of the citizen to engage in various forms of social activity. Freedom of thought and conscience seem in one sense to be

quite different from the other rights already discussed, since they can be enjoyed without any support from the state, and are usually thought of as having no influence on others (but see below). However, as soon as that freedom of thought is translated into practice, either as a religious activity or as the expression of opinion, then the potential for disagreement with others emerges. And while it is generally to be hoped that disagreement can be amicable, sometimes it is not.

Another factor that makes the possibility of disagreement more likely is Article 19's concept of imparting information through any media and across frontiers. Opinions, especially controversial ones, that would have stayed local only a hundred years ago, are now global within days. Alice Bailey suggests that the psychology of human beings is primarily conditioned by the quality of consciousness known as harmony through conflict, and the appetite for conflicts of opinion is a major driver of the world's media networks. This can be a good thing when it is done with the intention to find a creative solution that reconciles elements of opposing positions. Holding newspapers, television channels, internet bloggers and other media institutions to this high standard is an important task that people of goodwill can involve themselves in.

Finally, the provision for freedom of thought does not take into account the full power of thought – in every major faith tradition, the power of prayer or meditation is acknowledged; and some spiritual traditions go so far as to say that *every* thought has an effect on our environment, for good or ill. Freedom of thought therefore becomes a profound responsibility, and one which it can take a lifetime – or even several lifetimes – to perfect.

*(21) 1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.*

*2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.*

*3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.*

This article seems to privilege democracy over other forms of government. Is democracy the best political system for guaranteeing human rights? Well, one would think so, given that democracy is the system most openly concerned with empowering the individual, and human rights are all about the individual, and what he can expect from the state. There is perhaps a tendency in mature democracies to rather take democracy for granted. But it would be wise not to forget the long history of struggle which has led to this point. And there may also be a tendency to assume we know what democracy means – isn't it simply, one person, one vote?

It is true that universal and equal suffrage is the core principle of democracy, and, like human rights, it enshrines once more the fundamental equality of all persons and the value of the individual. But, as sub-article 3 indicates, more is needed before a society would be classified as truly democratic. The sub-article covers the points that there must be a regular electoral cycle guaranteed by law, and that the ballot must be secret, to prevent intimidation. It also hints, in its reference to "genuine elections", that the ballot must also be well designed and properly regulated, to avoid fraud. Yet there are still more conditions we can propose: for example, that the police and armed forces must be non-partisan; and that the media should be free to provide full and unbiased coverage of all involved in elections. Even this list is not exhaustive, and one could think of other conditions that are necessary. It is an interesting question whether any government yet existing would qualify, even in these terms, as a full democracy. By the same token, there is no society anywhere which implements the Universal Declaration in full. This is why the very existence of the Declaration is a kind of challenge to all governments, and in particular, to democracies. It is because democracies already set the bar for their behaviour so high, especially with respect to individuals, that so much is expected of them.

Alice Bailey proposes that the universality of democracy is humanity's response – inaccurate as yet – to the pure energy of Love, and suggests that a true democracy will become possible “through a right use of the systems of education and by a steady training of the people to recognise the finer values, the more correct point of view, the higher idealism, and the spirit of synthesis and of cooperative unity.” To move towards this true democracy, she indicates that what is needed is a greater number of truly awakened people; and when this is so, “we shall see a purification of the political field taking place, and a cleansing of our processes of representation instituted, as well as a more exacting accounting required from the people of those whom they have chosen to put in authority. There must eventually be a closer tie-up between the educational system, the legal system and the government, but it will all be directed to an effort to work out the best ideals of the thinkers of the day.” (*The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* pp. 52-3) When this is so, “...people will not tolerate authoritarianism in any church, or totalitarianism in any political system or government; they will not accept or permit the rule of any body of men who undertake to tell them what they must believe in order to be saved, or what government they must accept.” (*op. cit.* p.618)

*(22) Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.*

There is little to note in this article, apart from the significant statement “in accordance with the organization and resources of each State”. There are many states which cannot yet afford to grant their citizens some of the economic, social and cultural rights, such as universal primary education. As Article 28 below indicates, the key challenge is to find a way of more equitably sharing the riches of the planet so that all citizens have all rights.

*(23) 1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.*

*2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.*

*3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.*

*4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.*

*(24) Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.*

The right to work is a complex one, involving not only the state's economic and social responsibilities to the individual, but also the moral responsibility of the individual. The following extract from E.F. Schumacher especially emphasises the latter point:

“Traditional wisdom teaches that the function of work is at heart threefold: (1) to give a person a chance to utilize and develop his faculties; (2) to enable him to overcome his inborn egocentricity by joining with other people in a common task; and (3) to bring forth the goods and services needed by all of us for a decent existence. I think all this needs to be taught ...

The question is raised: How do we prepare young people for the future world of work, and the first answer, I think, must be: We should prepare them to be able to distinguish between good work and bad work and encourage them not to accept the latter. That is to say, they should be encouraged to reject meaningless, boring, stultifying and nerve-racking work in which a man (or woman) is made the servant of a machine or a system. They should be taught that work is the joy of life and is needed for our development, but that meaningless work is an abomination...” (from Schumacher, E. F. *Good Work*. Sphere Books, London, 1980)



Perhaps the key point in sub-article 1 is therefore “free choice of employment”. Sadly, today, this is not true for vast numbers of people, who must either accept unemployment or employment in jobs they dislike in varying degrees, thus increasing their stress levels. Passage to a society where there is truly free choice of creative employment on behalf of the whole looks likely to be a long struggle. As Schumacher suggests, a major key to this process is education.

Sub-article 3 and its requirement of “just and favourable remuneration” can be directly linked with the Living Wage Movement. The following passage, taken from the World Goodwill Study Set on the Problem of Capital, Labour and Employment (Available on request from World Goodwill, and downloadable from our website, [www.worldgoodwill.org](http://www.worldgoodwill.org)) explains this in more detail:

“Because the primary source of income for the majority of the working class around the world is earned through ‘self-employment with minimal monetary gain, it has been proposed by the Center for Popular Economics ([www.populareconomics.com](http://www.populareconomics.com)) that one strategy to deal with the problem of low-level incomes is to raise the returns that people receive for work — both paid and informal. One such strategy is gradual wage equalization and the establishment of a universal formula for determining the living wage that would include every region of the world...

The term living wage refers to the minimum hourly wage necessary for a person to achieve a basic standard of living. In the context of developed countries such as the United States, Great Britain or Switzerland, this standard is generally considered to require that a person working forty hours a week, with no additional income, should be able to afford housing, food, utilities, transport, healthcare and a certain amount of recreation.”

Highlighted in sub-article 4, the right to form trade unions is significant, because it is largely by withholding their labour in strikes that workers in the industrialised world have struggled for, and attained, their freedom and basic rights. When the modern labour movement came into being it was, as Alice Bailey writes in *Problems of Humanity*, “a great spiritual movement, leading to the uprising anew of the divine spirit” in humanity and to an expression of “spiritual qualities inherent in the race”. But, as she also warned, the labour movement has, in some instances, now ceased to be a movement that works for the interests of the great masses of the people. There are examples of modern trade unions becoming powerful organisations dedicated to achieving the maximum advantages for their own members, even if this is detrimental to the general good. Where this has happened, the unions have, like capital, become a force of organised selfishness. What is needed is a new relationship of more equal partnership between capital and labour, mediated by management, which finds ways of giving meaningful work and remuneration to all, while at the same time respecting the limits of planetary ecosystems.

*(25) 1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

*2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.*

The first part of sub-article 1 can be linked to the discussion of the Living Wage above. But what if the person is, for one reason or another, unemployed? Then a related concept, that of a Citizen's or Basic Income, has been advanced by a number of progressive economic thinkers, such as James Robertson. A Citizen's Income (CI) is an automatic, unconditional and nonwithdrawable income for every citizen, paid for by reducing tax allowances and means-tested and contributory benefits.

A CI scheme (sometimes called Basic Income or Universal Benefit) is intended to overcome the failings of the present welfare state. It is suggested that it would be simple in application, increase economic efficiency, help prevent poverty and unite society. Its payment would crucially *not* depend on work status. Anyone entering or re-entering the labour market would keep their CIs, and students and trainees would have a secure income. By abolishing the availability-for-work test, the introduction of a Citizen's Income would reduce the level at which paid work became worthwhile. The present pattern of employment opportunities in many countries is too rigid and inflexible, particularly for disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities and single parents with small children. It is also unsuitable for increasing numbers of older workers who might prefer some form of part-time working in the transition from full-time employment to retirement. With a CI in hand, part-time work, flexible working, temporary contracts and self-employment would become more attractive. By helping to break down the barriers between employment and unemployment, a Citizen's Income should enable workers to develop more flexible patterns of work more consistent with their own needs. And it would give some reward to those whose voluntary caring contribution to society is so important. (text adapted from [www.citizensincome.org](http://www.citizensincome.org))

*(26) 1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.*

*2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

*3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.*

The importance of education in the modern world can scarcely be understated. Multiple planetary crises are looming ever larger, and the children of today must be given the means to grapple with them. However, this cannot be through the endless inculcation of information. While an adequate platform of knowledge is necessary as a starting point, what is also crucial is the engagement of children's creativity – for creative innovation and unselfish action will be needed to tackle the growing planetary emergency.

This new kind of education calls for the recognition of the whole human being, including his/her ethical, inner or spiritual dimension; it posits the need for students to be aware of the planet as a whole, and it focuses on the interconnectedness of all life and the interdependence of all systems. The inner, subjective world of the human being, the outer, tangible/objective environment, and the connecting, interdependent relationships must be explored and understood. The inner and the outer dimensions must be recognised as being related, equally divine, and deserving of further understanding and development.

The role of educators is of central importance to this new education. It is imperative that they are, as far as possible, free of prejudice, have a sense of world citizenship, and reflect healthy, constructive attitudes. It is important that teachers are caring and loving and are able to create the right atmosphere in which the child can freely learn and grow. An understanding of psychological principles would also seem to be an imperative so that teachers can more fully realise their roles as educators: helping to *lead out* of students their highest potential while teaching them to work with and overcome their weaknesses and limitations.

Our educational systems must encompass a new vision and goal. The growing recognition that the substance abuse, delinquency, and general unrest, so visible in our contemporary society, stems equally from a material as well as from a spiritual poverty is also leading to a new understanding about what constitutes an adequate educational system. We are recognising that

the problem of education is no longer only a matter of creating literacy and conveying a body of factual knowledge. It is also the problem of being able to present the hypothesis of the soul – the interior factor within each human being which produces “the good, the true, and the beautiful”. Creative expression and humanitarian effort will then be recognised as the logical and scientific outcome of specifically applied educational procedures.

*(27) 1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.*

*2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.*

There is little to note concerning this article except that sub-article 2 of this article concerning ownership of scientific and artistic productions is an area undergoing huge flux at the moment, thanks to the increasing digitalisation of all forms, making them far easier to transmit and copy. Given the way in which current economic systems work, it is probably too early to expect human beings to share ideas freely right from their creation, although the Creative Commons movement (see [creativecommons.org](http://creativecommons.org)) is making steps in this direction. But it is at least possible to imagine a future in which this sub-article will become redundant, because it will be the common understanding that every product of the human mind and heart exists for the good of all.

*(28) Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.*

This Article reveals the full scope of the framers' vision – a world where the nations actively cooperate, sharing the world's resources with sufficient equity that the poorest person in the poorest state is nevertheless endowed with every single one of the rights in the Declaration. If we are still far from this position, how much further were they, in the aftermath of World War 2? Yet they had the boldness to set forth a vision of high principle that will require for its eventual realisation the best from every single person, whether ordinary citizen or international statesman. Such a vision is indeed spiritual, and should inspire our active support and cooperation.

These reflections lead straight into the next Article:

*(29) 1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.*

*2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.*

*3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.*

The flip side of rights are of course responsibilities\* or duties. As suggested above, and also emphasised in the Preamble, it is the duty of everyone who believes in the Declaration to make that belief practical by promoting it. And beyond that, to live their life in accordance with its principles, which will entail further efforts to support it. How far one takes this is a matter of personal decision, but one could imagine for example an interpretation of Article 25 that one has the duty to look after one's own health, to ensure that an excessive strain is not placed on health

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\* The Interaction Council, a distinguished body of elder statesmen, have gone so far as to prepare a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, as a complement to the Declaration of Human Rights. Copies are available from World Goodwill on request. Also available are copies of the Earth Charter, which approaches this idea from an ecological angle.

services. Going beyond the individual level, there are so many different types of civil society organisation now that deal with all of the issues raised in the Declaration that any person of goodwill should be able to find a field of service that will suit them.

Sub-article 2 emphasises the reciprocity and interdependence of human rights – they can only really be fully protected if each person recognises their part in the process. This interdependence mirrors the interdependence of planetary ecosystems, which reminds us that we have responsibilities not just to other humans, but to all forms of life.

The Declaration concludes with an obvious yet important coda:

*(30) Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.*

## **Conclusion**

Having examined the Declaration in some detail, it is time to consider how the rights it contains actually work out. The first stage in this working out comes, as suggested in the introduction, in the formulation of laws – for it is only then that governments can apply rights in practice. As mentioned in the discussion of Article 2, the rights in the Declaration were divided into two legal instruments or Covenants. Originally, only one Covenant had been intended, which would have included only civil and political rights. But when economic, social and cultural rights were added, then some nations claimed that, because their realisation depended on the availability of resources, these should be regarded as aspirations, not rights. As such, these nations argued, they should not be binding obligations that might dilute the provision of civil and political rights. Because of this difference of opinion, it was decided to split the Covenant into two, one on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the other on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

What this division encapsulates is the inherent difficulty in grounding ideals in human living. Always in the past, there have been differences of interpretation of rights, caused by longstanding cultural and ideological differences between individuals, between groups, and between nations. As noted in the discussion of Articles 18 to 20, humanity is strongly conditioned by the quality of consciousness known as harmony through conflict, and we may hope that there will eventually be a resolution of this fundamental disagreement, with the two Covenants being re-united to mirror the Declaration. But for the moment, humanity has two distinct legal instruments based on the UDHR. The provisions of the ICCPR and the ICESCR are more detailed and extensive than the UDHR, precisely because they are intended to be incorporated into law. So, while the UDHR consists of 30 articles and 1,800 words, the two Covenants between them include 84 articles and 10,641 words.\*

In practice, any nation can sign up to either one or both of these Covenants. As things stand in 2009, 164 nations are Parties to the ICCPR, and 160 are Parties to the ICESCR. This is in the context of the UN membership roster of 192 nations. So we can see that, while the rights in the UDHR are not yet universally accepted, there are only a few nations that are not yet willing to make it part of their legal systems. However, these headline figures conceal the fact that nations do not necessarily sign up to every provision in a Covenant. If they so choose, at the time of

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\* In fact, the Covenants are only two of many *conventions*, i.e. legally binding instruments concluded under international law. Those areas of human rights law that the UN believes require extra attention have their own convention. Some of the more well-known conventions are those on the Rights of the Child, on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. However, the ICCPR and the ICESCR are the two with the widest scope, and, when taken together with the UDHR, they are sometimes referred to as the International Bill of Rights.

signing, they can make reservations to specific provisions, if they feel they conflict with their own national laws (it is worth noting that other nations may formally express their opinion of disagreement with these reservations). And furthermore, there is also the possibility of derogating from specific provisions in a time of emergency, such as war.

So in fact, instead of a uniform picture, there is a rather complicated patchwork of agreement and disagreement over the implementation of rights. This is without taking into consideration just how far the provisions of the Covenants have been integrated into specific national laws, and how zealously these laws are upheld, two factors that may shift rapidly in response to world events. For example, in Europe, a continent traditionally associated with the defence of human rights, we find that immigration policy has become tougher in Denmark since the turn of the millennium. And in the Netherlands and the UK, there is considerable ongoing debate about what is admissible as free speech, particularly with regard to the portrayal of Islam. Indeed, as we live in an increasingly technology-driven society, with multiple modes of transmitting information, the issue of censorship versus free speech, is coming more sharply into focus everywhere. Technology also impinges on the right to privacy, with government departments and commercial companies holding more and more information on citizens.

However, it would be wise not to despair too soon at what appears to be a gradual erosion of some rights. We should not forget how far the world has come since 1948, particularly since the two Covenants did not even exist until 1966. The women's movement has taken major strides; state-sanctioned racism, such as apartheid in South Africa, is largely at an end; the countries that formerly composed the Eastern bloc now have governments that, by and large, have embraced democracy. And if we take an even longer-term perspective, we can see that history reveals a steady increase in the human rights granted to each citizen, in spite of the temporary set-backs that sometimes occur in times of social turmoil.\*

One important mechanism to help prevent the further erosion of rights is the reporting mechanisms inherent in the ICCPR and the ICESCR. Among their provisions is the requirement that governments must report on the progress made in implementing the Human Rights covered by the Covenants, thus providing an important benchmark that the nation's citizens, and other governments, can use to measure progress. The ICCPR report is submitted every five years to the Human Rights Committee, a body of 18 independent Human Rights experts which meets in New York or Geneva three times a year. The Human Rights Committee then enter into constructive dialogue with representatives of the country submitting the report, and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the representatives in a series of concluding observations. The ICESCR report is submitted to the Economic and Social Council of the UN. The Economic and Social Council can in turn transmit findings from these reports to the Human Rights **Council** – not to be confused with the Human Rights Committee cited above: the Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the UN system made up of a rotating panel of 47 States. It is a more controversial body than the lower profile Committee, because the Council's operation and public statements have sometimes been regarded as politicised. In fact, the Human Rights Council, as well as receiving information from other UN bodies such as the Economic and Social Council, also requires, under a process called the Universal Periodic Review set up only in 2007, a report on Human Rights from each member state every four years. While this process is not directly linked with the two Covenants, it is clearly related in intent, and is also more comprehensive in coverage, since all 192 member states must comply, even those who have not signed the two Covenants (for example, China, which is not a party to the ICCPR, underwent the review process in 2009).

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\* Speaking in New York, at the 2008 World Goodwill Seminar *Human Rights, Spiritual Responsibilities – A Crisis for Democracy*, Kimberley Riley outlined the historical growth of rights in the context of democracy from the time of the Babylonian emperor, Hammurabi (1760 BC). The transcript can be ordered from World Goodwill, and the audio recording is available on our website at [www.worldgoodwill.org](http://www.worldgoodwill.org)

While none of the bodies who receive these reports and comment upon them have the legal power to compel nations to change their ways, their ability to shine a light on the Human Rights situation in a public context is important. It allows other nations, civil society organisations, and globally minded citizens to gauge progress, and to establish fresh priorities for thought and action. And in an age of global media, being seen to conform to accepted norms of international behaviour is an increasingly powerful incentive to governments. Indeed, a number of governments, such as the USA, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the UK, have specific departments or divisions that explicitly focus on Human Rights.

Thus, from one Declaration, we have proceeded to two Covenants, to a number of international legal instruments, and finally to a multitude of actual legal provisions. From simplicity to complexity, from high principle to imperfect implementation – this, it seems, is ever the way with human institutions. But there is much that people of goodwill can do to support the continuing perfection of implementation of Human Rights. There are civil society organisations that focus specifically on the theme of human rights: Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are two of the largest, but there are many others, that deal with issues specific to certain rights – such as children's rights, women's rights, immigrants rights etc. - or that focus on regional or national issues. And in fact, although they may not explicitly focus on Human Rights, the work of most civil society organisations impinges on this topic in one way or another. Nevertheless, while practical participation in such work is an important avenue of service, perhaps the most potent open to people of goodwill is that of meditation.

Group meditation can be a powerful form of service to humanity in a time of world crisis such as this, when the old and familiar ways have been called into question and found lacking, yet when little clarity has emerged to light the way. Fundamental ideas on which a new and better world for all must be based, such as the UDHR, can be clarified and empowered through the power of meditation, making them recognisable to people of goodwill all over the world. Group meditation can help to stimulate the growth of public opinion, and augment the efforts of those servers who have thought their way through to a new level of understanding, helping them to hold their wisdom as a vision before the eyes of all people.

Thinking through the implications of one's own worldview and taking the necessary steps to adjust one's attitudes and relationships so that they are truly motivated by group good and the larger welfare of human society, inevitably provokes its own kind of crisis, but a constructive, spiritual crisis that leads to clearer discrimination between needs and wants, that quiets the cry of self-interest and the demands of the separated self. By giving the power of our concentrated thought, we help create the mental atmosphere in which breakthroughs and innovations in Human Rights and democracy can happen, leading to a world in which the value of the individual and the fact of the one humanity are universally accepted and respected. The UDHR stands as a spiritual landmark in humanity's ongoing efforts to create a truly global civilization, and the document itself, and all of the efforts to put it into practice of the preceding sixty years, calls on us to continue to widen its range of influence, so that its next sixty years will give further cause for celebration.

## **THE OBJECTIVES OF WORLD GOODWILL**

To stimulate and encourage men and women of goodwill everywhere to establish right human relations between races, nations, and classes by an intelligent understanding and adequate communication.

To assist men and women of goodwill in their studies of world problems and in the effective application to these problems of goodwill, cooperation and sharing for the common good.

To cooperate with other organizations in constructive activities contributing to world unity, stability and right human relations.

To make available up-to-date information on constructive current action in the main areas of human life through the publication of a quarterly newsletter.

To establish a goodwill Commentary on issues of world interest.

To aid in establishing goodwill as the keynote of the new civilization.

To create a worldwide mailing list of men and women of goodwill.

To support the work of the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies as the best hope for a united and peaceful world.

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**WORLD GOODWILL** is an activity of the **LUCIS TRUST**, a non-profit, educational organization first incorporated in the USA in 1922.

The Lucis Trust is on the Roster of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. World Goodwill is an accredited non-governmental organization with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations.