

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, 10 DECEMBER 2017** **Values enshrined in Universal Declaration of Human Rights under assault, must be defended – Zeid**

“Human Rights Day falls on 10 December every year, the day when, back in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the world’s most widely translated\* and possibly most influential document – was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, itself just three years old at the time.”

“Thanks to the Universal Declaration, the daily life of millions has been improved, untold human suffering has been prevented and the foundations for a more just world have been laid. While its promise is yet to be fulfilled, the very fact that it has stood the test of time is testament to the enduring universality of its perennial values of equality, justice and human dignity.”

“Next year – on 10 December 2018 – we will celebrate **the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, and this year’s Human Rights Day on Sunday marks the beginning of a year-long 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration.”

“It will also, I hope, be a year of intense and profound reflection on the continuing and vital importance of each and every one of the 30 articles contained in this extraordinary document.”

“The Universal Declaration was drawn up by a world wounded by war, the remedy prescribed by States to inoculate their populations against their own worst instincts and omissions. It was drawn up by representatives, and endorsed by leaders, of countries from all continents, who were – to quote from the Declaration’s preamble – fully, recently, sorely, aware that ‘disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.’”

“It was drawn up with the memory and knowledge of the Holocaust, and the attitudes and accumulation of policies and practices that made it possible, seared on the conscience of those who failed to prevent it.”

“It was drawn up to cover not only civil and political rights, but also social, economic and cultural rights, in the full understanding that you cannot have development without human rights and you cannot have a full enjoyment of human rights without development – and peace and security depend on both.”

“Today, as World War II and the Holocaust grow distant, that awareness appears to be evaporating at an alarming rate, and the enormous progress that has been achieved through progressive enactment of human rights principles, as laid out in the Universal Declaration, is being increasingly forgotten or wilfully ignored.”

“The universality of rights is being contested across much of the world. It is under broad assault from terrorists, authoritarian leaders and populists who seem only too willing to sacrifice, in varying degrees, the rights of others, for the sake of power. Their combined influence has grown at the expense of liberal democratic order, peace and justice.”

“We see mounting cruelties and crimes being perpetrated in conflicts across the world; an antagonistic nationalism on the rise, with surging levels of racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination taking root, even in countries which had grown complacent in the belief these were problems of the past, rather

than ones that could all too easily re-emerge and reassert themselves.”

“We see measures to end discrimination and promote greater justice – some of the fruits of the Universal Declaration and the immense body of law and practice it has spawned – starting to be being dismantled by those who seek profit from hatred and exploitation. We see a backlash against many human rights advances, including on the rights of women and those of many minorities, in the Americas, Asia, Africa and Europe.”

“We see political leaders who openly deny the fundamental truth of article 1 of the Universal Declaration which states that ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.’ Political leaders who defy their forbears’ promise ‘to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance.’”

“The Universal Declaration is a commitment, by all States, that they will protect and promote human rights. It is essential that we continue to hold those States to account. But human rights are too important to be left to States alone – too precious to all of us, and to our children.”

“As we enter the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Universal Declaration, it is right that we should honour its achievements and pay tribute to its inspired architects. At the same time, we should be under no illusions: the legacy of the Universal Declaration is facing threats on many fronts. If we let our commitment to uphold human rights drift – if we turn aside when they are abused – they will slowly shrivel and die. If that happens, the cost in human life and misery will be immense, and the whole of humanity will pay a heavy price.”

“Ultimately it is up to us, to ‘we the people,’ for whom this Declaration was written. It is up to me; to you; to everyone in every city, province and country where there is still space to express thoughts, participate in decisions, raise one’s voice. We need to act to promote peace, fight back against discrimination, and to uphold justice.”

“We must organize and mobilise in defence of human decency, in defence of a better common future. We must not stand by, bewildered, as the post-World War II system of values unravels around us. We must take a robust and determined stand: by resolutely supporting the human rights of others, we also stand up for our own rights and those of generations to come.”

ENDS

On Sunday 10 December, the High Commissioner will mark Human Rights Day and the launch of the 70th anniversary campaign alongside the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris -- the historic site of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948.

Visit the **Stand Up 4 Human Rights** website dedicated to the year-long campaign related to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UDHR: <http://www.standup4humanrights.org/>

Specific projects designed to promote the relevance of the Universal Declaration include “**Add Your Voice**” which aims to promote and disseminate the UDHR in over 100 languages. An online application allows people to record themselves reading an article of the UDHR in their own language and share it on social media – encouraging others to do the same. Visit: <https://www.un.org/en/udhr-video/>

To join the thousands of people have already taken the **Stand Up pledge**: go to: <http://standup4humanrights.org/en/index.html#pledge>:

\* The Universal Declaration of Human Rights holds the world record for the largest number of translations, with the current total standing at over 500 languages.