

UN's 1948 human rights credo worthy of respect today

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By **SARA WEINBERGER**

NORTHAMPTON — On Dec. 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Forty-eight nations voted for the declaration, with eight countries abstaining.

Two years after its creation, a fledgling United Nations approved a document that proclaimed the rights that should be accorded to all human beings by virtue of nothing, except the fact that they are born human.

In our own community, the Aspire Project can benefit from the wisdom of the declaration. Raising our children at school and at home with a profound respect for the dignity and worth of all people can be an antidote to the callousness and insensitivity displayed by those who do not respect each others' humanity.

(Sara Weinberger, right.)

In today's world of conflicts and disagreements, the fact that so many countries with political and cultural differences could vote to adopt a document that recognizes that "the inherent dignity and ... the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" and "that human rights should be protected by the rule of law" is nothing short of a miracle.

Yet most people I've talked to have never even heard of the declaration, and those who have often dismiss it because it was never ratified as a law and thus, according to the skeptics, it's unenforceable.



Yet the Declaration of Human Rights affords us a vision of a world that promotes freedom, respect and opportunity for all human beings. The declaration talks about “equal rights of men and women” and in its 30 articles spells out our liberty, legal, and subsistence rights, as well as our duties to our community and responsibilities to protect everyone’s freedom.

It is a recipe for a world that values humanity, without exception, and that provides all people with the opportunities to realize human potential.

All over the world, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been used by grassroots groups to advocate for social justice, to challenge government ideologies and unjust laws. Schools in remote villages in places like Bangladesh use it as an educational tool to teach children that they are valuable and deserving. The declaration is a weapon that has fueled human rights movements on every continent, where activists work to expose injustices, advocating for the protection of child soldiers, sweatshop workers, political dissidents, victims of sexual trafficking, and so many other human beings whose rights have been disregarded.

Locally, we can use the spirit and language of the declaration to advocate for quality education, law enforcement that protects everyone’s rights, jobs that pay a living wage, affordable housing and other resources necessary to ensure the rights and freedoms of all members of our community.

We could start with the powerful lesson of Article 1 in the declaration, which states, “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” (and sisterhood in post-1948 language). Imagine how different our school environments might be if children internalized these beliefs!

The declaration can guide us from where we are to where we might aspire to be in a world that recognizes the sacredness of humanity.

I would urge those who haven’t read the declaration to go to Google or your local library and take a few minutes to read it.

It’s intentionally written in clear and understandable language in order to be widely accessible. We can celebrate Human Rights Day this Dec. 10 by committing ourselves to do our part to protect and advance human rights, locally or globally, by getting involved in a movement with a bold vision that benefits everyone.

The Northampton Human Rights Commission has adopted the declaration as a guide to inform its mission “to uphold the human rights of all persons in Northampton.”

Each of us, as individuals, parents or members of community and faith-based groups and organizations, has the opportunity to decide how we might choose to live in a way that’s guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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