

Reflections on
75
Years of the
Universal
Declaration of
Human Rights
&



25 Years of The Declaration on Human
Rights Defenders: A moment of reflection

CONCEPT NOTE



European
Union



**Ford
Foundation**



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

BACKGROUND

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) commemorates its 75th Anniversary this year; this document, which essentially set out the foundation of International Human Rights Law, the basis of International Legal System and inspired many binding international and regional human rights treaties, continues to have relevance in the global political and legal landscape.¹

The UDHR is a foundational blueprint for taking concrete actions to stand up for human rights and tackle pressing global issues today. It recognised that promoting and protecting human rights for all is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. The UDHR also recognised that human rights are universal and indivisible, anchored in fundamental values that span every culture, religion, and continent. The UDHR laid the foundation for many treaties that govern international human rights law today, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and on a continental level, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

The provision of key foundational human rights such as the right to equality and dignity as provided for in Article 1 of the UDHR, non-discrimination in the application of the Declaration as set out in Article 2; equality before the law as provided in Article 7 and the various freedoms informed the content of various Constitutions and Bills of Rights of nations across the world. Although the UDHR itself is not legally binding, its influence on global minimum standards in relation to human rights and on global protection and promotion of human rights cannot be understated.

At the same time, political, economic, social, and technological forces that shape the human experience have caused setbacks in the promise of the UDHR. Much of the potential of human rights to build a better, equal, just, and prosperous world for all remains untapped. The 75th Anniversary provides us with a moment of reflection, while we see the vital impact of the UDHR on Human Rights Law globally, we also see a global 'backtracking' on the ideals enshrined in this document.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law>

As we reflect on the 75 years of the UDHR, it is pertinent to recall that 25 years ago, the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted by the United Nations, setting out the role of human rights defenders in defending human rights and the obligations of states towards human rights defenders. Africa has persistently experienced a concerning crackdown against human rights defenders through the adoption of repressive legislation, political persecution and the use of the criminal justice system to silence human rights advocacy, political activism and pressure groups as an attempt to shrink civic space.

In this context, The Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria and OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa (OHCHR ROSA), in partnership with the Ford Foundation and the European Union (EU) Delegation in South Africa, will commemorate International Human Rights Day this year in the context of the UDHR 75th year and the 25th Anniversary of the HRDs Declaration. The Commemoration will assess progress made in advancing human rights guaranteed by the UDHR and the challenges human rights defenders face in defending human rights.

OBJECTIVES:

This moment of reflection calls us to:

- Reflect on UDHR as a Human Rights Instrument and the strides it has made in International Human Rights Law.
- Critically reflect on the state of Human Rights in African and explore opportunities towards ensuring the implementation of provisions of the UDHR.
- Examine the shrinking civic space and challenges human rights defenders face on the African continent.

