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The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** represents the first and the most important formulation of **international human rights standard**. It was adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on **10 December 1948** as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations, to that every individual and every organ of society, 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.

### **Objectives of UDHR**

**The Preamble of UDHR** makes it clear that it was a simple testimony to the fact that it was the first normative response of the international community to the terrible experiences that had during the second World war. It noted that disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind. It emphasized that 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. It also stressed that a common understanding of the human rights and freedoms enshrined in the UN charter is of greatest importance for the full realization of the pledge. **The UDHR consists of one Preamble and thirty articles.** This was reflected in

**Article 1 as 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'**. They are endowed with reasons and conscience and should act towards one another by a spirit of brotherhood. It defined the basic assumption of the Declaration that i) the right to liberty and equality is man's birthright and cannot be alienated, and that ii) because man is a rational and moral being he is different from other creatures on earth and therefore entitled to certain rights and freedoms which other creatures do not enjoy. Similarly, **Article 2 set out the basic principle of equality and non discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political and other opinion national or social origin, property birth and other status.**

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF UDHR**

When the UN General Assembly adopted UDHR in 1948, it only intended the Declaration to be 'a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations'. After 70 years of UDHR it still stands as the single most important normative act ever adopted by the United Nations, for a number of reasons such as-First, having come through the harrowing experiences of inter-war totalitarianism and the horrors of the Second World War, the post-war international community set its human rights agenda through the Declaration. Since then the record of state behaviour became subjected to scrutiny through the standards set by UDHR. Second, although the Declaration did not proclaim itself to be legally binding, it acquired such a character in two ways. It came to be regarded as an interpretation and elaboration of the UN Charter provisions on human rights. Its influence on the drafting and practice of state constitutions which came into existence after 1948, has been extremely impressive and far-reaching. The founding fathers of the Indian Constitution too were influenced by UDHR. Indian courts still use the

Declaration to interpret and clarify the Fundamental Rights provisions of the Constitution. Third, UDHR provided the normative basis for all future activities of the United Nations in the field of Human Rights. It led to the drafting of the two International Covenants on Human Rights in 1966 - both of which, along with UDHR, constitute the International Bill of Rights. The diverse provisions of UDHR inspired the eventual drafting and adoption of a large number of treaties and further declarations on specific aspects of human rights. In fact, almost all the United Nations' human rights instruments that have emerged so far are in some way or the other based on UDHR. Fourth, the Declaration also inspired efforts at the regional level for evolving human rights institutions. Its influence on the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950 and the institutions established under this treaty, such as the European Commission of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, has been very significant. The Charter of the Organization of African Unity, 1963, also acknowledges its influences. However, we cannot overlook the fact that UDHR reflects what was essentially a mid-century Western perception of human rights, a response to the inter-war and wartime European experiences. An international community dominated by the Western countries adopted it. The presence of the Third World countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America started being felt at the United Nations only from 1960s. Till then, their human rights problems did not receive as much serious attention at the United Nations as they deserved.

Thus, this has led to a debate with regard to both the theories of Human Rights as well their universality.