Human Rights Glossary

Civil and Political Rights: The rights of citizens to liberty and equality. **Examples:** freedom to worship, vote, assemble, access information.

Convention, Covenant, Treaty: Binding agreements between states. All three are stronger than declarations because they are legally binding for governments that have ratified them. Governments that ratify a convention but violate the standards it sets forth can be censured by the United Nations. (Note: When a government ratifies a treaty, its articles become part of national law.)

Examples:


Declaration: Document stating agreed-upon standards that are not legally binding. The United Nations General Assembly often issues influential declarations.

Example: the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948).*

Economic, Social, Cultural Rights: Rights that concern the production, development, and management of material for the necessities of life.

Examples: the right to education, food, shelter, health care.

Human Rights: The rights people are entitled to simply because they are human beings, irrespective of their citizenship, nationality, race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, or abilities; human rights become enforceable when they are codified as conventions, covenants, or treaties.

Human Rights Education: Provides knowledge about the historical and contemporary significance of human rights and the mechanisms that protect them, and reinforces skills and values to uphold human rights.

Inalienable: The principle that human rights belong to every human being and cannot be taken from a person under any circumstances. They are not given to people by their government or any other authority, nor can they be taken away.
**Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs):** Organizations sponsored by several governments that seek to coordinate their efforts.

**Examples:**
- Regional: Council of Europe, Organization of American States.
- Dedicated to a specific purpose: World Health Organization, International Labor Organization.

**International Humanitarian Law (IHL):** The body of law, mainly based on the Geneva Conventions, that establishes the “rules of war,” protecting soldiers and civilians and limiting the methods of combat in order to limit destruction and suffering.

**Legally Binding:** Establishing lawful accountability. In human rights law, refers to a **covenant, convention or treaty**.

**Nonbinding:** A document, like a **declaration**, that carries no formal legal obligations. It may, however, carry moral obligations or attain the force of law as customary international law.

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Organizations formed by people outside of government. The “watchdogs” of human rights that monitor violations. NGOs influence United Nations policy, and many have official consultative status at the United Nations.

**Examples:**
- Large and international: Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International.
- Small and local: an organization to promote gender equality.

**Ratification, Ratify:** Formal procedure by which the legislative body of a state obligates itself to accept the terms of a **treaty**.

**Reservation:** The exceptions that governments make to a **treaty**, including provisions that they do not agree to follow.

**Universal, Universality:** A principle that all human rights are held by all persons in all states and societies in the world.

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** Adopted 1948. Declares a common standard of achievements for all persons and all states around the world. It set out, for the first time, universal protection of fundamental human rights.
Dear Colleagues,

This morning, Monday, December 19, 2011, the General Assembly of the United Nations officially adopted the UN Declaration of Human Rights Education and Training. This landmark document recognizes the right of every one of the planet’s seven billion people to have access to human rights education, a lifelong process involving all ages, all parts of society, and every kind of education, formal and informal.

The Declaration specifies not simply what one should learn about human rights, but also how (“through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners”) and also why (“for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others”).

For North American educators the Declaration presents a distinct challenge and a great opportunity. It names the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the primary basis for this learning. Yet a national survey conducted in 1997 showed that over 90% of people in the United States had never even heard of this fundamental document. Because you cannot graduate from any high school in this country without a course in US history and government, most North Americans can name many of their Constitutional rights. However, very few would recognize health care, shelter, or a living wage as a right, all of which are guaranteed in the Universal Declaration. The Declaration thus provides an opportunity for North Americans to expand our understanding of fundamental human rights, the building blocks of representative democracy.

The adoption of this new Declaration also offers the educators and policy makers an occasion to reassess state and national policies and priorities in the light of international standards. If as the Declaration states, “human rights education and training is essential for the promotion of universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all,” then human rights education is not only the entitlement of every North American, but also a necessity for responsible citizenship, both of the US, Canada and of the world.

Best regards,
Nancy Flowers
National Consultant, HRE USA Network

UN Declaration of Human Rights Education and Training

**Article 1**

1. Everyone has the right to know, seek and receive information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms and should have access to human rights education and training.

2. Human rights education and training is essential for the promotion of universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, in accordance with the principles of the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.

3. The effective enjoyment of all human rights, in particular the right to education and access to information, enables access to human rights education and training.

RESOLUTION # 13-02-2

NCSS ENDORSES INCLUSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AS A CORE ELEMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES

Sponsored by: Human Rights Education Community


RATIONALE: Connecting the personal, local, and global domains of experience begins with an awareness of the universal aspirations throughout the human family of dignity human rights. Thus, social studies educators recognize the need for students in the United States to learn the fundamental principles of human rights and humanitarian law as an integral component of a broadly defined civic education. Responsible citizenship requires that young people develop a critical understanding of these two related fields which are deeply embedded in the history and culture of the United States and which are essential for the realization of human freedom worldwide.

WHEREAS: Education about human rights and humanitarian law is an essential component of democratic citizenship and civic education, supporting the ideals and principles embedded in the Declaration of Independence, the U. S. Constitution, constitutions of the states, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Geneva Conventions;

WHEREAS: Numerous studies have documented the critical linkages between school-based civic education and well-informed civic participation by adults;

WHEREAS: The United States, in its own history and in collaboration with other nations has traditions of commitment to the defense of human rights and humanitarian conduct since before the Revolutionary War, which should be shared with each new generation of Americans;

WHEREAS: The United Nations General Assembly, through a consensus reached with the concurrence of the United States has established by declaration a World Program for Human Rights Education to encourage civil society and school-based programs of human rights education;

WHEREAS: The United States, as a party to the Geneva Conventions is obliged to “disseminate the text of (the Geneva Conventions)...as widely as possible and...to include the study thereof in their programme of ... civil instruction, so that the principles thereof may become known to the entire population.....” (First Geneva Convention, Article 47, Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 144)

WHEREAS: Educating students in the United States about universal human rights and humanitarian law is an essential component of a rich civic education that also prepares young people for the demands of global citizenship in the 21st century;

BE IT RESOLVED, the National Council for the Social Studies incorporate into its expectations for social studies education, comprehensive programs of human rights and humanitarian law education, and provide opportunities through conference activities, Council publications and other means to expand awareness and strengthen the impact of human rights education in Pre K-12 social studies programs, college and university curricula, and teacher education programs nationwide;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the National Council for the Social Studies adopt an official position statement endorsing human rights education for all students and supporting the goals of the World Programme for Human Rights Education established by the United Nations through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
Why Human Rights Education is Essential?

Why does Human Rights Education (HRE) matter? Why is it essential today? Why should HRE be included in schools and other learning institutions?

From Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General

“Everyone has the right to human rights education in the same way that everyone has the same human rights.”

From Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

“What good was it to humanity that Josef Mengele had advanced degrees in medicine and anthropology, given that he was capable of committing the most inhuman crimes? Eight of the 15 people who planned the Holocaust at Wannsee in 1942 held PhDs… I am increasingly supportive of the proposition that education of any kind, if it is devoid of a strong universal human rights component, can be next to worthless when it should matter most: in crisis, when our world begins to unravel.”

From Sarah Leah Whitson, HRW Middle East and North Africa Division Director

“Why Should High School Students Learn About Human Rights?” [1:09]

“First and foremost they should learn about human rights so they should know what their rights are. It’s the number one important aspect of life as a human being is knowing your rights and protecting and defending your rights when they are violated. Whether it’s your right to speak freely, or to pray and worship freely, or to assemble with those you share views with. Whether it’s the right of women to be free from discrimination or children to be free from abuse. These are the most basic building blocks of living a life with dignity. And high school students need to be in a position not only to defend their own rights but to demand protection for the rights of others. Because ultimately we can’t have a civilized society, we can’t have a civilized planet if we don’t have a rights respecting one.”
From the UN Declaration on Human Rights and Education Training

On December 19, 2011, the United Nations reaffirmed the importance of HRE in the Declaration on Human Rights and Education Training. This declaration reasserted that Member States are duty-bound under multiple human rights instruments to ensure “that education is aimed at strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Article 1 affirms that everyone has the right to know, seek and receive information about human rights, and that all should have access to human rights education. It states that “human rights education and training is essential for the promotion of universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all…” In essence, human rights education matters because it is fundamental to ensuring respect for human rights. Human rights education is a human right in and of itself.

From Human Rights Watch Student Task Force

HRE is deemed important not only by the United Nations and by educators, but by students as well. The student need for and interest in HRE can be seen in HRW Student Task Force’s Human Rights Education Survey in 2011. Evidence from this survey reveals that, while a majority of students claim to have learned about human rights in their classes, “they lack a basic awareness of how our modern international human rights system functions.” The study, of 2,900 high school students in the Los Angeles area, showed that an overwhelmingly large number of high school students cannot define basic terms such as “human right,” and most have never heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Despite a lack of knowledge, students expressed a significant interest in wanting to learn more about human rights.

From HRE USA

Adam Stone and Rosemary Blanchard, coordinators of HRE USA Network’s Collaborative Action Policy and Advocacy Committee, justify the importance of human rights education in school curricula, especially within the United States, as an “integral part of any civics-based education.” An education in civics “that does not address universal standards of human rights and humanitarian law is incomplete and does not adequately prepare young citizens of the United States for their responsibilities at home and in the larger world.”

From Todd Jennings

Todd Jennings of California State University San Bernardino’s School of Education, justifies HRE as not another “add on” to school curricula, but rather as content that can be used “to teach computational, literacy, and critical thinking skills as required by education standards.” He argues that HRE helps students relate standards and skills to their lives in meaningful ways, increasing student motivation and the perceived relevance of school curriculum.

From UC Berkeley’s Human Rights Program

Human rights have become the moral language of today, the idiom in which we discuss our common humanity and weigh competing claims for resources, rights and protections.
Human Rights Organizations: HRE Resources
(Partial list, for more resources: www.hrwstf.org/wordpress/?page_id=2114)

MOST USED: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the principal human rights office of the United Nations. Its main “priorities are strengthening international human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality and countering discrimination; combating impunity and strengthening accountability and the rule of law; integrating human rights in development and in the economic sphere; widening the democratic space; and early warning and protection of human rights in situations of conflict, violence and insecurity.” www.ohchr.org

The Advocates for Human Rights

The Advocates for Human Rights, at the forefront of the world’s human rights movement, creates and maintains lasting, comprehensive, and holistic change on a local, national, and global scale. Volunteers, partners, supporters, board members, and staff implement international human rights standards to promote civil society and reinforce the rule of law.

For more than 30 years, our innovative programming has changed the lives of refugees and immigrants, women, ethnic and religious minorities, children, and other marginalized communities. We investigate and expose human rights violations, represent immigrants and refugees seeking asylum, train and assist groups that protect human rights, engage the public, policy-makers, and children; and push for legal reform and advocates for sound policy. www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org

Amnesty International Secretariat

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 3 million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

At the heart of Amnesty International is this idea: that we are at our most powerful when we stand together for human rights. We work together in many different ways, so that all our supporters can be involved, wherever they live and whatever their age, background or skills. Our movement is driven by our members, supporters, our more than 1,800 staff members and hundreds of volunteers around the world.
Together we campaign to: defend freedom of expression; protect women’s rights; abolish the
death penalty; demand justice for crimes against humanity; and demand corporate
accountability where companies have abused people’s rights.

Campaigning can change lives – of the survivors of human rights abuses, of the human rights
activists, even of the abusers. www.amnesty.org

**Carr Center for Human Rights Policy**

The Carr Center for Human Rights Policy has a mission to make human
rights principles central to the formulation of good public policy in the
United States and throughout the world. We train future leaders for careers
in public service and apply first-class research to the solution of public policy problems.

Since its founding in 1999 through a gift from Kennedy School alumnus Greg Carr, the Center has
developed a unique focus of expertise on the most dangerous and intractable human rights
challenges of the new century, including genocide, mass atrocity, state failure and the ethics and
politics of military intervention.

In approaching such challenges, we seek to lead public policy debate, to train human rights
leaders and to partner with human rights organizations to help them respond to current and
future challenges. We also recognize that the solutions to such problems must involve not only
human rights actors, but governments, corporations, the military and others not traditionally
perceived as being “human rights” efforts. Thus, we seek to expand the reach and relevance of
human rights considerations to all who influence their outcomes.

www.carrcenter.hks.harvard.edu

**Dorothy Cotton Institute**

The Dorothy Cotton Institute honors and perpetuates the legacy of an
important Civil Rights leader, Ms. Dorothy Cotton. As an internationally
renowned education and resource center, it develops, nurtures, and trains
leaders for a global human rights movement; is building a network and
community of civil and human rights leadership; and explores, shares, and promotes practices
that transform individuals and communities, opening new pathways to peace, justice and
healing. www.dorothycottoninstitute.org

**Facing History and Ourselves**

Facing History, for more than 30 years, has believed that education is the
key to combating bigotry and nurturing democracy.

Through a rigorous investigation of the events that led to the Holocaust, as
well as other recent examples of genocide and mass violence, students in a
Facing History class learn to combat prejudice with compassion, indifference
with participation, and myth and misinformation with knowledge.

We work with educators throughout their careers to improve their effectiveness in the
classroom, as well as their students’ academic performance and civic learning. www.facing.org
Human Rights Education Associates

**Human Rights Education Associates (HREA)** is an international non-governmental organisation that supports human rights learning; the training of activists and professionals; the development of educational materials and programming; and community-building through on-line technologies. HREA is dedicated to quality education and training to promote understanding, attitudes and actions to protect human rights, and to foster the development of peaceable, free and just communities.

HREA works with individuals, non-governmental organisations, inter-governmental organisations and governments interested in implementing human rights education programmes. Services provided by HREA are: Assistance in curriculum and materials development; Training of professional groups; Research and evaluation; Clearinghouse of education and training materials; and networking human rights defenders and educators. [www.hrea.org](http://www.hrea.org)

Human Rights Educators USA

**Human Rights Educators USA (HRE USA)** is a national network dedicated to building a culture of respect for human rights. HRE USA is committed to the basic human rights principles of human dignity, equality, and non-discrimination as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In all our undertakings we value diversity, inclusiveness, transparency, integrity, accountability, responsibility, and respectful and honest communication and sharing. Regardless of varying perspectives, HRE USA expects its members will operate from the same values in their dealings with each other.

The mission of HRE USA: To promote human dignity, justice, and peace by cultivating an expansive, vibrant base of support for Human rights education (HRE) in the United States.

HRE USA facilitates mutual collaboration and support to maximize members’ efforts to: integrate HRE into formal and non-formal educational settings, such as schools, universities, and organizations that work with youth; advocate for the inclusion of HRE in national and state education policies, standards, curricula, and pedagogy; provide pre-service and in-service teacher training programs and HRE resources; contribute to global research and scholarship on HRE; and empower educators and learners. [www.hreusa.net](http://www.hreusa.net)

Human Rights Watch

**Human Rights Watch** is one of the world’s leading independent organizations dedicated to defending and protecting human rights. By focusing international attention where human rights are violated, we give voice to the oppressed and hold oppressors accountable for their crimes.

Our rigorous, objective investigations and strategic, targeted advocacy build intense pressure for action and raise the cost of human rights abuse. For more than 30 years, Human Rights Watch has worked tenaciously to lay the legal and moral groundwork for deep-rooted change and has fought to bring greater justice and security to people around the world. [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)
Human Rights Watch Student Task Force

Human Rights Watch Student Task Force (STF), launched in 1999, is a youth leadership-training program that brings together high school students and educators from the Los Angeles area and empowers them to advocate for human rights issues, especially the rights of children.

We work with teachers and students in Los Angeles area high schools to promote human rights education, develop leadership skills and contribute to campaigns to end human rights abuses of children locally and globally.

Our website includes a section dedicated to human rights education that is constantly evolving with resources and materials for human rights educators. [www.hrwstf.org](http://www.hrwstf.org)

National Education Association

National Education Association Human and Civil Rights understands that education advocacy and social justice advocacy go hand in hand, and that an increasingly diverse kaleidoscope of students and educators must feel welcome in our public schools.

We believe individuals are strengthened when they work together for the common good. As education professionals, we improve both our professional status and the quality of public education when we unite and advocate collectively.

NEA also believes every student in America, regardless of family income or place of residence, deserves a quality education. In pursuing its mission, NEA has determined that we will focus the energy and resources of our 3.2 million members on improving the quality of teaching, increasing student achievement and making schools safer, better places to learn. [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)

Speak Truth to Power

Speak Truth To Power, a project of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, is a multi-faceted global initiative that uses the experiences of courageous defenders from around the world to educate students and others about human rights, and urge them to take action. Issues range from slavery and environmental activism to religious self-determination and political participation. Speak Truth to Power began as a book written by Kerry Kennedy (and since translated into 6 languages with more coming), and has been adapted into a dramatic production by Ariel Dorfman.

The Speak Truth To Power human rights education curriculum has been disseminated to millions of students in the U.S., Europe and Africa. The international interest in the curriculum continues to grow and to offer new partnership opportunities with donors, governments and with teachers’ unions in the U.S. A model country for this educational initiative is Italy, where the 12-week course has been taught to over 700,000 students. The human rights education curriculum is also being taught in Cambodia, Canada, France, Greece, Norway, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. [www.rfkcenter.org/speak-truth-to-power](http://www.rfkcenter.org/speak-truth-to-power)
Street Law

Street Law develops classroom and grassroots programs that educate students and communities about law, democracy, and human rights. Some of our initiatives bring us directly into classrooms and neighborhoods. However, the majority of our efforts, including our popular professional development programs, are focused on training others—individuals and organizations—to become effective Street Law educators. Our approach is practical, relevant, and experiential, blending legal content with innovative hands-on teaching strategies that actively engage students and program participants in the learning process.

When it comes to developing legal curricula, Street Law is a leader. Our groundbreaking textbook, Street Law: A Course in Practical Law, now in its eighth edition, is used in classrooms across the U.S. We’ve authored hundreds of lessons on law, democracy, human right, public policy, crime prevention, conflict resolution, and youth advocacy.

By helping to improve the teaching of law and understanding of relevant legal principles, Street Law empowers youths and adults to use their knowledge to solve problems and better their communities, and motivates them to become active participants in society. [www.streetlaw.org](http://www.streetlaw.org)

UNICEF

UNICEF is the driving force that helps build a world where the rights of every child are realized. We have the global authority to influence decision-makers, and the variety of partners at grassroots level to turn the most innovative ideas into reality. That makes us unique among world organizations, and unique among those working with the young.

We believe that nurturing and caring for children are the cornerstones of human progress. UNICEF was created with this purpose in mind – to work with others to overcome the obstacles that poverty, violence, disease and discrimination place in a child’s path. We believe that we can, together, advance the cause of humanity.

UNICEF upholds the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We work to assure equality for those who are discriminated against, girls and women in particular. We work for the Millennium Development Goals and for the progress promised in the United Nations Charter. We strive for peace and security. We work to hold everyone accountable to the promises made for children.

We are part of the Global Movement for Children – a broad coalition dedicated to improving the life of every child. Through this movement, and events such as the United Nations Special Session on Children, we encourage young people to speak out and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

University of Connecticut Human Rights Institute

The University of Connecticut Human Rights Institute currently runs one of the largest undergraduate majors and minors in human rights, offers a Graduate Certificate in Human Rights, and sponsors three thematic research clusters centered on health and human rights, humanitarianism and economic and social rights.
As a university wide program, the Institute advances human rights teaching across all University of Connecticut colleges and schools and pursues novel and critical approaches to human rights scholarship and pedagogy. Our aim is to educate well-rounded scholars with an informed understanding of human rights, promote interdisciplinary scholarship and provide experiential learning for our students. The Institute encourages engaged discussion and academic research on the advantages and limitations of human rights discourse and practice. Our research programs demonstrate the Institute’s commitment to bridging disciplinary boundaries and providing a space for scholars and advocates to exchange knowledge and experience across areas of expertise. www.humanrights.uconn.edu

**University of Minnesota Human Rights Center**

The **University of Minnesota Human Rights Center** was inaugurated December 1988 on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The principal focus of the Human Rights Center is to help train effective human rights professionals and volunteers. The Human Rights Center assists human rights advocates, monitors, students, and educators through five primary programs: Applied Human Rights Research; Educational Tools; Field and Training Opportunities; Human Rights Online through the Human Rights Library and Resource Center; and Learning Communities and Partnerships. www.law.umn.edu/humanrightscenter

**The World As It Could Be Human Rights Education Program**

The **World As It Could Be Human Rights Education Program** is an outgrowth of a series of successful initiatives carried out since 2006 to educate and inspire youth and adults to further human rights for all people. These initiatives have used the creative arts to deepen learning about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); they have also given participating youth the voice to teach their peers and adults about the importance of the UDHR concepts.

With the success of two years of pilot work at San Francisco’s Balboa High School (Jerry Garcia’s alma mater), and Arroyo High School in San Lorenzo, CA, the project is now working to widely distribute a high school curriculum that integrates the creative arts to deepen the learning of the UDHR, as well as to commission original productions in which youth convey the importance of the UDHR Articles, starting with Article 26, the Right to an Education.

While raising awareness about the UDHR the project seeks to provide multiple levels of benefits: Supporting grassroots non-profits and creative arts professionals; Showcasing the importance and value of creative arts to personal development and a vibrant culture; Engaging youth to inspire learning, critical thinking and positive social interaction; Encouraging youth who are often marginalized due to learning or physical differences to enjoy participation in school-wide events; Engaging the broader community to support and celebrate accomplishments of youth; and Providing collaboration opportunities among non-profits, public schools and universities.

www.theworldasitcouldbe.org