

# Human Rights Day: UN officials pledge to focus on advancement of human dignity, equality and rights

11 December 2017 – Top United Nations officials on Monday urged everyone to raise their voices and stand up for the rights of others, while celebrating the launch of a year-long campaign on the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights during a special event at UN Headquarters in New York.

“Over seven decades, this mighty document has helped to profoundly change our world,” [said Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Monday, at an event to commemorate [Human Rights Day](#), observed annually on 10 December.

“[The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)] establishes the equality and dignity of every human being. It stipulates that every government has a duty to enable all people to enjoy their inalienable rights and freedoms. And it establishes that these rights are universal,” he added.

Mr. Guterres highlighted the progress achieved by humankind since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, including advancing and protecting the rights of women, children and victims of discrimination as well as in holding accountable perpetrators of gross human rights violations and abuses.

However, he also called for taking a stock in areas where progress has not been achieved.

“In practice, recognition of the inherent dignity and equal rights of human beings is still far from universal,” he said, noting that millions around the world continue to suffer human rights violations and abuses. “And human rights defenders still face persecution, reprisals are rising and the space for civil society action is shrinking in very many nations,” added Mr. Guterres.

Participants at the Human Rights Day and launch of the year-long campaign for the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that included Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, General Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák, former High Commissioners for Human Rights Louise Arbour and Navi Pillay and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour. Photo: UN WebTV screen capture

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[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

Underscoring the need for all sections of the society to “speak out and take

a stand” for human rights, the UN chief announced his own pledge that he will respect the rights of others regardless of who they are, and will uphold their rights even when he disagrees with them.

“When anyone’s human rights are denied, everyone’s rights are undermined, so I will stand up. I will raise my voice. I will take action. I will use my rights to stand up for your rights,” he committed.

Also speaking at the ceremony, Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the General Assembly highlighted that the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was not only a milestone for the General Assembly, but was also one for humanity.

“But [the Universal Declaration] did not create human rights. They existed before this. Not on paper – but in people. In fact, human rights are an inherent part of humanity. And they always will be,” he said, adding that while the rights can be denied, they cannot be taken away – neither by law nor policy or action.

Recalling the efforts, that ultimately led to the adoption of the Universal Declaration in 1948, he called on everyone to use the seminal document to inspire themselves and help protect and promote everyone’s human rights.

“Stand up taller – and speak up louder – for human rights,” he urged.

Also speaking today were Wu Hongbo, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs; as well as Louise Arbour and Navi Pillay, former High Commissioners of Human Rights.

The [campaign](#), which was officially [launched](#) yesterday by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein at Palais de Chaillot in Paris on Sunday.