

International Year for Human Rights

1968 has been chosen International Year for Human Rights and the UN General Assembly has invited states and institutions to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Red Cross too is associated in this commemoration by publishing in the International Review the following article on Red Cross and Human Rights; this will be followed in other issues with contributions on the same theme.

It will be recalled that the United Nations, in order the better to promote the principles contained in the Universal Declaration, decided to convene a Conference in Teheran in order to review what has been achieved in the field of Human Rights over the last twenty years, and to prepare a programme of further measures.

The efforts of the United Nations to ensure recognition and protection for Human Rights are in line with earlier efforts exemplified by Magna Carta, the American Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of the Rights of Man following the French Revolution. On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights " as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations ". This standard, even today, is not one which even the most developed countries can pride themselves in having completely achieved. But the adoption of this Declaration is a landmark. The Red Cross views it as akin to the humanitarian Conventions and is gratified to do so. This Declaration is important for two reasons: because it is the first attempt of its kind on a supra-

national level; and because the more solidly established rights are as the moral and legal inheritance of peoples, the less prone they are to be trampled on during tension and conflict.

*The author of the first draft of the Universal Declaration, Professor René Cassin, defines as follows the significance and scope of the 30 articles of the Declaration adopted twenty years ago:*¹

“ The dominant feature that characterizes the universality of the Declaration is its broad scope and content. The Declaration embraces all the rights and freedoms essential for the dignity and development of the human personality: the right to life and to physical and juridical freedom; to spiritual and political freedom such as freedom of conscience, opinion and information; the right to work, to own property, to education, to leisure, to the benefits of culture, and to engage in intellectual and artistic creation.

Originally conceived as an international Declaration produced by States for the benefit of the citizens of those States, the Universal Declaration focussed increased attention directly on man's relations with his fellows and on a wide range of social patterns such as the family, religion, employment, and professions, the city and State, and society as a whole. All members of the family of Man are consequently encompassed within the Declaration in so far as they are directly subject to international law (jus gentium), irrespective of their original or present status, and without distinction of race, sex, creed, language, birth, fortune, social condition or opinion. The Universal Declaration applies to all States or territories regardless of the political, juridical, economic or international status of the country, or whether or not it is a member of the United Nations.

Although the authors of the Declaration in no way attempted to avoid direct references to the contempt for human rights that had resulted in barbarous acts which had outraged the conscience of mankind, they refused to turn the Declaration into a document of acrimony and bitterness harking back to the past. Instead, they sought to erect the foundations for the building of a better future.

The Declaration voices the deep-rooted, enduring aspirations of all men for liberty, equality and at least a measure of security, whether the society people live in is more advanced and provides

¹ UNESCO, *Courier*, Paris, January, 1968.

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certain basic rights, or underdeveloped and deprives them of proper food, liberty and education.

In short, the Declaration sets forth an ideal of achievement and marks out the guide-lines for a vast programme of positive action.”

This ideal is by no means applied fully throughout the world and this year's commemoration of the Universal Declaration's anniversary will be worth-while only to the extent that new progress is achieved towards broader recognition of every human being's dignity.

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