

Chronology of UN Milestones for Human Rights and Development

Human Rights and Development have been central and indivisible pillars of the International Community of Nations since its inception in 1945 with the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations. This historic event gave birth to a normative era in which the international community, inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, produced an outstanding corpus of international norms and standards for a life of dignity and well-being for all. Despite this monumental achievement, human rights and development practice evolved on different tracks mainly due to the political dynamics that prevailed during the cold war. The World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 was a turning point however, and opened the door to a renewed vision of the indivisibility of human rights - a vision that underscored the hand-in hand partnership of human rights and development for achieving equitable human development and the effective realisation of human rights in the lives of all persons, irrespective of their location, condition, identity or status.

1945-50s

Laying our Foundation

1945. The United Nations Charter. The UN Charter sets forth the "inherent dignity" and the "equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family." It affirms the UN's fundamental purpose as being "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion".



UN Photo/Michos Tzovaras.

1946. The UN Commission on Human Rights is established.



UN Photo

1948. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted, in which "Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations... a common standard... for all peoples and all nations". It is the first time in history that human rights and fundamental freedoms are set forth in such detail and the UDHR serves as the foundation for international, regional and national human rights law.

1960s-80s

Developing UN Norms and Standards

1946 - 1986. Regional human rights regimes are established in the Americas, Africa, and Europe. These systems are complementary to the international human rights framework. In the case of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, which came into effect in 1986, article 22 sets out the right to development as both an individual and collective right and notes that States have the duty to ensure the exercise of the right to development.

1979. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is adopted. A vision of substantive equality is articulated in the Convention which defines what constitutes as discrimination against women and sets an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

1965 onwards. UN human rights treaties enter into force. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights were all adopted during the 1960s. There are now 9 core human rights treaties in force. To monitor implementation of these treaties, treaty bodies composed of independent experts are set up, establishing the first form of dialogue between Member States and the UN on human rights.

1980s. The first Special Procedures (SP) are established. With the assigning of the first SPs, the UN established a pool of independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. There are now 39 thematic and

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UN Photo.

1989. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is adopted. It is the first international treaty to incorporate the complete range of international human rights – including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights as well as aspects of humanitarian law. It changes the way that children are viewed and treated; i.e. as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of passive objects of care and charity.

14 country mandates. The mandate of several SPs has a direct bearing on the link between human rights and development (e.g. Independent Expert on sustainable environment, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights).

1986. The Declaration on the Right to Development. The UN Declaration on the Right to Development defines development as ‘an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised.’ The Declaration establishes that the human person is the central subject of development.

1990s-2015

Delivering Together: Global Summits and UN Reforms on Human Rights and Development

Inter-governmental

1993. The World Conference on Human Rights.

Reaffirmed that all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated, that “women’s rights are human rights” and that “while development facilitates the enjoyment of all human rights, the lack of development may not be invoked to justify the abridgement of internationally recognised human rights”. This understanding would be reiterated by other development related world conferences, such as the Population and Development Conference in Cairo (1994), and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995).

1993. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. A landmark acknowledgement of violence against women as a human rights violation and as an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace, the Declaration addresses violence against women, whether occurring in public or private life.

1993. Establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, with a mandate to mainstream human rights in the work of the UN system.



UN High Commissioners for Human Rights. Top row: Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein (current), Navanethem Pillay, and Louise Arbour. Bottom row: Sergio Vieira de Mello, Mary Robinson, and Jose Ayala-Lasso.

UN system & Inter-agency



UN Photo/ Tim McKulka.

1997. Secretary-General Annan’s First UN reform initiative established four Executive Committees (including UNDG) with human rights to be mainstreamed across them.

2000. The Human Development Report

2000 elaborates how human rights and human development are linked since they “share a common vision and common purpose.” It concludes that human development is essential for realising human rights, and human rights are essential for full human development.

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2000. The Millennium Declaration.

At the Millennium Summit in 2000, heads of States made significant commitments to a comprehensive agenda on development, human rights, rule of law and gender equality. The Millennium Declaration recognised the link between human rights, good governance and development.

2002. The Rome Statute enters into force and establishes the International Criminal Court (ICC), the first permanent court with a world-wide reach mandated to investigate, charge, and try those accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, hence providing an avenue for perpetrators of gross violations of international human rights law to be held accountable for their crimes, even when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute them.



UN Photo/Larry Barns

2005. The World Summit Outcome.

The 2005 World Summit reaffirmed that human rights, development and peace & security, are three interlinked pillars of the UN, and gave explicit support for the further integration of human rights within the UN system. Member States also committed to integrate the promotion and the protection of human rights in their development and cooperation policies.

2006. Establishment of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). As part of its work promoting and protecting human rights around the world, the HRC has endorsed a number of resolutions and global standards with direct bearing on the human rights and development nexus, including the resolution on Human Rights and Climate Change and the Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights.

2006. The International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is adopted. The first human rights instrument of the 21st century. It gives expression to the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons with disabilities and the steps Governments must take to promote those rights, including through sustainable development.

2007. UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is adopted. It has become the cornerstone of the UN's efforts to ensure the individual and collective rights of indigenous and tribal peoples are respected. It establishes the need to gain the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous



Sin Chai, Viet Nam. UN Photo/Kibae.

2002. Secretary-General Annan's Second UN Reform initiative. "Action 2" of the Secretary-General's second report on UN reform calls for strengthened UN actions on human rights at country level and the building of strong human rights institutions as a principal objective of the UN. Stemming from the report, the "Action 2" Global Programme on Human Rights is created (2004-2008) which leads to concrete field actions by the UN system as a whole.

2003. UN Statement of Common Understanding on Human Rights-Based Approach to Development (HRBA). A common understanding of the HRBA is reached across the UN agencies at a UNDG interagency workshop in Stamford, USA. This statement establishes that human rights should guide all phases and sectors of development, but also that development cooperation and programming should further the realisation of human rights as the ultimate goal of development.

2005. Secretary-General's Report "In Larger Freedom: development, security and human rights for all" sets out a framework for addressing peace, security, development and human rights and reaffirms these as the three and inter-connected pillars of the UN.



Oaxaca, Mexico. UN Photo/F Keery.Oaxaca, Mexico.

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peoples before any development programs that will affect them is put in place.

2008. Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR, as an innovative mechanism established under the HRC, began its first round of reviews, becoming the human rights mechanism to assess all countries on all human rights, ensuring equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed. The UPR is the only human rights mechanism where the review is carried out by “peers”- Member States.

2010. MDGs Review Summit.

The Outcome Document recognises that human rights are essential for achieving the MDGs. The human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation and accountability permeate the Action Agenda.

2012. Rio+20 Outcome Document.

Increased recognition by Member States of the centrality of human rights and of the key human rights standards and principles, including the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to food, the right to water and sanitation, the right to health, and the right to education.

2012-2016. The Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review for the first time explicitly calls for a strengthening of normative and operational linkages, and in this regard directing particular efforts to building national capacity for inclusive, equitable, participatory, transparent and accountable national development processes to empower the poor and people in vulnerable situations.

2014. Resolution on Treaty Body strengthening adopted by the General Assembly.

While treaty bodies are now a main pillar of the international human rights protection system, their expansion has seen a backlog in State reports, chronic under-resourcing and insufficient compliance by States with reporting obligations.

The UNGA resolution addresses these challenges with commitment to additional resources, innovative measures and capacity building.

2015 onward. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs emphasizes the responsibilities of all States to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all – underscoring the UNs commitment to human rights as both the means and the ends of development; central to ensuring a ‘people centred’ development that leaves no one behind.

2010. The UNDG Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), established at the request of the UN Secretary-General, aims to integrate human rights in the UN’s development work and bolster system-wide coherence, collaboration and support for UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams to strengthen national capacity for the promotion and protection on human rights.



Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. UN Photo/Helena Mulherns

2014. The Human Rights up Front initiative launched by the Secretary General renewed the commitment of the UN Secretariat, funds and programmes to uphold the responsibilities assigned to the UN by the Charter, the Security Council and the General Assembly whenever there is a threat of serious and large-scale violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.