

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Saturday 10 December 2011



Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said: "Thanks to hundreds of thousands of brave people, armed only with words and ideals, 2011 became the year of human rights, in a way we could never have imagined 12 months ago. They took to the streets and squares, and to the social media highways, and demanded change. They used the Internet and instant messaging to inform, inspire and mobilize supporters to seek the basic human rights to which we are all entitled... this year's Human Rights Day is an appropriate way not only to celebrate the passing of an extraordinary year, but also to look forward to an exciting and hopefully brighter future, where everyone's rights are understood and respected."

Human Rights Day recognises the work of human rights defenders worldwide who act to end discrimination. Acting alone or in groups within their communities, every day human rights defenders work to end discrimination by campaigning for equitable and effective laws, reporting and investigating human rights violations and supporting victims.

While some human rights defenders are internationally renowned, many remain anonymous and undertake their work often at great personal risk to themselves and their families. Human Rights Day is observed by the international community each year on 10 December. It commemorates the day in 1948 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: Someone is shouting in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make a straight path for God to travel! Every valley must be filled up, every hill and mountain leveled off. The winding roads must be made straight, and the rough paths made smooth.' (Luke 3:1-6)

All: God of justice, your messenger has called us to prepare your way, to make your paths straight.

Leader: But the world is not ready to receive you. The roadway is choked with material possessions of people who have become rich from the labor of those who are denied access to resources because of their race, ethnicity, gender, class or nationality.

All: God of peace, your messenger is calling us to prepare your way.

Leader: But fearful threats exist. The highway is barricaded with armaments. The valleys are filled with landmines that kill innocent children, women and men.

All: God of compassion, your messenger is calling us to prepare your way.

Leader: But not everybody will be free to greet you. Some of the courageous languish in prison, tortured for their beliefs or for speaking truth to power. Many women are imprisoned in their homes, abused by their husbands and without means of escape because they are denied legal and economic recourse. Many children are chained in sweatshops or sold into prostitution.

All: How then shall we prepare the way?

Leader: In the name of God and for the sake of God's people, we proclaim in word and deed that all human beings are born with fundamental human rights.

All: How shall we prepare the way?

Leader: We will strive to guarantee the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of women and men.

All: How shall we prepare the way?

Leader: We will work for a world in which human beings enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want.

All: Then we will go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before us shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. And every valley shall be filled and the crooked shall be made straight, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.



PSALM 67

Leader: May God's face shine upon us, that God's way may be known upon the earth, the peace of God among all nations.

All: Let the peoples pursue your justice and your peace, O God. Let all the people pursue your peace.

Leader: Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth.

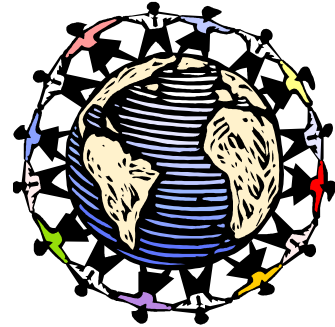
All: Let the people pursue your justice and your peace, O God. Let all the people pursue your peace.



PRAYER

All:

God of life, Creator of all people
As equal in dignity and humanity;
You have called us to be one:
To live in unity and harmony;
To build faith and realize community.
Yet we are divided
Race from race; class from class;
Rich from poor; gender from gender;
Old from young; neighbor from neighbor.
O God, by whose love all enmity is brought to an end:
Break down the walls that separate us,
Forgive the sins that divide us,
Free us from pride and prejudice.
O God, give us the courage to repent honestly;
Give us the power to change our lives.
Amen.



LITANY OF COMMITMENT

Excerpts from the Beatitudes (Luke 6:17-22 and Matthew 5:1-11) and the Charter of the United Nations. Each time the Leader reads, someone in the group drops a flower or a leaf into a bowl of water set in the center of the group.

Leader: God of all creation, we are your children. We are also the peoples of the United Nations.

All: Help us seek the security of the whole human family made in your image and for whom Jesus lived, died and lived again.



Leader: Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.'

All: God of Peace, we your children and the peoples of the United Nations are 'determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.'

Leader: Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

All: God of Love, we your children and the peoples of the United Nations 'reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women and nations large and small.'

Leader: Jesus said, 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.'

All: God of Life, we your children and the peoples of the United Nations will 'promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.'

Leader: Jesus said, 'love your neighbor as yourself and love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return.'

All: God of Community, we your children and the peoples of the United Nations will 'practice tolerance and live together in peace as good neighbors.' We are called to

be peacemakers to the Christ who came that we might know a peace that passes understanding. Lead us to rise up and be called children of God, citizens of a new world community. Guide us to speak boldly, with moral conviction, to the nations and to the world. Let us build, with your grace, a global community by acting now for world peace, for a flowering of justice, for an opportunity of love, for the realization of Your peace. AMEN.

PLEDGE

*We are the human rights generation.
We will accept nothing less than human rights.
We will know them and claim them,
For all women, men, youth, and children,
From those who speak human rights,
But deny them to their own people.
We will move power to human rights.
—Shulamith Koenig, People's Movement for Human Rights
Education*



BLESSING

Leader: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto God's self and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." Christ charges us to practice God's shalom and seek life in all its fullness for all God's people, everywhere.

All: And the courage of Christ, the peace of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will be always with us. AMEN.

Human Rights Day Liturgy [adapted from Presbyterian Church Peacemaking Program USA]



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