



អង្គការសហប្រជាជាតិប្រចាំប្រទេសកម្ពុជា
United Nations in Cambodia

Op-ed of the United Nations in Cambodia:

Human Rights Day, 10 December 2017

Today, Human Rights Day, marks the launch of a year's celebration to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We have much to celebrate. International treaties and national laws have been adopted to guarantee the rights of all, including women, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities and other vulnerable populations. These laws have led to real improvements in many people's lives. Yet, with conflict and inequality persisting across the world, we should also pause and reflect about the road ahead.

In his message on the occasion of the Human Rights Day this year, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: "Human rights are the foundation of peaceful societies and sustainable development. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the equality and dignity of every person. It makes governments responsible for ensuring people can enjoy their inalienable rights and freedoms."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was always a bold endeavour. It was created in response to the devastation of the Second World War and economic crises that shook the world in the last century. It set a blueprint for action to realise the vision of the UN Charter for peace, stability and development.

Its goals were lofty, but also practical and applicable universally. It declared all people to be born free and equal in dignity and rights. It reaffirmed equality between men and women. It recognized access to health care and housing, universal and compulsory education, and dignified work as equally important as freedom of thought and expression, freedom of belief and religion, freedom of peaceful assembly and association. It recognized the will of the people as the basis of the authority of government. It clearly stated that no one should suffer torture or slavery and that everyone is equal before the law.

Too often, the world has strayed from this vision. And the resulting wars and crises, and the exclusion of people and their voice, tell a somber tale. Yet the Declaration has never ceased to inspire the resilience of people and the strive for improved institutions. In 2015, world leaders reaffirmed this vision by launching the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda renews the commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' principles and those of the UN Charter. The agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on creating peace and prosperity in a way that is centred on people and protects the planet through partnerships, old and new. The global goals reflect the Universal Declaration perhaps most clearly through the call of 'leaving no one behind'.

The 2030 Agenda affirms that 'leaving no one behind' can only be achieved with the full realisation of rights and capabilities by all peoples without discrimination as guaranteed by international law, and this is also an essential building block for societies to be inclusive, just and peaceful. Implementing such an ambitious agenda calls on leadership of the government and the full participation of people across society.



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From participating in post-2015 surveys to advocating for the Sustainable Development Goals, civil society has already had a significant impact in shaping the 2030 Agenda. And civil society has important roles to play in landing the agenda at community level, by raising awareness, extending services and sharing perspectives of those left behind to inform policy solutions. Under SDG 16, partnership with the government is key to secure an enabling environment for civil society where rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed.

It has been the experience of the United Nations system in Cambodia time and again that open participation of civil society contributes positively to meeting national development priorities in a way that is inclusive, equitable and sustains peace. Thanks to civil society's engagement, the cooperation among local and indigenous communities and local authorities to promote sustainable forests and fisheries management have seen some positive results. And civil society organizations have been instrumental in policy-making and campaigning to respond to and prevent gender-based violence and violence against children. They have been key to achieving access to HIV prevention, treatment and care services for all in need.

As we gear up to celebrate 70 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, let us nurture the creativity, innovation and ingenuity of civil society, protect and expand the space for civil society to operate and continue to develop partnerships to strengthen our purpose and draw closer to the goals we all want: sustainable development, justice, equality and peace for all.

Claire Van der Vaeren, UN Resident Coordinator on behalf of the United Nations system in Cambodia.