

International agreements and human rights



The many relationships across borders and among states all over the world require some patterns of behaviour, some agreements, conventions, rules and protocols to guarantee that every contact and exchange run smoothly. Every **treaty** is governed by the Law of Treaties (established by the Convention in Vienna in 1969), and is defined as “an agreement concluded between States in written form and governed by international law, whether embodied in a single instrument or in two or more related instruments and whatever its particular designation”.

Quite often, it's **non-governmental organisations** (NGOs) that promote and support the signature of treaties or the implementation of agreements, an NGO being a cooperative, non-governmental, non-profit, voluntary organisation that serves specific social or political purposes. There are two kinds of NGOs: **operational NGOs**, which focus on development projects, and **advocacy NGOs**, which promote particular causes.

Treaties may be **bilateral** (two parties) or **multilateral** (between several parties) and a treaty is usually only binding on the parties to the agreement. One topic on which almost any state has agreed upon, is human rights.

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination.

[...] International human rights law lays down obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups.

The principle of the universality of human rights is the cornerstone of international human rights law. This principle, as first emphasised in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, has been reiterated in numerous international human rights conventions, declarations, and resolutions. [...]

Human rights are inalienable. They should not be taken away, except in specific situations and according to the due process. [...]

All human rights are indivisible, whether they are civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; or collective rights. All are indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. The improvement of one right facilitates advancement of the others. Likewise, the

deprivation of one right adversely affects the others.

Non-discrimination is a cross-cutting principle in international human rights law. The principle is present in all the major human rights treaties and provides the central theme of [many] international human rights conventions [...]. The principle applies to everyone in relation to all human rights and freedoms and it prohibits discrimination on the basis of a list of non-exhaustive categories such as sex, race, colour and so on. The principle of non-discrimination is complemented by the principle of equality, as stated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Human rights entail both rights and obligations. States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights. The obligation to respect means that States must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights. The obligation to protect requires States to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses. The obligation to fulfil means that States must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights. [...]

Adapted from: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatAreHumanRights.aspx>



- 1 BEFORE READING.** **PAIR WORK** Read the given definition of international agreement, and then brainstorm on all the topics you know there are international agreements on. Think about some non-governmental organisations that support them and then use this phraseology to write down sentences describing their functions.

International agreement: instrument by which states and other subjects of international law, such as certain international organisations, regulate matters of concern to them.

X's mission is to protect/defend... ■ X aims at promoting/supporting... ■ X campaigns for ...



- 2 PAIR WORK** Match each verb to its possible collocation. There are more possible options.

1. to drive	8. to lobby	<input type="checkbox"/> a. ones' voice	<input type="checkbox"/> h. something
2. to safeguard	9. to make	<input type="checkbox"/> b. for values	<input type="checkbox"/> i. a belief
3. to draw	10. to reaffirm	<input type="checkbox"/> c. society	<input type="checkbox"/> j. human rights
4. to build	11. to protect	<input type="checkbox"/> d. the line	<input type="checkbox"/> k. a difference
5. to raise	12. to join	<input type="checkbox"/> e. selfishness	<input type="checkbox"/> l. a cause
6. to stand up	13. to gather	<input type="checkbox"/> f. for better leadership	<input type="checkbox"/> m. a story
7. to oppose	14. to amplify	<input type="checkbox"/> g. bridges	<input type="checkbox"/> n. a voice



- 3** Read the first ten articles of the Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948 and complete it with the correct word.



person ■ distinction ■ equality ■ brotherhood ■ arrest ■ punishment ■ against ■ prohibited ■ dignity ■ tribunal ■ discrimination ■ origin ■ right ■ entitled ■ belongs ■ fundamental ■ torture ■ slavery ■ equal ■ protection

Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in 1. and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of 2.

Article 2. Everyone is 3. to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social 4., property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no 5. shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person 6., whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3. Everyone has the 7. to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4. No one shall be held in 8. or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be 9. in all their forms.

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to 10. or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or 11.

Article 6. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a 12. before the law.

Article 7. All are 13. before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal 14. of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any 15. in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8. Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the 16. rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary 17., detention or exile.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full 18. to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial 19., in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge 20. him.