ACCESS AMERICA

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Sixty years Old

©iStockphoto / Steve Debenport

December 10, 2008 marks an important anniversary: it is 60 years since the United Nations General Assembly ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and opened a new era of international history. Why the UDHR matters, how it came into existence, what it says, and the results it produced are the focus of this article.

Why the Universal Declaration Matters

The Universal Declaration is among the most important documents of the 20th century. It has been translated into 337 different languages. It has become a touchstone for actions by governments, individuals, and nongovernmental groups. It has been ratified by every country in the world. Practically no other international instrument can claim this honor. In short, the UDHR has acquired a moral and political significance matched by few documents.

The Universal Declaration provides both a guide to present action and an evolving set of ideas for future implementation at the national level. Increasingly, the UDHR's principles have been embodied in what states do, and it serves as the foundation for the International Bill of Rights and of several other crucial human rights agreements.

Also in this issue

From the IRC.....2
Alumni Spotlight.....3
Calendar..... 4

How the Universal Declaration Came Into Being

Every country in the world had been touched directly or indirectly by World War II. Seventy million people perished. Planning for a future international organization to succeed the League of Nations started during the war. In the spring of 1945, 50 governments and hundreds of nongovernmental organizations met in San Francisco. The resulting "charter" embodied both "official" and "unofficial" ideas.

The Preamble to the United Nations Charter includes these famous words:
We the peoples of the United Nations determined ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental

Continued on PAGE 2

From the Ambassador

As former US President Jimmy Carter said, "America did not invent human rights. In a very real sense human rights invented America." The importance of human rights was clear to America's Founders, who said in our Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal and have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Today, Americans continue to believe respect for human rights is a core value. This year, we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the ratification of one of the world's most important statements on human rights: the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The Universal Declaration, translated into 337 languages, has become a standard for governments and people everywhere. We should all strive to live by the principle that it affirms: "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

—Robert F. Godec

From the IRC

Books

Globalization and human rights
Berkeley : University of California Press,2002

(323.09051 GLO)

Les Droits de l'homme dans le droit international.
Malone, Linda A

(Black letter series 323 MAL)

Supporting human rights and democracy: The U.S. record

(REF 323 SUP)

Human Rights Watch World Report 2006:
Human Rights Watch,2006

(REF 323.4 HUM)

NGOs and human rights: Promise and performance .
Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001

(323 NGO)

—Khaled Ben Bhouzid & the IRC team

Continued from PAGE 1

human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, ...

The U.N. Charter called for a commission on human rights. Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, chaired it. With the help of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, the new Commission on Human Rights studied how different cultures, nations, and philosophers viewed human rights. These multiple perspectives deepened the commission's understanding and improved its work.In September 1948 the commission sent its draft to the U.N. General Assembly. Lengthy debates clarified the draft language and built increasing consensus. The climax came on December 10, 1948. The General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration without a single dissenting vote, although eight states abstained. This was a remarkable conclusion to an extraordinary process.

What the UDHR Says

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets forth a number of objectives, some to be achieved immediately, others as rapidly as feasible. The UDHR also provided the foundation for a series of other international agreements, both global and regional. Finally, the UDHR inspired people around the world to claim their rights, not simply accept the diktat of others.

The UDHR provides "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations." Every "individual and every organ of society" shall promote "respect for these rights and freedoms ... by progressive measures ..." The goal was "to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance."

Results of the Universal Declaration

Even more significant than the Universal Declaration's inspirational language have been its results. In international law, several major treaties, ratified by more than 100 countries, trace their origins to the UDHR.They include, in chronological order: The International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1965);

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966);
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966);
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979);
- The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984);
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

What Steps Lie Ahead?

For six decades, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has proven its durability. Yet debates remain. Looking back to 1948, however, progress has been remarkable. A visionary document has become a living reality. The Universal Declaration should be celebrated for its firm foundation and flexible structure. December 10, 2008, should be celebrated around the world.

This article is adapted from an article on America.gov, a web site delivering information about current U.S. foreign policy and about American life and culture produced by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs

Program Announcement

The Near East and South Asia Undergraduate Exchange Program (NESA)
An opportunity for undergraduate students in any academic field of study to study in a U.S college.
Length of program: 5 to 10 months
Deadline: December 19 ,2008
For more information contact Sami Saaied, at saaieds@state.gov or at 71-107-259

The Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program
An opportunity for students enrolled in first or second year of secondary school to spend a year in the US., study in a U.S high school, live with American host families and participate in a range of civil and community service activities.
Length of program: 9 months
Deadline: January 4 ,2009
For more information visit http://www.amideast.org

Study of the U.S. Institutes for Scholars
An opportunity for scholars to take part in post-graduate level academic programs. Study topics are American Civilization, American Politics and Political Thought, Contemporary American Literature, U.S. Foreign Policy, Journalism and Media, Religious Pluralism in the United States.
Length of program: 6 weeks
Deadline: January 13 ,2009
For more information contact Ms. Faouzia Ben Kheder at benkhederf@state.gov or 71-107-438

Study of the U.S. Institutes for Student Leaders
An opportunity for outstanding undergraduate student leaders to enroll in an intensive academic program in the United States.
Eligibility: First to third year university students who are 25 years old or younger.
Length of program: 5 weeks
Deadline: January 27 ,2009
For more information contact Ms. Faouzia Ben Kheder at benkhederf@state.gov or 71-107-438

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Samia Elfékih
Fulbright Doctoral Fellowship (2007-2008)

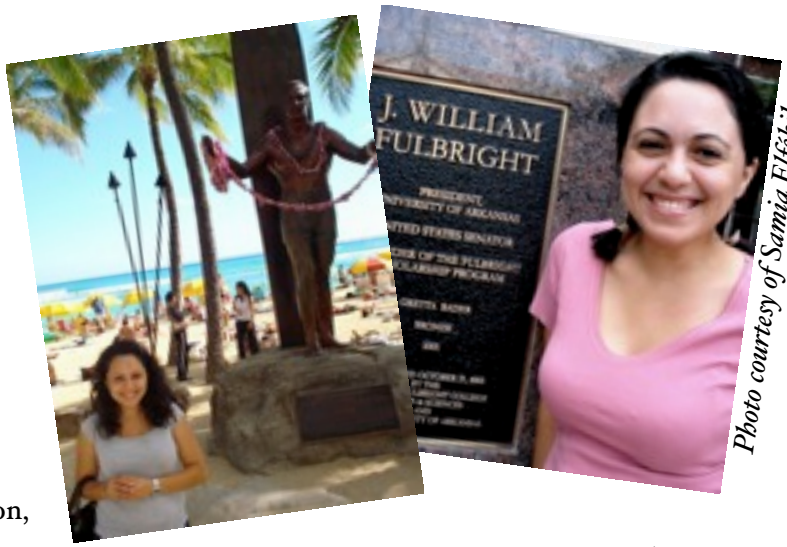

Photo courtesy of Samia Elfékih

Home in Tunisia: Nabeul

Home in the U.S. : Honolulu (Hawaii)

Fondest Memory of the U.S.: visiting the first house owned by Past President Bill Clinton, in Fayetteville Arkansas was amazing. I was so thrilled to see his handwriting and learn about his biography.

My experience: During my Fulbright Program, I did research in molecular genetics at the Department of Cell and Molecular Biology (John A Burns School of Medicine) at the University of Hawaii at Manoa which has approximately twenty thousand undergraduate and graduate students. I lived in an off-campus dormitory owned by a Buddhist temple (Shinshu

Continued on PAGE 4

Continued from PAGE 1

Kyokai mission). Living in a dorm that hosts brilliant students from all over the world was a truly valuable experience. I learned about cultures from Asia, Europe and Latin America. Being the only "Arab Muslim North African Mediterranean" in the dorm and in the department where I worked gave me an ambassadorial role . I attended several meetings and luncheons held by Rotary International to talk about my Fulbright experience in the US and how my rich ethnical background can be an asset to promote peace and mutual understanding. In addition to the great social and cultural exposure, I made a significant advancement in my research work. My research achievements allowed me to participate in prestigious international conferences where I had the chance to meet the world leading authorities in the molecular genetics field.

Lessons Learned: The Fulbright experience changed my life and gave it a truly exceptional dimension, starting from the language pre-academic program to the actual academic work and enrichment seminars. Being a Fulbrighter allowed me to meet outstanding students and to build strong friendships with people worldwide. I also had a big exposure to American social activities, volunteering and community service. I was so delighted to be acquainted with individuals that believe in hard work, persistence and willing to make a positive change! I became more aware of my leadership potential and my ability to be a better person!

Advice for others: Enjoy everything, work hard and see things this way: "it is not good, it is not bad, it is just different!"

What I miss most about the U.S.: my friends, my academic supervisor and his family.

Alumni Essay Contest !

Deadline: January 9 ,2009

PRIZES:
- 1st Prize: 100TDN
- 2nd Prize: 75 TDN
- 3rd Prize: 50 TDN

-Plus signed certificates and honorable prizes !

For more information please visit http://tunis.usembassy.gov or email zairid@state.gov

Calendar

Free English Conversation

Every Tuesday & Thursday
American Corner at AMIDEAST
4:00 PM

Weekly discussions on topics from films and music to religion. Topics are posted weekly in the American Corner and at AMIDEAST.

Open Access

Every Monday-Friday
American Corner at AMIDEAST
10:00 AM-6:00 PM

Peruse books and magazines in English on topics from history to pop culture and more.

Weekly Movies:

Fridays 4:00 PM at American Corner

American Corner at AMIDEAST
22, Rue Al Amine al Abassi, Cite des Jardins, 1002 Tunis-Belvedere, tel. 71-790-563 ext. 106

Study in the USA Consultations

Tuesday to Friday
AMIDEAST Advising Resource Library
8:30 AM-3:30 PM

Browse materials from U.S. universities ;consult resources on applications and scholarships.

Study in the USA General Advising*

Every Wednesday & Friday
AMIDEAST Advising Resource Library
12:30 PM

Statement of Purpose Workshops*

By appointment

Graduate Statement of Purpose workshop
Undergraduate Statement of Purpose workshop

*Please call or send an email to make an appointment *

NEW ! check out the American Corner Blog, online at http://americancornertunis.blogspot.com

The American Center

U.S. Embassy Tunis
Public Affairs Section
Les Berges du Lac
1053 TUNIS, Tunisia
Tel. +216 71-107-000
Fax +21671-963-263
E-mail:
tuniswebsitecontact@state.gov
Web site:
http://tunis.usembassy.gov