

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at Sixty

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It was a brief pause between two global upheavals in the middle of last century—an interlude separating the cataclysm of the Second World War from the polarizing tensions of the Cold War. The years 1946 to 1948 witnessed a coming together of humanity, as it were, under the auspices of the then newly established United Nations, and an amazing birth took place: the genesis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). History rarely offers such respites, but this was certainly one that many around the world were determined not to miss. A group of remarkable men and women from a variety of ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds gathered within the UN’s Human Rights Commission (HRC) to hammer out a set of rights for all that they enshrined in 30 articles and a preamble. The resulting document, the UDHR, came with a strong claim to universality. The consequent universalization of human rights is perhaps the most extraordinary development of the post-war world.

Not only was the composition of that original Human Rights Commission cosmopolitan, the Commission’s task was launched in response to clearly stated intentions spelled out in the UN Charter of 1945 and adopted by the organization’s international membership as a whole to “reaffirm faith in fundamental 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 Charter therefore had provided the necessary mandate for the Commission to proceed with the momentous project of crafting a set of universally valid human rights for all people everywhere and in every age. As the Commission got down to its early deliberations in January 1947 a parallel process began initiated by UNESCO, the UN’s Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, headed at the time by the noted scientist Julian Huxley. UNESCO assembled an international committee of leading thinkers that it called the Committee on the Theoretical Bases of Human Rights. It was a wise and farsighted move designed to address preemptively questions about the feasibility of tabulating a set of rights with claims to being universal, namely rights that cut across national and cultural barriers in both space and time thereby traversing boundaries between civilizations and belief systems. The UNESCO committee, which also came to be known as the Philosophers’ Group, included such luminaries as the British historian E. H. Carr, the American philosopher Richard McKeon, the French Neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain as well as representatives of Confucian, Hindu, and Muslim cultures, and others. In March 1947 it sent out a questionnaire to a number of statesmen and scholars around the world—among them Mohandas Gandhi, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Benedetto Croce, and Aldous Huxley—asking them whether they thought there was a legitimate basis for a *universal* declaration of human rights.

The replies that came back were astonishingly encouraging and reassuring. They revealed that the principles that would eventually form the bedrock foundation of the UDHR were already present in many differing cultural and religious traditions throughout the world, though not always articulated in terms of rights as such. Thus the lists of basic rights and values that the Philosophers’ Group received in response to their questionnaire proved to be

surprisingly similar exhibiting much commonality and overlap. The UNESCO committee concluded that it would be possible to achieve agreement across cultures regarding certain rights that “may be seen as implicit in man’s nature as an individual and as a member of society and to follow from the fundamental right to live.” Of course the philosophers had no illusions that a deeper probing would reveal major disparities once the divergent philosophic principles and political and economic underpinnings of these various cultures and worldviews were tapped. Maritain famously stated it as follows: “Yes, we agree about the rights but on condition no one asks us why.” However, a lack of consensus on foundations need not be seen as detrimental since, as Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard states in her definitive history of the making of the UDHR, “If there are some things so terrible in practice that virtually no one will publicly approve them, and some things so good in practice that virtually no one will oppose them, then a common project can move forward without agreement on the reasons for those positions.” The UNESCO philosophers reassuringly advised that a great task such as the one being undertaken by the UN’s Human Rights Commission could proceed and bear fruit.

This conclusion vastly reinforced the credentials of the Commission’s claims to be offering the world a set of truly universal human rights. The men and women on the Commission entrusted with the actual drafting of the Declaration were themselves living examples of the world’s diversity coming together to emphasize shared values in the form of clearly expressed rights. There was the Commission’s chairperson Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the American President Franklin Roosevelt and called a pragmatic visionary because of the unique leadership she provided for the arduous sessions that formulated the UDHR. There was John Humphrey of Canada who headed the UN’s Secretariat and who instructed his staff to study the world’s existing constitutions and rights instruments as well as a vast array of written suggestions that had come in to the Secretariat from external organizations and concerned individuals. There was the celebrated French jurist and legal expert Rene Cassin, the Chinese Confucian philosopher P. C. Chang, the philosopher-diplomat from Lebanon Charles Malik who served initially as the Commission’s rapporteur and later its president after Mrs. Roosevelt, Hernan Santa Cruz of Chile, Hansa Mehta of India, Colonel William Roy Hodgson of Australia, Charles Dukes (or Lord Dukeston) of Britain, and a succession of Soviet delegates culminating in Alexei Pavlov. Early in the Commission’s work it was decided that a smaller drafting committee had to be formed to produce the actual “preliminary draft” of the Declaration, and Roosevelt, Chang, Malik, Humphrey, and later Cassin were selected.

The making of the UDHR was a cooperative effort among the key figures on the Human Rights Commission with each contributor representing in his or her own right a unique and irreplaceable component of this historic collective achievement. As part of my talk on this the sixtieth anniversary I have been tasked with the somewhat awkward assignment of highlighting my late father Charles Malik’s role in both the formulation and passage of the Declaration. Looking back in retrospect at that monumental endeavor it becomes clear that Charles Malik was the right man in the right place at the right time for such an undertaking. But when he first started out from humble beginnings in tiny Lebanon the last thing on his mind was a career in international diplomacy. The young Charles had shown an early inclination toward mathematics and the sciences, which he studied until the Bachelor’s level. At the same time he was a voracious reader in literature and philosophy, and he had received a strong grounding from his paternal grandmother in the essentials of the Christian faith within the Eastern Orthodox tradition. After teaching math and physics for a few years he turned wholeheartedly to philosophy, in particular the ancient Greeks (Plato and

Aristotle), Augustine and the medieval scholastics (Aquinas and others), Immanuel Kant, and the modern existentialists (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger). In fact he studied philosophy at Harvard under Whitehead (himself an arrival to philosophy from the sciences) and at Freiburg in Germany under Heidegger in the 1930s. He was all set for an academic career at the American University of Beirut back in Lebanon, but this plan was to be fatefully interrupted when the Vichy French were chased out of the Levant by the British resulting in Lebanon's independence in 1943. Thereafter the young philosophy professor found himself being reluctantly drafted into a career in diplomacy representing his country first at the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945, and then as Lebanon's first ambassador to the United States in Washington and Lebanon's head of delegation to the UN in New York, Geneva, and Paris.

In many ways it can be said that Charles Malik was the product of an enlightened period in Lebanon's modern history, a time when Lebanese society exhibited a vibrant pluralist mix of religious sects and political outlooks coexisting for the most part peacefully and creatively in an uncommon outward semblance of harmony rarely glimpsed in Lebanon before or since. For instance, among his classmates in Tripoli and Beirut during the 1920s were Christians, Muslims, and Jews, and the same *mélange* existed among his students at the university in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It was precisely such an environment of mutual respect and inclusiveness that had set Lebanon apart in a positive sense from its wider regional surroundings. The same was true within the Christian community itself in Lebanon, and Charles Malik embodied this spirit of ecumenism and openness toward other Christian denominations, in particular the Catholics and Protestants. If the familiar clichés about Lebanon being “a bridge between east and west” or “the Switzerland of the Middle East” ever carried a modicum of substance it was during the period before the onset of war in 1975 that the Lebanese like to look back upon nostalgically as their golden age. It was a living testimony to this Lebanese spirit of openness therefore that during 1948 Charles Malik, who was then the chief spokesman for the Arab League and a defender of Palestinian rights at the UN, could have such a cordial and productive working relationship over months with Rene Cassin, an ardent supporter of the newly created Jewish state and someone who had recently lost 29 relatives in concentration camps during the Holocaust.

In UN circles in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s Charles Malik was a well known and popular figure. He was elected by secret ballot to almost every important post at that international organization: in addition to being rapporteur of the Human Rights Commission under Eleanor Roosevelt and subsequently its president, he was also president of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), president of the crucial Third Committee that in fall 1948 saw the UDHR through to the final vote in the General Assembly after more than 80 meetings to discuss and refine its Preamble and 30 Articles; and president of the UN General Assembly in 1958.

Throughout the lengthy deliberations of the HRC Charles Malik was a consistent defender of the rights of the individual human person and advocated the strengthening of those intermediate institutions in society—families, community associations, trade unions, the free media, churches, universities, small enterprises, intimate circles of friends, etc.—that shielded the individual from the overbearing pressures of the state. He argued this repeatedly in the face of fierce Soviet insistence to the contrary, and he eventually received open support from Eleanor Roosevelt and the other Western members of the Commission. After one heated exchange in February 1947 between Malik and Tepliakov of the USSR, Eleanor Roosevelt intervened with these words:

Though he does not represent one of the ‘great powers’, Dr. Charles Malik of Lebanon presented a plea that is a pleasure to read. We might modify some of his expressions as reported, but his statement can be summarized under the following points:

- The human person is prior to any group to which he may belong—class or nation or race;
- His mind and conscience are the most sacred and inviolable thing about him;
- Any social pressure that determines his consent is wrong; and
- The group can be wrong, just as the human person can.

Evidently [she continues], Dr. Malik is inspired by the same philosophy that created the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution. It is quite shocking, therefore, to learn that his statement drew the immediate and violent fire of Mr. Tepliakov, the Soviet representative.

Charles Malik’s early solo sparring with the Soviet delegates on the HRC represent the first opening shots at the United Nations in the ideological confrontation between communist totalitarianism and liberal democracy that was soon to metamorphose into full-fledged ideological warfare with the onset of the Cold War. Later, in the 1950s, this delegate from the tiny country of Lebanon was to single-handedly take on the mighty Soviet Union’s Andrei Vishinsky (Stalin’s henchman during the Purges of the 1930s; head of the UN Soviet delegation in the early 1950s) in speech after speech at the UN in which Charles Malik presented arguments that devastatingly demolished the ideological premises of Marxism-Leninism and its dialectical materialism. He confidently predicted the inevitable demise of an anti-human system like communism forty years before its actual collapse, but sadly he died in December 1987, less than two years shy of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Charles Malik’s diary—a massive manuscript spanning some sixty years of daily recordings that is now happily all digitized on computer and in the process of undergoing laborious transcription and editing before eventual publication—this diary discloses that on Friday, 11 June 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt asked him to put together a preamble for the UDHR. At the time he was still Lebanon’s ambassador to Washington and was having to shuttle back and forth every week between Washington and New York, so he wrote a text for the preamble that weekend—literally a back-of-the-envelope affair—and presented it to the HRC on Monday. Chang, the only other philosopher in the group besides Malik, objected to the word “inalienable” in Malik’s preamble, but his objection was voted down and the word remained. The Malik version of the preamble was passed unanimously with only minor stylistic tightening here and there by Cassin, who had himself earlier produced a long and unwieldy version that focused too much on the recent horrors of the Second World War and that was not satisfactory for Mrs. Roosevelt and the other Commission members. So the Preamble of the UDHR we have today is largely the work of Charles Malik, and it is a very important part of the UDHR because it contains many philosophically technical terms like inalienable and inherent and the right to rebellion against tyranny as a last resort and much more.

Charles Malik wrote the all-important Article 18 on religious freedom. It reads as follows:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in

community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Even though the right to freedom of religion includes by implication the right to change one's religion, in retrospect I believe it was fortuitous—nay, providential—that the right to change one's religion was spelled out in the body of the Article and not left merely to the inference of the reader. True, this part of Article 18 has generated much controversy over the years and continues to do so, but the challenge it poses has been a very healthy and necessary exercise for many.

Back in December 1948 some decisive behind-the-scenes lobbying took place to convince the Saudi Arabian delegation to change its intended negative vote on the Declaration to an abstention—and this effort succeeded. The Saudis were on the verge of voting against the Declaration because of the clause in Article 18 about the right to change one's religion. Those conducting the brunt of the successful persuasive negotiations at the time were two unlikely figures: a Christian Arab, the UN philosopher-diplomat from Lebanon, Charles Malik; and the liberal-minded Pakistani foreign minister and member of the minority Ahmadi sect Mohammad Zafarullah Khan. This unique lobbying spectacle, not repeated before or since, helps capture the exceptional nature of the circumstances in 1948 surrounding the birth of the Declaration. But it also underscores the deceptive character of precisely that unduplicated historical moment. Ever since then the Saudis have acted as if they regretted their abstention and felt they had somehow been hoodwinked at the time. According to their strict and extremist Wahhabi interpretation, the *shari'a*, or Islamic law, punishes apostasy (*ridda*) by death. In recent years the Saudis have been doing everything in their power to undermine the UDHR at the UN, mainly through their influence over the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference), many of whose member states back in 1948 ironically voted in favor of the Declaration and did not abstain.

Perhaps a way to a compromise on this sensitive issue has been charted by the intrepid female scholar Rifaat Hassan of Pakistan, who wrote insightfully some years back about extending the Koranic exhortation that there be no compulsion in religion to Muslims as well as to non-Muslims: “There is nothing in the Koran which suggests any punishment at all, let alone the punishment of death, for a Muslim who renounces Islam,” she wrote. “There is absolutely no reason to assume that the Koran dictum ‘Let there be no compulsion in religion’ (Sura 2:256), which modern Muslims apply with such magnanimity to non-Muslims, does not or should not apply to Muslims also.” This is a direct response from within the Islamic tradition, as interpreted by an open-minded moderate woman, to fears of the UDHR's Article 18 and to the customary *shari'a*-decreed punishment of death for apostasy.

Charles Malik also wrote Article 28, which simply states that “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.” This is a chapeau article capping the Declaration, a security clause to ensure that the document will not be fragmented, so that it cannot be said that people are more entitled to certain rights than to others. Moreover, as a counterpoise to positive law Charles Malik stressed in all his speeches the overriding importance of natural law as conceived by Thomas Aquinas, in whose philosophy Malik was steeped, and as articulated in earlier centuries not only by Cicero and the Stoics but as far back as Sophocles (for example, in the *Antigone*). Thus rights belong to the primordial domain of “natural law that reason can ferret out and grasp,” as Malik later wrote in August 1952. He and the rest of the delegation

from Lebanon also had a great deal of direct input on the wording of the articles dealing with the family and marriage (Article 16) and the right to emigrate or travel (Article 13). And Malik was the principal defender of Article 1's affirmation that human beings are "endowed with reason and conscience," as Mary Ann Glendon informs us. In fact it is worthwhile to review Charles Malik's many substantive interventions during the deliberations over several months of the HRC as they are preserved in the Verbatim Records of those meetings in the UN archives.

Perhaps Charles Malik's most important practical contribution to the making and passage of the UDHR came in the fall of 1948. Keenly aware as he was at the time of the atmosphere of rising international tensions and the gathering clouds of the Cold War, Malik felt the narrowing window of opportunity had to be seized before the end of that year to get the UN General Assembly to approve the Declaration. Having been elected by secret ballot as president of the Third Committee instructed with going through line by line, and approving, the final draft of the UDHR and then presenting it to the General Assembly for a vote, Charles Malik was in the driver's seat to push the process along at a brisk clip in the face of determined procrastinators, filibusters, and obstructers. During 85 meetings at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris in fall 1948 the various delegates from scores of countries went through every little word and comma in the draft text—but the disrupters were plenty and aggressive led of course by the Soviets, who wanted to pause at every line and argue endlessly the fine points that had been covered so many times before in previous debates. The devil was certainly in the details, but Charles Malik was not going to allow this devil to get the better of him. He knew that if the discussions spilled over into 1949 there was a real danger the whole process of the genesis of the UDHR would be scuttled, overtaken by the rapid deterioration in international relations between East and West. Already in the air were the budding crises in Berlin, the Korean peninsula, and the Middle East. He also knew that completing work on the Declaration plus the envisaged binding covenants with their mechanisms of implementation would be an impossible task before the end of 1948, so he decided to go full speed ahead to approve the actual Declaration and to defer the covenants and their implementation clauses to a later time—he was proved right because work on those covenants was not completed until 1966. Human rights were third on the agenda of the Third Committee, but Charles Malik quickly moved them up to number one; however, the refugee issue of recent and ongoing Palestinian dispossession kept intruding and intermingling with the proceedings. The Russian delegate, Alexei Pavlov, did his utmost to delay the process as well through long-winded tirades and by proposing an amendment for every article that came up for discussion. Finally, Charles Malik procured himself a stopwatch and imposed with the authority of the Committee president the strict three-minute rule: everybody, no matter what country they represented (and that included Pavlov), had only three minutes to speak before the gavel came down and it was the next speaker's turn. This rule, scrupulously observed, ensured efficiency and in fact railroaded the draft text of the Declaration to approval and to the final vote on 10 December. In a pivotal speech he gave on the eve of the General Assembly vote (December 9), Charles Malik, now the grand statesman-diplomat, went out of his way to acknowledge the positive contributions of all the delegations including the Soviets: "Thanks to the Soviet delegation we were awakened to the importance of economic and social rights," he said. Everyone received mention in the speech regarding their constructive contributions to the process of debate, formulation, and approval of the UDHR. It was truly a cooperative effort and thus a unique human rights moment in history thanks in no small measure to Charles Malik's intellect and leadership. The next day the UDHR was approved in the General Assembly without a single dissenting vote.

As expected, the international climate soured quickly after 1948 and the world entered a new era of heightened tensions with the onset of the Cold War. Sixty years on, however, we have witnessed the collapse of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe, the end of apartheid in South Africa, and the passing of some of the authoritarian and military regimes of Latin America. We have also seen the coalescing of the international human rights movement in the years following the Second World War as a consequence of direct inspiration from the UDHR, whose articles have been incorporated within the bodies of the constitutions of many sovereign states. As testimony to its inherent moral power, the UDHR was instrumental—indeed at times central—in the triumphant struggles against both communism and apartheid toward the end of last century. It is well known that the Declaration served as the preferred inspirational banner and philosophical rallying point for most of the civil society movements of dissent in communist lands during the twilight years of that ideology, and it played a similar role in the hands of opponents of the system of racial discrimination in South Africa. By doing so the UDHR revealed once again the potent historical force of raw yet sound ideas in contrast to the impotence of human rights covenants with their mechanisms of implementation whose effectiveness rests on the consent of their respective signatory states. Granted the much-hailed “march of democracy and freedom” has left some parts of the world untouched (just look at today’s Cuba, Myanmar, and North Korea); or has proceeded at a prohibitive cost in others (look at the Middle East generally, and Iraq in particular). Still, the truth of universal human rights remains a formidable moral challenge in the face of all existing forces of repression and relativism.

Since those heady days of fall 1948 and the successful passage of the UDHR it has been precisely this universality that has come under sustained assault, and this mainly from three distinct quarters. One persistent attack on the UDHR’s claim to universality has derived from a small but diehard band of states ruled by authoritarian regimes. This was starkly evident, for example, in 1993 in Vienna at the World Human Rights Conference when a dozen or so states led at the time by China challenged the Declaration’s universality by arguing that the right to self-determination and the inviolable sovereignty of states precluded any notion of universal rights that could be applied across borders, let alone across cultures. Hiding behind the concept of noninterference in the internal affairs of sovereign states these countries wished the rest of the world to leave them alone to go about their business of stifling freedoms and oppressing their own people. Happily, however, the overwhelming majority of international delegations at Vienna sided with universality, and the UDHR emerged from that conference unscathed. In fact the final communiqué of the conference reaffirmed in the strongest terms the universality of human rights as embodied in the Universal Declaration. Certain states of course continue to violate their citizens’ rights, but the international community also continues to expose this abuse and to insist, based on the UDHR, that it is wrong and has to change.

Another assault on the universality of rights comes from postmodernist philosophies and their secular derivatives. Here the criticism goes beyond mere cultural relativism, which is certainly an integral part of the postmodern package, to encompass a denial of the very existence of human nature. Sartre and Rorty, among others, come to mind. The fact, for example, that we all universally blush when we are beset by feelings of embarrassment is not taken by these thinkers as an outward indicator of a shared human phenomenon grounded in a shared human nature; instead, it is explained merely on the basis of a chemical-sociological reaction: the onrush of blood to the face induced by cultural conditioning of shame, and so on. The implications for human rights of this rejection of a universal human nature are profound. Human rights are anchored in human dignity, and this inherent dignity that all

human beings possess by virtue of being human is itself premised on a common human nature that along with reason and conscience defines the human species and sets it apart from all others. To erase human nature arbitrarily, as the postmodernists do, is to cancel human dignity and along with it the possibility of rights enjoyed by all humans. Words like “endowed,” “inalienable,” “inherent,” “inviolable,” and “indivisible,” some of which appear prominently in the UDHR, become meaningless once the foundation of a shared human nature is eliminated.

It is no surprise therefore that in the last quarter century postmodernism has fueled what the late Pope John-Paul II referred to as the “culture of death” in the developed world: the promotion of abortion, euthanasia, same-sex unions, assisted suicides, the materialistic self-indulgence of the youth, and other related forms of egotism—all in the name of *my* freedom and *my* right to do whatever I please. Practices that were commonly viewed as abuses of human rights have themselves become for some the new rights that need to be asserted in the postmodern world. Of course they remain pseudo-rights when held up against the UDHR. This leveling tendency, whereby everything is rendered equally valid and permissible, sends humanity down a slippery slope of self-destruction and has become a hallmark of the postmodern ethos. Fortunately, the last quarter century has also witnessed the proliferation of human rights NGOs (non-governmental organizations), many of which strictly uphold the Articles of the UDHR and its affirmation of universality. And even though some of these NGOs are in fact GONGOs (government-operated non-governmental organizations), or pedal newfangled rights in what has become throughout the public square a veritable rights industry, there remains a critical mass of serious and sensible human rights organizations that take a dim view of rights a la carte and are aware of the pitfalls of the postmodern relativist/subjectivist trap. Proponents of the UDHR are putting up an admirable fight against the ravages of postmodernism.

The third source of attack on the universality of human rights as presented in the UDHR comes from specific varieties of religious extremism, particularly those emerging in parts of the Islamic world. The accusation leveled against the UDHR in this context is that it is essentially a Western document with a Judeo-Christian bias and therefore unworthy of being regarded as universal. Never mind that this position flies in the face of the facts as outlined above concerning the circumstances of the UDHR’s genesis—the UN Charter and what it says on behalf of all member nations about human rights; the cosmopolitan composition of the HRC; the cooperative nature of the cumulative and multicultural contributions of its members; the UNESCO Philosophers’ Group report that assured the HRC of a universal basis for its proposed endeavor; the varied composition of this UNESCO group; the deliberations of the exhaustively representative Third Committee; the final unanimous vote in the General Assembly; and the fact that, Saudi Arabia’s abstention aside, all the Islamic states present at the UN in 1948 voted for the Declaration.

Soon after the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran an official rejection of the UDHR was issued by the new regime on the basis that it was “a secular understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition,” and this was coupled with a warning that Tehran would therefore not hesitate to violate the Declaration’s provisions. In 1981 in London and with Saudi backing a document in Arabic was produced by the Islamic Council for Europe entitled the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UIDHR), and it was presented in September of that year to UNESCO in Paris. This document contains elements derived from *shari’a*, or Islamic law, incompatible with the rights of women and non-Muslims as stated in, or gleaned from, the Articles of the UDHR. Similarly, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), a

Saudi-influenced body, adopted the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI) of 5 August 1990, another document whose stipulations rest on similar *shari'a*-based interpretations that cannot be easily harmonized with the rights that are found in the UDHR. Despite the claims of their authors that they speak for all, or for a majority of Muslims, or for “authentic” Muslims, these documents intended as replacements for the UDHR only reflect the viewpoints of their extremist creators and those supporting them. By no means do they bind all Muslims to their narrow and intolerant distortions of rights, and it behooves enlightened voices throughout the Islamic world, of which thankfully there are many, to openly disassociate themselves and their faith from such fanatical formulations. Theocracy cannot be a rebuttal of universal rights.

These three contemporary challenges to the universality of rights—from repressive regimes, postmodernism, and religious radicalism—underscore the urgency of upholding and defending the UDHR at all costs on this its sixtieth birthday. Without universal human rights how could there be any possibility of dialogue among civilizations that would hope to arrive at a philosophical understanding based on a common human anthropology? In a world governed by big-power rivalries and cynical deals at the expense of the weak and vulnerable, human rights universally established must continue to mean protection of the individual person, the mediating institutions of society, the beleaguered ethnic or religious minority community, the small country, women, children, the elderly, the infirm, and the unborn. Without universality as the acknowledged shared language and the accepted basis of human rights globalization will devolve into a cacophony of incoherence, a latter-day Babel. Similarly, pluralism without shared norms and values and standards will degenerate into atomization and fragmentation and isolation and disintegration. This is why winning the battle for the universality of the rights enshrined in the UDHR is vital for ensuring the future of humanity. We owe it to ourselves and to our children; we owe it to the memory of those pioneers sixty years ago whose intelligence, dedication, and perseverance gave us the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
