

SESSION 1  
HUMAN NEEDS – HUMAN RIGHTS  
– HUMAN RESPONSIBILITIES

# Presentation Script

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Human needs – human rights – human responsibilities

*This script for the session 1 presentation is illustrated by slides 7-28 of the session PowerPoint.*

### INTRODUCTION: HUMAN RIGHTS



Regardless of who we are, of what religion, ethnicity, gender or age we have and regardless of where we live – there are basic needs that we all share. No one wants to be arrested for no reason, tortured or discriminated against and no one wants their children to starve. We all want to live in societies where we are protected from these things.



Human beings share the same basic, universal needs. If these needs aren't met, our physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing suffers.

### HUMAN RIGHTS



The governments of the world have recognised that everyone everywhere has these needs and that governments have a responsibility – a duty in fact – to respect these needs and do their best to ensure they are met.



To help make this a reality, the governments of the world agreed on universal human rights – on the rights every person has, and on the duties every government has, to respect, protect and promote those rights.



The three most important human rights agreements are:

- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which we've looked at using the posters,
- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and
- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

These two covenants are legally binding on countries that approve them.



The vast majority of countries have committed themselves to these agreements – all the countries in green on these maps! The governments of all these countries have accepted that they have a legal duty under international law to do three things.

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### **INTRODUCTION: HUMAN RIGHTS**

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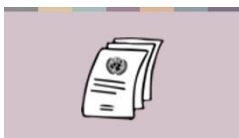
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### **HUMAN RIGHTS**

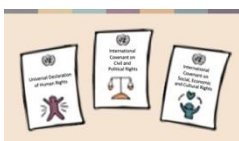
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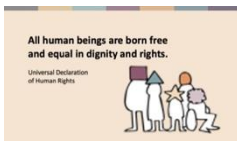
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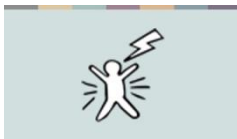
The vast majority of countries have committed themselves to these agreements – all the countries in green on these maps! The governments of all these countries have accepted that they have a legal duty under international law to do three things:



- To respect human rights in the laws they make and the actions officials take. For example, there should be no discriminatory laws and no one should be tortured.
- To protect human rights, making sure everyone can seek justice when their rights are violated by the state or anyone else.
- And to promote human rights – doing their best to make sure everybody has access to their rights. For example, to do their best to ensure everyone has access to healthcare and education. Of course, not all governments have the same resources, so making these social and economic rights a reality is a gradual process.

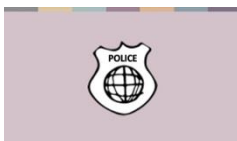


Governments have agreed that every human being has these rights equally. The very first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”.



Sadly, a lot of governments don't live up to these commitments – many people have their rights violated. Women, girls, minorities, disabled people and migrants are especially vulnerable to rights violations. Gender-based violence is a common example that happens in every country of the world.

### **CRITIQUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS**



When governments violate rights or fail to protect people from rights violations, there is no global police force to come and punish the government. So, if there's no international police force to force governments to follow human rights – aren't human rights toothless – words on paper rather than an effective tool for change?



There is some truth in that - some governments are very hard to influence. But in lots of countries, international and domestic criticism of human rights violations has led to positive change. There are lots of ways to promote human rights without having an international police force.



There are some other reasons people criticise human rights. Maybe you've had these thoughts too?

- Perhaps human rights sound technical to you – a topic for lawyers and politicians rather than something you can be involved in.
- Or perhaps you think human rights are far removed your daily life – something elites in capital cities can afford to worry about.
- Or maybe human rights seem like a weapon in a global political game. Something governments use hypocritically, criticising their enemies while violating human rights themselves too.

Well, human rights are about law, politicians make laws and lawyers can fight for human rights through the courts. And yes, the term is sometimes used and abused for political ends. But human rights are about far more than that!

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## HUMAN RIGHTS AND US

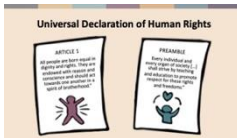
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As we have seen, human rights are actually about the needs we have in our daily lives. About what happens in our schools, farms, workplaces, homes and neighbourhoods. About how we should treat each other and be treated. About protecting us from being abused by those who have power over our lives – landlords, employers, teachers or even family members. And of course, by the authorities like the police, the courts, the army and the government.

Perhaps we can sum it up by saying that human rights are about the kind of society we want to live in and work to build.

If human rights are to be a reality in our communities, then we all have a part to play. A lot of human rights violations happen because ordinary people don't respect other people's rights – for example when we treat some people as though they were not equal. And governments, businesses and individuals are able to keep on committing human rights violations because people don't stand up for each other and try to change things. Because we are often silent.



We are not governments – we haven't signed international human rights agreements. We don't have a legal duty to ensure human rights are followed. But we are human beings with reason and conscience, and we have a moral duty to one another. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says:

“All people are born equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

“... every individual and every organ of society [...] shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.”

Whenever we have the power to do good or bad in other people's lives, we have a moral duty to uphold human rights. We can't do everything – in some situations it's hard to think of anything we can do – but when we see injustices being done, and we CAN do something to help, maybe we have a moral duty to try.

Doing something can be as simple as being a good neighbour.

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## CHANGEMAKER STORIES

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Shafaq Hassan, is a British Muslim woman from south London. In recent years there has been a big rise in hate crime in the UK. Muslims, and especially Muslim women who (like Shafaq) wear head coverings, are often targeted – both online and on the streets. In this context, everyday acts of friendship and generosity between people of different faith traditions can mean a great deal.

Shafaq says that her faith in humanity was restored when her non-Muslim neighbour unexpectedly gave her and her 14-year-old son Ayaan gifts to celebrate the Eid festival.



Shafaq posted a photo of the gifts to Twitter, saying:

“Our non-Muslim neighbour totally surprised us with Algerian dates and a prayer mat for my 14-year-old, who had fasted the whole month. He’s been our neighbour for over 20 years, but completely surprised us with the Eid gifts.”

“I didn’t realise he’d noticed Ayaan was fasting. My son felt really special. They’re friendly neighbours, they’re fans of my mum’s biryani so we always send over a box. We’re a diverse community and its heart-warming that our neighbour was so thoughtful and encouraging of Ayaan and his religious beliefs.”

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Zaliha and Magdalena are also making a difference in a very different context. Zaliha is a devout Muslim and a grandmother, from the island of Pemba in Zanzibar, where she teaches at the local Koran school.

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Zaliha says,

“I am worried about the unrest in our communities. Our young people have no faith in our political leaders and no opportunities.”

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She continues saying,

“Many mainlanders who move here to work in the tourism industry are Christians. Many Muslims I know blame the Christians for taking their jobs. I have lived through many years’ political unrest and religious tension. I have seen churches being burnt, leaflets with hate speech being distributed, Christians being harassed on the way to church. I see our youth becoming more radicalised and it worries me. That’s why I joined the Women’s Interfaith Committee.”

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“I want to help prevent religious violence on our island. At the Koran school, I teach the children that tolerance and love is a fundamental part of our religion. The future lies with our children and it is our responsibility to show them the way.”

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Magdalena, a Christian mainlander who moved to Zanzibar, is also involved in interfaith work. She has faced discrimination because of the way she dresses and her religion, but she is determined to bridge the divide between Christians and Muslims. She joined the Ungoya region Women’s Council which goes into communities to talk about interfaith challenges and women’s rights.

“I joined the committee to learn more about Islam and understand how Muslims live,” she explains. “We are all women, and we all face discrimination because of that – we must stand together and support each other.”



There are countless people like Shafaq’s neighbour and like Zaliha and Magdalena. Ordinary people like us, who in their own small way are trying to make human rights a reality in their communities – local change makers!

Whoever we are, we can do something to make human rights a reality!

#### **Sources**

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<https://www.faith-matters.org/family-surprised-by-presents-from-non-muslim-neighbour-to-celebrate-eid/>

Zanzibar Inter-faith Centre (ZANZIC)

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