

# Human Rights Milestones International

## c. 1750 BC

### Code of Hammurabi, Babylonia

Drafted by Hammurabi, first king of the Babylonian Empire, this is one of the first known written codes of law in recorded history. It includes the idea of presumption of innocence and suggests the accused and accuser have the opportunity to provide evidence.



Confucius.

## c. 551-479 BC

### Confucius

The Chinese philosopher's teachings included the twin principles of "What one does not wish for oneself, one ought not to do to anyone else; what one recognises as desirable for oneself, one ought to be willing to grant to others."

## c. 40-100 AD

### New Testament

Accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus and his apostles. Central principles include forgiveness, equality before God and compassion.



The Koran. PICTURE: TRANZ/CORBIS.

## c. 644-645 AD

### The Koran

The Muslim holy book, considered to be the word of God as revealed to the prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel over a 23-year period. It shares many stories with the Bible including Noah's Ark and Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. It includes the principles of privacy, freedom, dignity and equality.

## 1400s

### Code of Nezahualcoyotl

A respected and influential king, Nezahualcoyotl of Texcoco (now part of Mexico) brought the rule of law, scholarship and artistry to his kingdom and established a code of law based on the division of power, administered through councils of finance, war, justice and culture.

## 1648

### Treaty of Westphalia

This agreement ended the Thirty and Eighty Years Wars between Protestants and Catholics. It gave rise to the modern notion of national sovereignty by allowing rulers to determine the religion of their realms and gave some freedom of worship to religious minorities.

## 1776

### United States Declaration of Independence

Adopted by Britain's 13 colonies after the beginning of the American Revolution, the Declaration listed the colonists' grievances against King George, announced separation from Great Britain and proclaimed the creation of the United States. The Declaration became a central statement of human rights to "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and helped to spark the French Revolution and revolts against Spanish rule in Latin America.



Abraham Lincoln.

## 1863

### US Emancipation Proclamation

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Proclamation on January 1, declaring "all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States are forever free".

## 1945

### United Nations Charter

Signed by 51 nations, the United Nation's founding document laid out its responsibilities to maintain peace and security and to co-operate in solving economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems. Promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all was also included in the charter, but these rights and freedoms were not clearly defined until 1948.

## 1951

### Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

Following the massive displacement of millions of people during World War II, the UN expressed profound concern for the refugee problem and the potential it had for creating tensions between states. The Convention defines who can be considered a refugee (limited to Europeans until 1967), and outlines refugee rights such as freedom of religion and movement, the right to work, education and accessibility to travel documents. It also underscores refugees' obligations towards their host governments.

## 1965

### Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

The Convention, which came into force in 1969 expressed alarm at the persistence of racial discrimination, particularly by governments, and stated that any doctrine of racial superiority was "scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous". It called for the speedy elimination of all racial discrimination and promoted the need for education to increase understanding and respect between races.

## 1989

### Convention on the Rights of the Child

This placed signatory nations under a legal obligation to ensure the provisions set out in the 1959 Declaration, such as the right to food, clean water, health care, free education and children's own culture, religion and language are met. It reiterated that children may not be used for cheap labour, or as soldiers.

## 2007

### Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Convention marks a "paradigm shift" in attitudes. It formalises the change from viewing persons with disabilities as "objects" of charity, medical treatment and social protection to "subjects" with rights, capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

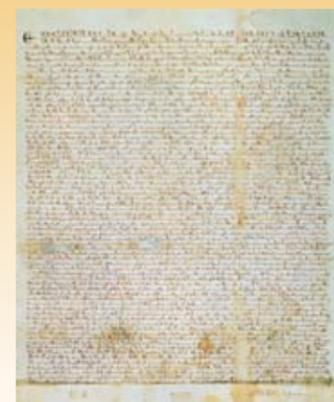


Old Testament.

## c. 1200-100 BC

### Old Testament

The Old Testament (also called the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh) is an account of God's dealings with the Hebrews as his chosen people. Aside from the Ten Commandments, Old Testament laws include respect for life and property, rights (e.g. the obligation not to kill), the asylum tradition of synagogues and the principle of innocence until proven guilty.



Magna Carta.

## 1215

### Magna Carta

The "great charter" of liberties signed by John I of England after pressure from nobles and the clergy. It introduced the concepts of habeas corpus (due process of law) and of "no taxation without representation", which became a central component of the United States Constitution.

## 1689

### English Bill of Rights

Following the overthrow of James II, who was a staunch believer in absolute monarchy, Parliament passed this bill outlawing royal interference in its affairs. It forbade royalty from suspending laws or levying taxes without parliamentary consent, interfering with elections and guaranteed the right to freedom of speech within Parliament.

## 1789

### French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

The Declaration was intended to be part of a transition from an absolute monarchy to a more democratic form of government and was signed by noblemen, clergy and commoners. It listed the natural rights of men as "liberty, property, security and the rights to resist oppression", removed aristocratic privilege and replaced it with the principle of equality before the law.

## 1893

New Zealand becomes the first nation to grant women the right to vote.

## 1919

### League of Nations Covenant

Drawn up in the aftermath of World War I, the Covenant sought to prevent devastating conflicts and to promote international co-operation. League members agreed not to go to war until all possible means of peaceful settlement had been explored, but this was weakened by the absence of the US and the withdrawal of Japan, Italy and Germany.

## 1948

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights

A committee headed by Eleanor Roosevelt spent three years debating the Declaration's 30 articles. Although not legally binding, it has become a standard measure of human rights and its provisions have been incorporated into many national constitutions.



Eleanor Roosevelt.

## 1979

### Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Adopted by the UN, it is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Along with asserting women's rights to participate in political and public life, the Convention is the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations.

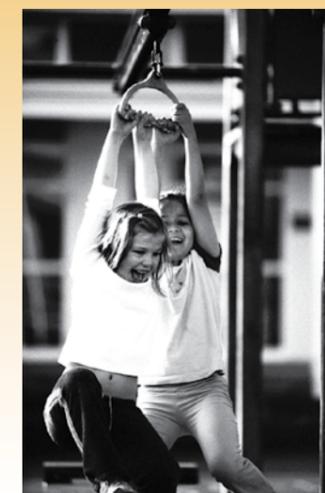


Photo: Fred LÔAmi.

## 2007

### Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Declaration acknowledges that indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of colonisation and dispossession of land and resources. It emphasises the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue development in keeping with their needs and aspirations.