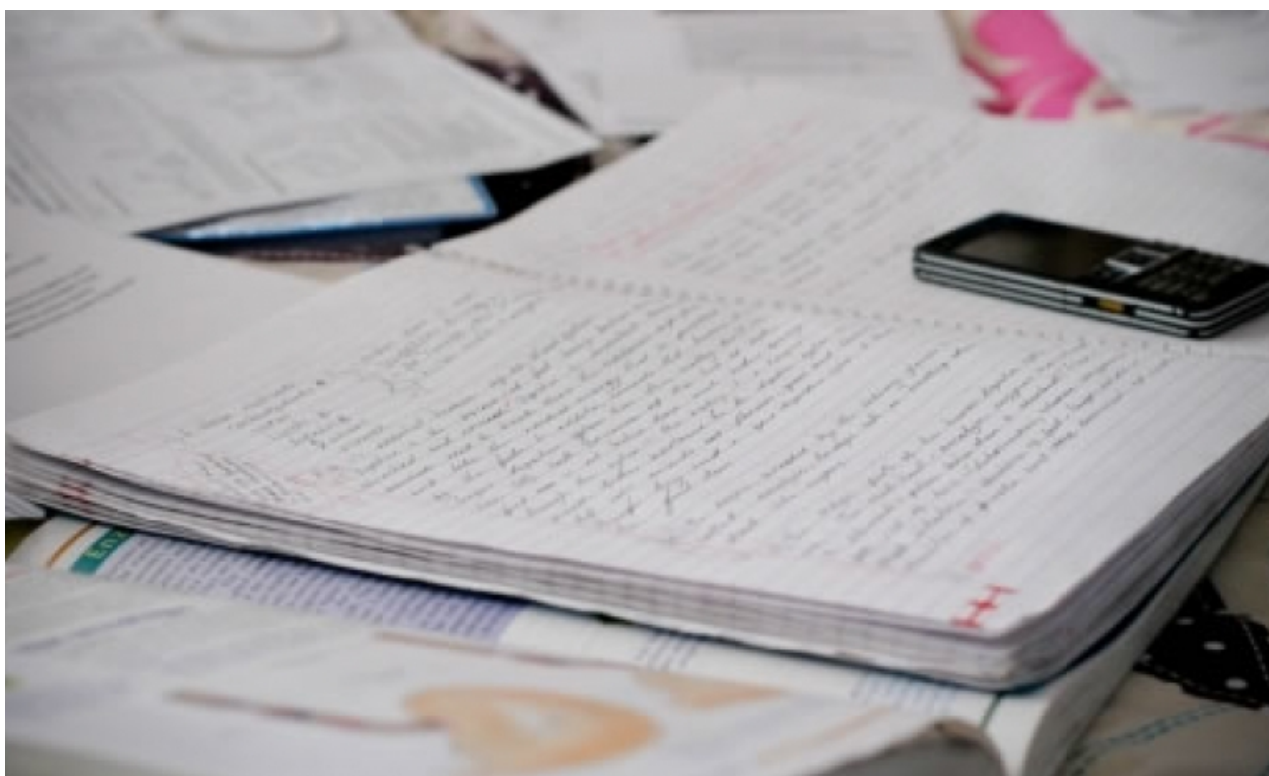


Should we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?



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December 10th is one of those dates marked on the calendars of all social movements, activists, media and politicians, but, should we celebrate it?

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Submitted by F Pere Tarrés on Thu, 12/07/2017 - 11:14

Description:

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December 10th is one of those dates marked on the calendars of all social movements, activists, media and politicians...whether they are international, national or local. This year especially, since it will mark 70 years since the United Nations' General Assembly solemnly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in an attempt to grant international protection to these rights and, through successive development, hold States accountable for the recognition and safeguard of them.

A growing number of voices will suggest there is nothing to celebrate, saying there is a growing regression in human rights, and will focus on the violations and will question that, very possibly, today such a declaration would never be possible.

Not us. We are aware of the many shortcomings and the criticism that can and should be made of the Declaration's infringements; but we are also very aware of the historical context when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted and declared: a devastated world as a consequence of World War II, where the sovereign of the States, the irresponsibility of political leaders and totalitarian ideologies systematically ignored the principle of respecting human dignity.

Today, we want to celebrate the ideal of rebuilding a world and a society where people are the subjects of rights, while also recognising that a constructive critique is needed to correct the dimensions of human rights that many feel are absent. Nobody questions the values inherent to human rights or the enormous boost that came with the United Nations solemnly declaring these rights; indeed, this is the theoretical basis that seduces many. What comes into question is whether this declaration is effective, its scope, its content and infringements. To some extent, this is the practical reason why some may feel disenchanted.

And this is precisely where we should focus our proposals for improvement and for the future, so as to ensure that the right to a life in dignity becomes a reality for all and not just a beautiful theoretical promise that is infringed by a part of the world's population.

We must not forget that 1948 was a starting point only in the international regulatory framework. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is not a binding legal instrument, was put forward as minimum proposal internationally. This minimum proposal didn't appear out of the blue, however. Each and every one of its thirty articles carries a long history of social struggle and mobilization to reclaim that everything that was considered, in the best of cases, as privileges granted by the States should be demandable and actionable rights and freedoms.

That minimum proposal was useful to consider that human rights and fundamental freedoms are not an exclusive competence of each State, but a matter of international public order that affects humanity as a whole. It served as a means to erode States' sovereignty and we see many examples of this throughout the years, but we need more. We must also realise that, seventy year later, many challenges remain: fostering a greater relationship between democracy and human rights; considering that States must guarantee these rights but may also violate such rights; considering that human rights' violations may happen through acts or omissions; deconstruct false dilemmas (freedoms vs. security; the West vs. Islam...); implementing human rights based on needs instead of costs (as has been the case many a time); sanction violations and also establish pre-violations mechanisms...

The challenges are many, indeed, and there is a lot to be done. We are faced by many commitments that we cannot ignore, for the sake of all the persons who fought for us and those who will continue the struggle after us.

So yes, there are reasons to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declarations of Human Rights. We must celebrate with a constructive spirit to recover the power of all those struggles that made social transformation possible. They are more necessary than ever before to confront the growing drift towards regression and repression.

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