



Australian  
Human Rights  
Commission

*everyone, everywhere, everyday*



Human rights  
education resources  
for teachers



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# Understanding human rights

# Understanding human rights



Human rights  
education resources  
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**Subjects:** Civics and Citizenship, History, Geography, Legal Studies, International Studies

**Level:** Year 9 and up (14 years and up)

**Time needed:** 1–4 lessons

## Introduction

Human rights are basic to humanity. They apply to all people everywhere. An understanding of human rights is an important part of our individual status as human beings and of our collective status as members of the global community of humankind.

To understand how human rights affect us in our daily lives and to acknowledge our responsibilities in recognising the need to balance those rights with the rights of others, we require an understanding of what human rights are.

So what are human rights? Where did they come from? How do they impact on humanity? How do they affect me?

## Aim

**Understanding human rights** includes activities that are designed to help students clarify human rights concepts and provide an opportunity to explore the effect of human rights in their own lives.

They can be photocopied for class use and used individually or as an entire resource.

The resources provide students with:

- basic information about the concepts encompassed by the term ‘human rights’
- an historical context for the development of human rights laws and the establishment of the United Nations
- the processes involved in the drafting and publication of international documents and treaties that support human rights
- an overview of how human rights are incorporated at a national level in Australia
- an understanding of how human rights are relevant in every day life.

## Learning outcomes

In this topic students will:

- develop an understanding of what human rights are
- understand the origins of modern human rights
- appreciate the meaning and significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments
- appreciate the relationship between rights and responsibilities
- understand the forms human rights can take, legally and morally
- understand how human rights instruments are applied in Australian law and society
- analyse the relationship of human rights to daily life
- apply the concepts of human rights to their own lives.

## Activities/resources

### 1. What are human rights?

- Resource sheet: What are human rights?
- Key questions: Human rights
- Activity sheet: What are human rights?

### 2. The origins of modern human rights laws

- Resource sheet: The origins of modern human rights law
- Key questions: The origins of human rights
- Activity sheet: The origins of modern human rights law

### 3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments

- Resource sheet: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments
- Key questions: Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Activity sheet: Identifying human rights

### 4. Human rights in Australia

- Resource sheet: Human rights in Australia
- Key questions: Human rights in Australia
- Activity sheet: Australian perspectives
- Key questions: My community

## Teaching strategies

### 1. What are human rights?

- Resource sheet: What are human rights?
- Key questions: Human rights
- Activity sheet: What are human rights?

This stage introduces some of the important terminology used to discuss human rights. It also explains the concept of human rights in a way that will set the context for the ideas explored in the later stages of the unit.

The activity associated with this stage helps establish the level of knowledge students already have about human rights. Of course, it is likely that the term is not completely new to many of them; however, the depth and accuracy of each student's understanding may vary widely. It may be interesting to compare the difference in students' levels of understanding by looking at their responses to the activity both before and after the delivery of the unit. This activity may be most effectively completed individually, rather than as group work, so that students can see their own levels of knowledge and understanding in the first instance.

In addressing the key questions put forward at the end of this unit, students should be encouraged to identify the relevant issues.

**Some of the issues raised may include:**

- **Who has responsibility for acknowledging human rights?**
  - governments (get students to think about how this might work in a totalitarian state)
  - organisations, such as the United Nations, Amnesty International, the International Committee of the Red Cross, etc.
  - communities, such as school communities, town communities, club communities, etc
  - individuals, such as you and I.
- **What are some terms that describe what human rights are concerned with?**
  - dignity, respect
  - responsibility
  - values systems
  - moral and legal rights
  - justice, tolerance, equality
  - interaction between people and their community.
- **Where do human rights come from?**
  - philosophies put forward by thinkers of the ancient world (e.g., Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, St. Augustine)
  - religious principles from a range of world religions
  - philosophical positions from thinkers of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment periods (e.g., Locke, Bacon, Descartes, Voltaire)
  - political struggles, such as the French Revolution, the American Civil War, women's suffrage, collapse of apartheid system in South Africa.
- **Do you think human rights are important? Why?**
  - unique value of each person and their common humanity
  - the importance of recognising every individual's dignity

- the need for freedom of thought, movement, ideas
- the need to operate as part of a community
- the value of mutual respect between people
- a system of values by which individuals and communities can interact together constructively
- need for balance between rights, our duty to acknowledge and respecting rights of others.

## 2. The origins of modern human rights laws

- Resource sheet: The origins of modern human rights law
- Key questions: The origins of human rights
- Activity sheet: The origins of modern human rights laws

This stage places the concept of 'human rights' within a specific historical context. It looks at the role of World War II in focusing the will of nations to establish a universal system to define, protect and promote human rights. By thinking about the human rights abuses that occurred during World War II, students will more fully appreciate the importance of the decision taken by the international community to establish the United Nations.

This stage provides the opportunity for the class to discuss what they know about World War II, drawing on history studies they have already undertaken; films or television programs about World War II that students have seen; books they have read; or even stories of the War that they have heard from elderly friends or relatives.

Such a discussion, in conjunction with working through the information provided, will keep the focus on the serious human rights violations that occurred during World War II. The Activity sheet: Origins of modern human rights is suitable for use either in pairs or small groups.

The key questions are designed to clarify students' understanding of the main issues. In the case of the first question, it may be useful to draw a timeline with some significant dates on it to prompt students to think how human rights are related to historical events.

The question 'How and when was the United Nations formed?' gives students an opportunity to explore the extent of the human rights abuses perpetrated in a time of war and the international reaction to those abuses.

In answering the question think about **what aspects of some of the wars that took place before World War II had an influence on the development of human rights**. Students may think about issues such as:

- rebellion to combat monarchic oppression, e.g. the French Revolution
- rebellion to combat foreign power, e.g. the Boxer Rebellion
- development of statements about rights in the aftermath of war or revolution (e.g. the Magna Carta (UK), the Declaration of the Rights of Man (France)).

Issues to consider when responding to the question – **what issues of human rights abuses in WWII may have prompted the formation of the United Nations**, could include:

- discrimination against particular groups of people (e.g. Jews, people with disabilities, homosexuals, communists etc.)
- torture, cruel and inhuman treatment (e.g. starvation, subjection to 'experiments', rapes, beatings etc.)
- genocide (e.g. the systematic destruction of races of people)
- contravention of the Geneva Convention of 1929 regarding treatment of prisoners of war.

### 3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments

- Resource sheet: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments
- Key questions: Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Activity sheet: Identifying human rights

This activity is another group learning exercise, focusing on the development of the documents and treaties that support human rights and inform national and international human rights law. It may be useful to look at the full transcript of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (available from the website of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>).

At this point, other resources may also be useful by way of comparison between human rights and other 'types' of rights. Through exposure to dramatised representations in film and television, some students may have a concept of 'rights' having to do with what happens when you have a 'run in with the law'. Phrases like 'Did you read him his rights?' or 'He took the fifth amendment' are a product of American media and, of course, refer specifically to the American legal system. Some clarification of these points may be necessary for students, depending on how and when you present this unit and in what cross-curricular context.

The **Activity sheet: Identifying human rights** may be completed individually, in pairs, in small groups or as a whole class. It provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate their understanding of the difference between human rights and other issues that might have rights implications but are not 'human rights' as such. It is an important distinction that differentiates the inherent moral power of human rights and the legal and social implications of other sorts of rights, entitlements and assertions.

The key questions seek to ensure students have acquired an understanding of the instruments of human rights.

In discussing the key questions, points that students may find useful in clarifying the terms might include: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is an internationally agreed statement that acknowledges the inherent dignity of each person

- the UDHR is a series of 'articles' that defines universal human rights
- the UDHR is recognised as a statement of powerful moral force and is often quoted in defence of those for whom human rights organisations may advocate (e.g., political prisoners)
- the acknowledgments made in the UDHR are useful for individuals to apply to their definitions of how to show respect for others' humanity
- treaties are agreements between different countries
- treaties are solemn agreements, entered into with an understanding that they are binding.

Note that further activities around the UDHR are available as part of the *Commemorating Human Rights Day* activities/resources. For more detailed background information on human rights laws, refer to *Human Rights Explained* fact sheets, and the *Let's talk about rights* Consultation Toolkit.

### 4: Human rights in Australia

- Resource sheet: Human rights in Australia
- Key questions: Human rights in Australia
- Activity sheet: Australian perspectives
- Key questions: My community

This activity looks at how human rights, which have been incorporated into international law, are translated in the Australian context.

It would be pertinent in working through the information in this unit to consider some of the human rights issues in Australia that have attracted international attention and drawn comment from the UN. To read about these issues visit the UN News (web link at <http://www.un.org/News/>) and do an advanced search for 'Australia'. Alternatively, you could check the latest Human Rights Council Periodic Report on Australia.

The activities give the opportunity to use teaching strategies such as: structured debate, role-plays and dramatisation of the issues. Teachers could provide a range of newspapers and magazines or ask students to bring some in; or you could direct them to watch particular current affairs programs.

Narrowing the focus from the international setting to the Australian community, the key questions encourage students to enquire into the human rights conditions in their own environment. While students explore various answers, it may be useful to mention race discrimination law, sex discrimination law, age discrimination law and disability discrimination law in Australia. Information regarding these laws is provided on the Commission's website at [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au).

Identification of issues currently in focus will depend on the types of human rights issues being covered in the media at the time that you are presenting this topic. How the students feel about issues that are raised is an important aspect in allowing students to engage personally with the concepts that have been dealt with.

*Some issues that may evoke a response from students could include:*

- treatment of people in Australia's immigration detention centres
- treatment of Arab Australians and Muslim Australians
- reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- paid maternity leave, and other issues facing women in the workplace
- any cases of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age or disability that may be current.

*The key questions posed could focus on scenarios such as students' responses to:*

- witnessing of physical abuse or verbal harassment of someone because of clothing they may wear in religious observance
- behaviour that is unreasonable and disrespectful to people because of some single characteristic (e.g. road rage against people from a particular racial groups)
- sexual harassment where someone is being 'hassled' for how they look or the clothes they wear.

It would be useful to clarify students' level of understanding by asking them to discuss in each case which human rights they think are being infringed.

*Some of the sorts of ideas students may like to think about in terms of promoting human rights could include:*

- actively attempting to show respect to all the people they deal with day to day
- with others where they see human rights abuses occurring
- joining organisations that promote human rights (such as Amnesty International, or any of a range of charitable humanitarian organisations)
- developing fundraising drives at the school to donate money to human rights organisations.

Note that the human rights consultations in 2009 have raised some interesting questions about human rights protection in Australia. For further details on the limitations of human rights protections in Australia, as well as the submissions made to the consultation process, refer to the *Let's talk about rights* resources.

# What are human rights?

The basic notion of human rights lies in people's recognition of the need to protect and affirm every other person's individual dignity. Human rights are important. No matter where people come from, or what their age, culture, religion or income may be, they tend to talk about their concerns in terms of human rights. Human rights issues are often seen as national or international in scope, but human rights are equally relevant at an individual and community level.

## So what are human rights?

There is no universally agreed definition; indeed, people's understanding of human rights is continually evolving. There are general understandings, though, of what is meant by the term. One way of looking at rights is to see them as a special kind of claim on others. For example, the right to education means that everyone is entitled to a good education and, in particular, that governments have an obligation to provide education facilities and services.

Rights are related to the values that societies live by. These values have their origins in the world's great religions and philosophies. Value systems can vary in detail between one society and another but the fundamental ideas are very similar. Concepts of justice and human dignity are at the heart of these values.

Rights also relate to what is lawful: that is, some rights may be laid down in law. If you have a legal right to something, you may be able to defend it in court. In many situations, though, rights exist but are not covered by law. These rights are often called moral rights. Moral rights are based on people's sense of what is fair or just.

## Which rights?

There can be differing views on human rights – for example about which rights are more important or whether a particular moral or legal right is a human right. When we talk about human rights we are usually referring to those principles that the nations of the world have agreed to refer to as human rights. These have been set down in international agreements and form part of international law. The rights set out in these agreements are often also written into the domestic law of individual countries.

Human rights cover virtually every area of human activity. They include civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom from torture. They also include economic and social rights, such as the rights to health and education. Some rights apply to individuals, such as the right to a fair trial: these are called individual rights. Others apply to groups of people, such as the right to a healthy environment or to native title: these are called collective rights.

## Human rights and responsibilities

Human rights involve responsibility and duties toward other people and the community. Individuals often have a responsibility to ensure that they exercise their rights with due regard for the rights of others. For example, exercising freedom of speech should not infringe someone else's right to privacy. Human rights are part of a context of people living together in societies. As part of this, there must be a legal, social and international order for human rights to be realised effectively.

For more information refer to the *Human Rights Explained* fact sheets at [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/hr\\_explained/index.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/hr_explained/index.html)





# Human rights

## Key questions

1. Who has the responsibility to respect and protect human rights?

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2. What are some terms that describe what human rights are concerned with?

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3. Where do human rights come from?

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4. Do you think human rights are important? Why?

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5. Which rights are most important? Why?

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# What are human rights?

Activity sheet

The following activity explores what you currently know about human rights.

Look at each of the statements below. Place a tick in the appropriate box to indicate whether you think the statement is true, false, or if you aren't sure.

Statement	True	False	Not sure
1. There are rights which every person has and which cannot be taken away from them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. There are responsibilities which go with every right	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The individual is the most important unit in society and has to come first	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The group is the most important unit in society and has to come first	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Rights must ultimately be consistent with religious principles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. People have basic economic rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. People have basic obligations towards the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Within a society there may be special Indigenous people's rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Basic rights can never be taken away	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. All people have equal rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Make some notes here about any of the statements where you answered 'not sure'. Would you need to change the wording of any of the statements to make them easier to identify as 'true' or 'false'?

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# The origins of modern human rights laws

## Resource sheet

Throughout history, concepts of ethical behaviour, justice and human dignity have been important in the development of human societies, as has the question of the relationship of the individual to the wider community. Such ideas can be traced back to the ancient civilisations of Babylon, China and India. They contributed to the laws of Greek and Roman society and are central to Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Islamic and Jewish teachings. Concepts of ethics, justice and dignity were also important in societies which have not left written records, but consist of oral histories such as those of Indigenous people in Australia and elsewhere.

Ideas about justice were prominent in the thinking of philosophers in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. An important strand in this thinking was that there was a 'natural law' that stood above the law of rulers. This meant that individuals had certain rights simply because they were human beings. Significant development in thinking about human rights took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This found expression in the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789). Whereas earlier the focus had been on the sovereignty of rulers, the emphasis now started to shift to the rights of the individual as against the state, with its associated ideas of fundamental freedoms that people should be able to enjoy.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw continuing advances in social progress, for example in the abolition of slavery, the widespread provision of education and the extension of political rights. Despite these advances, international activity on human rights remained weak. The general attitude was that nations could do what they liked within their borders and that other countries and the broader international community had no basis for intervening or even raising concerns when rights were violated. This is expressed in the term 'sovereignty' or the sovereign rights of a state to govern as it pleases, make whatever laws or decrees it wishes, leaving it to others to condemn, praise or ignore.

**The atrocities and violations of human rights that occurred during World War II galvanised worldwide opinion and made human rights a universal concern. During World War II millions of soldiers and civilians were killed or maimed.**

As the war drew to a close, the victorious powers decided to establish a world organisation that would prevent further conflict and help build a better world. This new organisation was the United Nations, known as the UN, which came into existence in 1945. The purposes of the UN were essentially fourfold: to ensure peace and security; to promote economic development; to promote the development of international law, and; to ensure the observance of human rights. In pursuit of these goals, member governments of the UN have set up a vast and complex array of organisations covering virtually every area of human activity.

In its early years, the UN set about establishing and documenting basic human rights standards that would serve all people and all nations. It has continued to expand the range of standards that set out the obligations that governments and people can be expected to live up to. In doing this the UN was aware of the rights of sovereign states to decide whether they would be bound under International law by these standards or whether they would incorporate these standards into domestic legislation.

The process of writing these documents takes place in UN meetings, where representatives of the governments of all the UN's member countries put their views and negotiate agreements about the acceptable wording. At the end of this process the UN takes a decision on whether or not to officially 'adopt' the document in question. This is done through the UN's peak body, the General Assembly.

The first major achievement of the UN in the field of human rights was the adoption by the General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The details of the wording of the Universal Declaration were hotly disputed by the members of the UN, but its adoption was extremely important in the history of human rights and international law.

Australia played an active role in the writing of the Universal Declaration. The Australian Foreign Minister at the time, Dr H.V. Evatt, was Chairman of the UN General Assembly when the Universal Declaration was adopted.





# The origins of human rights

## Key questions

Who has the responsibility to respect and protect human rights?

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What are some terms that describe what human rights are concerned with?

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Where do human rights come from?

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Do you think human rights are important? Why?

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Which rights are most important? Why?

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# The origins of modern human rights laws

## Activity sheet 1

The philosophies of world religions (e.g. Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, etc.) have historically contributed to the development of human rights recognition.

Identify two principles that some of these religions have in common that relate directly to human rights?

1. ....  
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2. ....  
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What were some of the violations of human rights that occurred during World War II?

Refer to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* to answer this question

Human right	Violation
e.g. Freedom of movement	Construction of ghettos for housing of groups that allowed no movement in or out



# The origins of modern human rights laws

## Activity sheet 2

1. When the UN came into existence in 1945 its purpose was fourfold. Can you please list them?

- a. ....
- b. ....
- c. ....
- d. ....

2. How does Australia incorporate UN standards into its legal system?

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3. Can you give any examples of Australian legislation that is based on the protection of human rights?

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# The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments

## Resource sheet

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. It is the basis for human rights protection and promotion around the world and has been endorsed by all countries. Many countries have included its provisions in their basic laws or constitutions.

Those who drafted the Declaration had very much in mind the extreme human rights violations that had been perpetrated during World War II and the preceding years. The United Nations was all about promoting a better world through international co-operation, including in the field of human rights. In adopting the Declaration, the United Nations emphasised the inherent dignity of every person and that recognition of human rights was the basis for freedom, justice and peace. It called on governments and individuals to promote respect for human rights through education and government policies.

The Universal Declaration is a powerful and eloquent statement, setting standards that provide a framework for human rights supporters to call human rights violators to account. In its own words, it is

**‘... a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations ...’**

The rights set out in the Universal Declaration cover not only civil and political rights, which protect individuals from government abuse of power, but also economic, social and cultural rights, which are the basis for adequate standards of living that will ensure human dignity.

The existence of the Universal Declaration by itself does not mean that human rights violations do not continue to occur. Some countries are ruled by dictatorships, people are tortured and killed and there is discrimination and vilification. Some individuals are victims of poverty, unemployment, ill health and lack of educational opportunity. Nevertheless there has been much progress since 1948. There is widespread recognition of what human rights are, due largely to the existence of the Universal Declaration and other United Nations human rights standards.

The Universal Declaration has great moral force and standing and the standards it sets out have come to be the basis for much of the development of human rights law that has followed.

International human rights standards that are legally binding are in the form of agreements between different countries of the world. These agreements, or ‘treaties’, are worked out by representatives of governments sitting down together at the United Nations to discuss ideas and wording that all can agree on. Human rights treaties are usually called ‘conventions’ or ‘covenants’.

After adopting the Universal Declaration, the United Nations went on to draft two major treaties that elaborated on the provisions of the Universal Declaration in a way that made them legally binding on countries that agreed to become parties to them. The two treaties were the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). They were adopted by the General Assembly in 1966.

When countries ratify a treaty, they take on a solemn obligation to observe the provisions of that treaty. In the case of major human rights treaties, the obligations include regular reporting to and scrutiny by, UN human rights bodies. Each country has an interest in maintaining a rule-based international system because they don’t want others to break the rules. While there are no penal sanctions, most governments do not like to be exposed to international criticism for failing to observe human rights standards.

In Australia’s case, there is usually a substantive review of legislation and practice before ratifying a human rights treaty, to ensure that Australian law complies with the treaty concerned (though these laws can always be changed).







# Identifying human rights

## Activity sheet

Which of the following are human rights and which fall into other categories, such as assertions, entitlements?

	Human right	Other
The right to life, liberty and security of person		
The right to remain silent		
The right to bear arms		
The right to freedom of thought		
The right to freedom of speech		
The right to party		
The right to own property		
The right to assert authorship		
The right to drink alcohol		
The right to work		
The right to privacy		
The right to a nationality		
The right to your opinion		
The right to drive		

Discuss your answers with your classmates

# Human rights in Australia

## Resource sheet

The Australian Government has the responsibility for ensuring Australia's observance of internationally-recognised human rights. However, state governments have the responsibility to make and administer many of the laws that are relevant to human rights observance. These include laws relating to the administration of justice, land matters, health and education issues, among others.

In international law, a federal system does not justify a failure to observe internationally-accepted human rights. But in practical terms, a federal system can make the task of guaranteeing that people are able to access their rights more complicated.

It is the Australian Government that decides whether or not to take on obligations to observe international human rights standards. But the fact that the Government agrees to observe international standards does not make those standards legally enforceable within Australia. This requires specific Australian legislation. Without such legislation there is no legal way within the Australian court system to ensure that the rights in any international human rights treaty will take precedence over any state or territory legislation that is inconsistent with the treaty.

The main human rights treaties that have been specifically incorporated into domestic Australian law are:

International treaty	Domestic legislation
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) (RDA)
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) (SDA)
Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	Crimes (Torture) Act 1988 (Cth)

Australia has historically been an active participant in the development of international human rights standards. As new international standards have been developed, Australia has either endorsed non-binding instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or has ratified binding legal instruments such as the Covenants on Civil and Political, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Australia has also ratified some of the mechanisms that give individuals the right to complain to United Nations bodies about violations of their rights.

The legal protection of human rights in Australia depends on a combination of the common law and statute. Statute law is legislation of the Commonwealth Parliament.

In the common law, traditional freedoms are protected by centuries of custom and the precedents set by previous court decisions. The common law is a flexible instrument that is capable of reinterpreting rights in the light of changing circumstances. However, some rights may not be well-established in the common law. Where rights are not included in legislation, they may be more difficult to enforce. Political or economic interests may be given priority over human rights. And it is always open to governments to pass new legislation either to override the common law or to vary existing legislation that provides for human rights.

Ultimately, the extent to which human rights are protected in Australia depends on the values of the Australian people. The depth of these values is often tested, particularly when human rights issues arise. Community values are continually changing. The development and dissemination of international human rights standards help shape these values to protect human rights.



# Human rights in Australia

## Key questions

1. How has Australia incorporated some of the issues raised in the international human rights instruments into Australian law?

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2. What are some of the human rights issues in focus in Australia at the moment that you are aware of? How do you feel about these issues?

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3. What happens when there is a conflict between the rights of one individual or group and the rights of another individual or group?

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# Australian perspectives

## Activity sheet

Many issues associated with human rights have been in the national news lately. Issues to do with equality in the face of race, sex, age or disability differences come up frequently in Australian society. Issues to do with political freedoms and the right to speak out about matters have featured in Australian news coverage for many years.

In group discussion, identify some of the human rights issues that are in the news currently being reported. You may like to refer to newspapers or magazines, or think about TV and radio news stories you have seen/heard in the last few weeks. You may be interpretive in your choice of an article that demonstrates an issue of human rights, but you will need to identify what the rights issues are that are raised.

Write down four issues below and identify the rights involved

Issue 1:	Issue 2:
Rights involved:	Rights involved:
Issue 3:	Issue 4:
Rights involved:	Rights involved:

Think about all the parties involved in one of these issues. Does it include a victim (as either an individual or a group) and a perpetrator (again, either an individual or group)? Is an interventionist role identified? If not, could the issue benefit from third party mediation?

Set up an interpretation of one of these issues for presentation to the class. The interpretation should be creative: devise a debate, role-play, courtroom drama to work through the issue. All members of the group should be involved in devising and presenting the work.

Ensure that the perspectives of all parties represented in the news story are given. Include a mediation role even if it is not mentioned in the article. Using what you have learned so far, work toward a proposed resolution of the issue in your presentation.



# My community

## Key questions

1. Are there instances you can think of where human rights were not being upheld by people you know?

Dotted lines for writing the answer to question 1.

2. What can you do about promoting human rights in your community?

Dotted lines for writing the answer to question 2.