



CHAMPIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Twenty-seven million people live in slavery—more than twice the number during the peak of the slave trade. And more than a billion adults are unable to read. Given the magnitude of human rights violations it is not surprising that 90 percent of people are unable to name more than three of their thirty rights.

Who, then, with so many unaware of their most basic rights, will make sure that human rights are promoted, protected and become a reality?

To answer that question, we can draw inspiration from those who made a difference and helped create the human rights we have today. These humanitarians stood up for human rights because they recognized that peace and progress can never be achieved without them. Each, in a significant way, changed the world.

Martin Luther King, Jr., when championing the rights of people of color in the United States in the 1960s, declared, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

The great advocate of peaceful resistance to oppression, Mahatma Gandhi, described nonviolence as “the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.”

Fighting fiercely against religious persecution in eighteenth-century France, Voltaire wrote, “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

Thomas Jefferson, inspiration and principal author of the American Declaration of Independence, declared that “The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government.”

There are those who, through thought and action, have made a difference and changed our world. Among them are the following humanitarians, each a powerful and effective advocate and each an inspiration to all who today dedicate themselves to the cause of universal rights:

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962)

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013)

César Chávez (1927-1993)

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)

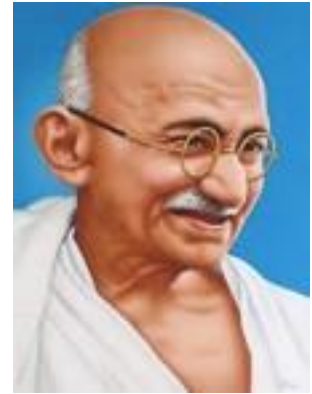
Desmond Tutu (nato nel 1931)

Muhammad Yunus (nato nel 1940)

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (nata nel 1945)

Malala Yousafzai (nata nel 1997)

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it—always.”
(Mahatma Gandhi)



MAHATMA GANDHI (1869-1948)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is widely recognized as one of the twentieth century’s greatest political and spiritual leaders. Honored in India as the father of the nation, he pioneered and practiced the principle of Satyagraha—resistance to tyranny through mass nonviolent civil disobedience. While leading nationwide campaigns to ease poverty, expand women’s rights, build religious and ethnic harmony and eliminate the injustices of the caste system, Gandhi supremely applied the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience to free India from foreign domination. He was often imprisoned for his actions, sometimes for years, but he accomplished his aim in 1947 when India gained its independence from Britain. Due to his stature, he is referred to as Mahatma, meaning “great soul.” World civil rights leaders—from Martin Luther King, Jr., to Nelson Mandela—have credited Gandhi as a source of inspiration in their struggles to achieve equal rights for their people.

“Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility. For the person who is unwilling to grow up, the person who does not want to carry his own weight, this is a frightening prospect.”

(Eleanor Roosevelt, American Delegate to the United Nations)



ELEANOR ROOSEVELT (1884-1962)

As the chair of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, Eleanor Roosevelt was the driving force in creating the 1948 charter of liberties which will always be her legacy: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Born in New York City, Eleanor married rising politician Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1905 and became fully immersed in public service. By the time they arrived in the White House in 1933 as President and First Lady, she was already deeply involved in human rights and social justice issues. Continuing her work on behalf of all people, she advocated equal rights for women, African-Americans and Depression-era workers, bringing inspiration and attention to their causes. Courageously outspoken, she publicly supported Marian Anderson when in 1939 the black singer was denied the use of Washington’s Constitution Hall because of her race. Roosevelt saw to it that Anderson performed instead on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, creating an enduring and inspiring image of personal courage and human rights.

In 1946, Roosevelt was appointed as a delegate to the United Nations by President Harry Truman, who had succeeded to the White House after the death of Franklin Roosevelt in 1945. As head of the Human Rights Commission, she was instrumental in formulating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which she submitted to the United Nations General Assembly with these words:

“We stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind. This declaration may well become the international Magna Carta for all men everywhere.”

Called “First Lady of the World” by President Truman for her lifelong humanitarian achievements, Roosevelt worked to the end of her life to gain acceptance and implementation of the rights set forth in the Declaration. The legacy of her words and her work appears in the constitutions of scores of nations and in an evolving body of international law that now protects the rights of men and women across the world.

“Do what you feel in your heart to be right—for you’ll be criticized anyway. You’ll be damned if you do, and damned if you don’t.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)



“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours.”
(César Chávez)

CÉSAR CHÁVEZ (1927-1993)

Mexican-American farmworker, labor leader and civil rights activist César Chávez brought about better conditions for agricultural workers. Born on his family’s farm near Yuma, Arizona, Chávez witnessed the harsh conditions farm laborers endured. Routinely exploited by their employers, they were often unpaid, living in shacks in exchange for their labor, with no medical or other basic facilities. Without a united voice, they had no means to improve their position. Chávez changed that when he dedicated his life to winning recognition for the rights of agricultural workers, inspiring and organizing them into the National Farm Workers Association, which later became the United Farm Workers. Through marches, strikes and boycotts, Chávez forced employers to pay adequate wages and provide other benefits and was responsible for legislation enacting the first Bill of Rights for agricultural workers. For his commitment to social justice and his lifelong dedication to bettering the lives of others, Chávez was posthumously recognized with the highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

(Nelson Mandela)

NELSON MANDELA (1918-2013)

Nelson Mandela, one of the most recognizable human rights symbols of the twentieth century, is a man whose dedication to the liberties of his people inspires human rights advocates throughout the world. Born in Transkei, South Africa, Mandela was the son of a tribal chief, and educated himself with a university degree and law degree. In 1944, he joined the African National Congress (ANC) and actively worked to abolish the apartheid policies of the ruling National Party. On trial for his actions, Mandela declared, "I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Sentenced to life imprisonment, Mandela became a powerful symbol of resistance for the rising anti-apartheid movement, repeatedly refusing to compromise his political position to obtain his freedom. Finally released in February 1990, he intensified the battle against oppression to attain the goals he and others had set out to accomplish almost four decades earlier. In May 1994, Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa's first black president, a position he held until 1999. He presided over the transition from minority rule and apartheid, winning international respect for his advocacy of national and international reconciliation. An international celebration of his life and rededication to his goals of freedom and equality was held in 2008, on the occasion of his 90th birthday.

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."

(Nelson Mandela)



"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

(Martin Luther King, Jr.)

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. (1929-1968)

Martin Luther King, Jr., was one of the twentieth century's best-known advocates for nonviolent social change. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, King's exceptional oratorical skills and personal courage first attracted national attention in 1955 when he and other civil rights activists were arrested after leading a boycott of a Montgomery, Alabama, transportation company for requiring nonwhites surrender their seats to whites and stand or sit at the back of the bus. Over the following decade, King wrote, spoke and organized nonviolent protests and mass demonstrations to draw attention to racial discrimination and to demand civil rights legislation to protect the rights of African-Americans. In 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama, King guided peaceful mass demonstrations that the white police force countered with police dogs and fire hoses, creating a controversy that generated newspaper headlines around the world. Subsequent mass demonstrations in many communities culminated in a march that attracted more than 250,000 protestors to Washington, DC, where King delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech in which he envisioned a world where people were no longer divided by race. So powerful was the movement King inspired, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the same year he was honored with the Nobel Peace Prize. Posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, King is an icon of the civil rights movement. His life and work symbolize the quest for equality and nondiscrimination that lies at the heart of the American—and human—dream.



"I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of rights."
(Desmond Tutu)

DESMOND TUTU (born in 1931)

Desmond Tutu is one of South Africa's most well-known human rights activists, winning the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in resolving and ending apartheid. Born in 1931 in Klerksdorp, South Africa, he was first a teacher, and later studied theology, becoming the first black Anglican Archbishop of both Cape Town and Johannesburg. Through his lectures and writings as an outspoken critic of apartheid, he was known as the "voice" of voiceless black South Africans. After the students' rebellion in Soweto escalated into riots, Tutu supported the economic boycott of his country, while constantly encouraging reconciliation between various factions associated with apartheid.

When South Africa's first multiracial elections were held in 1994—electing Nelson Mandela as the nation's first black president—Mandela appointed Tutu chairperson of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

In his human rights work, Tutu formulated his objective as "a democratic and just society without racial divisions," and has set forth minimum demands for the accomplishment of this, including equal civil rights for all, a common system of education, and the cessation of forced deportation.

In addition to the Nobel Prize, Tutu has been bestowed numerous awards, including the Pacem in Terris Award, the Bishop John T. Walker Distinguished Humanitarian Service Award, the Lincoln Leadership Prize and the Gandhi Peace Prize.

Desmond Tutu continues to travel extensively, championing human rights and the equality of all people, both within South Africa and internationally.



"I think by now I have made it fairly clear that I am not very happy with the word 'hope.' I don't believe in people just hoping. We work for what we want

(Daw Aung San Suu Kyi)

DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI (born in 1945)

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been a major voice for human rights and freedom in Burma (Myanmar), a country dominated by a military government since 1962. Born in Rangoon and later educated at Oxford University, she became politically active in 1988 when the Burmese junta violently suppressed a mass uprising, killing thousands of civilians. Suu Kyi wrote an open letter to the government asking for the formation of an independent committee to hold democratic elections. Defying a government ban on political gatherings of more than four persons, Suu Kyi spoke to large audiences throughout Burma as secretary-general of the newly formed National League for Democracy (NLD). In 1989 she was placed under house arrest. Despite her detention, the NLD won the election with 82 percent of the parliamentary seats, but the military dictatorship refused to recognize the results. Suu Kyi has remained in prison almost continuously since that time, rejecting the government's offer of freedom as it would require her to leave Burma. In 2003, she was moved from prison and again placed under house arrest, which has been repeatedly and illegally extended by the junta. She remains a living expression of her people's determination to gain political and economic freedoms. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, Suu Kyi has called on citizens around the world to "use your liberty to promote ours."



“Here we were talking about economic development, about investing billions of dollars in various programs, and I could see it wasn’t billions of dollars people needed right away.”

(Muhammad Yunus)

MUHAMMAD YUNUS (born in 1940)

Economist and Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus has become internationally renowned for his revolutionary system of micro-credit—the extension of small loans to entrepreneurs too poor to qualify for traditional bank loans—that has helped millions to escape poverty.

Born in the seaport city of Chittagong, Bangladesh, Yunus’ life is motivated by his vision of a world without poverty. It began in 1976 when he saw village basket weavers living in abject poverty despite their skill. Considered poor credit risks, the artisans were forced to borrow money at high interest rates to purchase bamboo and made no profit after repaying moneylenders. From his own pocket, Yunus made a loan of \$27 to a group of women who repaid the funds and, for the first time, made a small profit. Yunus realized that by means of tiny loans and financial services, he could help the poor free themselves from poverty.

In 1983 he established the Grameen Bank (Village Bank), founded on his conviction that credit is a fundamental human right. In a quarter of a century, the bank has stood as the flagship of a 100-country network of similar institutions enabling millions to escape poverty through individual economic empowerment. Professor Yunus is a member of the board of the United Nations Foundation and the recipient of numerous international awards for his humanitarian endeavors.



“One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world”

- Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai (born July 1997)

Malala Yousafzai was born on July 12, 1997, in Mingora, Pakistan. As a child, she became an advocate for girls' education, which resulted in the Taliban issuing a death threat against her. On October 9, 2012, a gunman shot Malala when she was travelling home from school. She was in the United Kingdom, Yousafzai was taken out of a medically induced coma. Though she would require multiple surgeries—including repair of a facial nerve to fix the paralyzed left side of her face—she had suffered no major brain damage and she survived. In March 2013, she was able to begin attending school in Birmingham.

She gave a speech at the United Nations on her 16th birthday, in 2013. She was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2013. In 2014, she was nominated again and won, becoming the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize along with Indian children's rights activist Kailash Satyarthi.

The European Parliament awarded Yousafzai the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. She has also written an autobiography, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, which was released in October 2013. In October 2015, a documentary about Yousafzai's life was released. *HE NAMED ME MALALA*, directed by Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*, *Waiting for Superman*), gives viewers an intimate look into the life of Malala, her family, and her commitment to supporting education for girls around the world.