



OUR RIGHTS  
OUR FREEDOMS  
ALWAYS

# 50th anniversary.

of the Human Rights Covenants

## What are the Covenants?



UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

# 50th anniversary.

## of the Human Rights Covenants

### WHAT ARE THE TWO COVENANTS?

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights list the human rights that everyone is entitled to. They build on the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Together, the Universal Declaration and the two Covenants form the International Bill of Human Rights.

### WHAT RIGHTS ARE COVERED?

The Covenants set out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that everyone has.

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#### INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

- Freedom from discrimination
- Right to equality between men and women
- Right to life
- Freedom from torture
- Freedom from slavery
- Right to liberty and security of person
- Right to be treated with humanity in detention
- Freedom of movement
- Freedom of non-citizens from arbitrary expulsion
- Right to fair trial
- Right to recognition before the law
- Right to privacy
- Freedom of religion and belief
- Freedom of expression
- Right of peaceful assembly
- Freedom of association
- Right to marry and found a family
- Right of children to birth registration and a nationality
- Right to participate in public affairs
- Right to equality before the law
- Minority rights

#### INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

- Freedom from discrimination
- Right to equality between men and women
- Right to work
- Freedom to choose and accept work
- Right to just and favourable conditions at work
- Right to form trade unions
- Right to strike
- Right to social security
- Right of mothers to special protection before and after birth
- Freedom of children from social and economic exploitation
- Right to an adequate standard of living
- Freedom from hunger
- Right to health
- Right to education
- Freedom of parents to choose schooling for their children
- Right to take part in cultural life
- Right to enjoy benefits of science
- Right of authors to moral and material interests from works
- Freedom to undertake scientific research and creative activity

# What are the Covenants?

## WHAT DO GOVERNMENTS HAVE TO DO?

The Covenants also identify the responsibilities placed on Governments to protect and promote those rights. There are three kinds of responsibilities on Governments:

### RESPECT

States must refrain from interfering directly or indirectly with your rights. For example, the State must not torture you or make you a slave. The State cannot force you to work in an area you have not freely chosen or stop you from speaking your language.

### PROTECT

States must take measures to make sure that others, such as businesses, political groups or other people do not interfere with your rights. For example, the State must stop people using hate speech against you because of where you are from or who you are. And the State has to make sure that private companies provide a fair wage for your work and do not give different salaries to men and women who do the same job.

### FULFIL

States must take steps to realize rights. For example, the State has to provide interpretation during trials if the accused cannot speak the language spoken in Court. The State must provide budgets to make sure that everyone can access medicines and be free from hunger.

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Many economic, social and cultural rights require Governments to allocate budgets to areas such as education and health care, particularly for poor people (responsibility to fulfil rights). For this reason, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights says States must achieve economic, social and cultural rights progressively. For example, your Government has to take steps to improve conditions in the area of health care, with a particular focus on providing health care to poor people or marginalized people with the aim of achieving universal access to health care as soon as possible.

Sometimes, richer countries should help poorer countries and for this reason, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights includes an obligation of international cooperation.

## DO THE COVENANTS APPLY TO YOUR COUNTRY?

The International Bill of Human Rights is a powerful statement of your rights. It should persuade all Governments to respect your rights. For the two Covenants to become binding on your Government, the State must ratify each Covenant. This means your Government must expressly agree to join them.

# What are the Covenants?

## HOW DO WE KEEP TRACK OF PROGRESS?

Two committees of experts monitor the Covenants. The Human Rights Committee monitors the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights monitors the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Monitoring includes:

- Regular review by the Committees of progress reports submitted by countries.
- Evaluation of complaints by individuals who claim their rights have been violated.
- For economic, social and cultural rights, in-country inquiries in cases of very serious violations of these rights.

## WHAT IMPACT HAVE THE COVENANTS HAD?

Thanks to the Covenants, countries have changed their laws and policies and the lives of many people around the world have improved. Some examples of impact include:

- Argentina paid compensation and a monthly pension to an indigenous girl who had been brutally raped. Argentina also introduced compulsory gender training for public officials because of the case.
- Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Philippines abolished the death penalty.
- Germany changed its asylum procedures after a request made by the Human Rights Committee.
- Kyrgyzstan introduced habeas corpus protections in its Criminal Code.
- South Africa introduced programmes to provide pregnant women with HIV treatments to prevent transmission during child birth.
- In Serbia, a court stopped the forced eviction of an informal Roma settlement.

## WHY IS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY IMPORTANT?

The two Covenants are celebrating fifty years of existence. They have had many successes and we have come a long way to raising awareness of human rights across the globe. But there are still many challenges. Violence, poverty, financial crisis, and discrimination affect all countries and everyone has a role to play in building better societies that respect human rights.

The 50th anniversary celebrations give us a moment to reflect on how far we have come and how far we have to go. Think of what you can do to in 2016 to promote human rights for everyone, everywhere!

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Core International Human Rights Treaties (Rev.1) -

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/Pages/ReferenceMaterial.aspx>

Frequently Asked Questions on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – OHCHR Fact Sheet No.33 -

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/Pages/FactSheets.aspx>

Civil and Political Rights: The Human Rights Committee – OHCHR Fact Sheet No. 15 -

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/Pages/FactSheets.aspx>