



OUR RIGHTS  
OUR FREEDOMS  
ALWAYS

# 50th anniversary.

of the Human Rights Covenants

Easy-to-read  
version of the  
Human Rights  
Covenants



# 50th anniversary.

## of the Human Rights Covenants

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

#### **Self determination**

Every people has the right to determine issues such as its system of government, its economic policies, and how to deal with its natural resources. No one can take away a people's means of subsistence.

States must respect this right, including by respecting the UN Charter.

#### **Duties**

The State must do everything it can to implement this Covenant. It should progressively improve enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights over time. To do this, it must use all its available resources. Other States should help poorer States when needed.

The State must guarantee all economic, social and cultural rights to everyone without exception. It is the State's duty to protect each member of society from any form of discrimination. This means that everyone has the same rights, in spite of:

- Sex
- Race or a different skin colour
- Speaking a different language
- Believing in another religion or no religion
- Holding a different opinion
- Owning more or less
- Being born in another social group
- Coming from another country
- Any other difference

#### **Equality between men and women**

Men and women are equal and have the right to enjoy economic, social and cultural rights equally.

#### **Limitations**

The State may limit economic, social and cultural rights. However, limitations must be set out in law, respect rights and protect public welfare.

#### **Preservation of rights and freedoms**

No State and no human being in any part of the world should act in such a way as to destroy your economic, social and cultural rights.

#### **Right to work**

You have the right to work, to be free to choose your work, and to defend your rights at work.

The State must set up technical and vocational guidance programmes as well as training programmes to help reach full employment and to help you in your work.

#### **Right to just and favourable conditions at work**

You have the right to just and favourable conditions at work. This means you have the right to at least the following:

- A fair wage that does not discriminate between different workers
- The same pay as anyone else for work of equal value
- A wage that allows you and your family to have a decent life
- Safe and healthy working conditions
- Equal opportunity to promotion based on only seniority and skill
- Limited working days that include rest breaks, assured leisure time each week as well as paid annual holidays and public holidays.

#### **Trade unions rights**

You have the right to start and to join a trade union of your choice.

Trade unions have the right to establish national and international associations with other trade unions.

The State may limit trade unions functions only if limitations are set out in law and to protect the public and their rights and freedoms.

You have the right to strike.

The State can limit trade union rights for members of the armed forces, the police and the public service.

#### **Right to social security**

You have the right to social security, including social insurance.

#### **Family life**

The State must protect the family.

You have the right to choose if you marry and who you marry.

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The State must protect mothers during pregnancy as well as before and after giving birth. The State must make sure working mothers have paid maternity leave.

The State must protect all children and children should be protected from exploitation. The State must set a minimum age for work and punish employers who employ children in dangerous, unhealthy or immoral work.

## Standard of living and freedom from hunger

You have the right to basic needs so that you and your family do not go hungry, have water and sanitation and have clothes and a home. The State must help you access these basic needs when necessary. Other States should help poorer countries in this regard.

All States have the duty to make sure that world food supplies reach everyone fairly so that no one goes hungry.

## Right to health

You have the right to health.

The State must take steps to reduce child deaths; to create a healthy environment and work place; to prevent, control and treat disease; and to promote a health system so that everyone can get medical help when sick.

## Right to education

You have the right to go to school and everyone should go to school.

The State must make sure that primary education is free and compulsory; make secondary school available to all and progressively free; and make higher education available to all on the basis of capacity.

The State must develop the school system and continuously improve the conditions of teachers.

Parents and guardians have the liberty to choose which schools their children attend so long as those schools meet the State's minimum education standards.

Parents and guardians have the liberty to choose the religious and moral education of their children

Anyone can establish and lead schools so long as they respect the State's minimum education standards.

## Plan of action for primary education

Within two years of joining the Covenant, States must have a plan of action to make sure that primary education is compulsory and free for everyone.

## Cultural rights

You have a right to share in your community's arts and sciences, and in any good that they do.

Authors, artists and scientists have the right to have their works protected and they have a right to benefit from their creative efforts.

The State must conserve, develop and disseminate science and culture.

The State must respect the freedom to engage in research and to create art.

## Implementation and entry into force

States have to report on how they have implemented the rights and duties. In 1985, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was established. One of its functions is to recommend to States how to improve enjoyments of these rights.

You can also send complaints to the Committee if you think your State has not respected your rights. Your State must first accept that people in your country can complain to the Committee.

The Committee may also visit countries to investigate if countries are respecting your rights, but only if the State accepts the investigation.

## INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

### Self-determination

Every people has the right to determine issues such as its system of government, its economic policies, and how to deal with its natural resources. No one can take away a people's means of subsistence.

States must respect this right, including by respecting the UN Charter.

### Duties

The State must not harm your civil and political rights and must take steps to make sure you enjoy them.

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This applies to everyone in the State's territory as well as to those in other parts of the world where the State has effective control.

The State must guarantee all civil and political rights to everyone without exception. It is the State's duty to protect each member of society from any form of discrimination. This means that everyone has the same rights, in spite of:

- Sex
- Race or a different skin colour
- Speaking a different language
- Believing in another religion or no religion
- Holding a different opinion
- Owning more or less
- Being born in another social group
- Coming from another country
- Any other difference.

The State must adopt laws and other measures so that everyone can enjoy their civil and political rights.

Everyone has a right to complain and ask for a help when rights are not respected.

### Equality between men and women

Men and women are equal and have the right to enjoy civil and political rights equally.

### Public emergencies

During a state of emergency, States – if they have no other choice - may suspend their duties to protect civil and political rights if the emergency justifies this and as long as any measures introduced to deal with the emergency do not discriminate against anyone.

If a State suspends its duties, it must inform the United Nations. The State must also inform the United Nations when the emergency has ended.

Even in times of emergencies, the State must respect the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom from slavery, certain limitations on imprisonment and trials, the legal protection of everyone and freedom of religion.

### Preservation of rights and freedoms

No State, group or human being in any part of the world should act in such a way as to destroy your rights.

### Right to life

You have the right to life.

In States with capital punishment, the death penalty can apply only to the most serious crimes and only if the law imposed the death penalty for that crime already at the time of committing the crime. Only a court may impose the death penalty. The death penalty cannot be contrary to your civil and political rights or be an act leading to genocide.

If you are sentenced to death, you have a right to ask to be pardoned or to have the sentence changed from the death penalty to another punishment.

Persons under 18 years of age and pregnant women cannot be sentenced to the death penalty.

States are encouraged to abolish the death penalty.

### Freedom from torture

No one may torture you or seriously harm you.

No one may perform medical or scientific experiments on you without your permission.

### Freedom from slavery

You cannot be a slave. The State must abolish slavery.

You cannot be forced to work against your will. If your State permits hard labour as a punishment for a crime, a court must pass a sentence of hard labour for it to be legal.

The State may require you:

- To do normal work when in prison or on conditional release from prison
- To do military or some other national service
- To help in emergencies
- To do work as part of normal civil obligations.

### The right to liberty and security of person

You have the right to live in freedom and security. You cannot be arrested or detained without proper reason and against the law.

If you are arrested:

- you have the right to know the reasons for the arrest and the charges against you at the time of the arrest
- you have the right to a lawyer

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- you have the right to be brought promptly before a judge
- you have the right to be tried within a reasonable time or to be released
- as a general rule, you have the right to bail although bail may have conditions, for example that you appear for trial.

If you are arrested or detained, you have the right to take proceedings before a court so that the court can decide if your detention is legal. If your detention is not legal, the court must order your release.

If you have been illegally arrested or detained, you have a right to compensation.

## Treatment in detention

You have the right to be treated with humanity and respect for your dignity when in detention.

When in detention before conviction, you have a right to be kept apart from convicted persons before you are convicted.

Children under arrest must be kept apart from adults. Children under arrest must be tried as soon as possible. Convicted children must be segregated from adults and treated appropriately according to their age and legal status.

The penitentiary system must aim to reform and socially rehabilitate prisoners.

## Limitation on imprisonment

You cannot be put in prison if the only reason is your failure to respect a contract including failure to pay your debts.

## Freedom of movement

You are free to move and free to choose where you live if you are in a State legally.

You are free to leave any country, including your own.

You cannot be stopped from entering your own country without proper reasons.

The freedom of movement cannot be restricted except if the restrictions are set out in law and necessary to protect the public and their rights and freedoms.

## Foreigners legally in a State

If a foreigner is legally within the territory of a State,

the State may only expel the person if there has been a decision to expel in accordance with the law.

The foreigner has the right to argue against the expulsion before a court unless there are compelling reasons of national security otherwise.

## Equality before courts

Everyone must be equally treated with everyone else before courts and tribunals.

You have a right to a fair trial in public.

The tribunal may exclude the press from a trial in limited situations such as in the interests of justice or to protect national security.

The tribunal must make its judgment public except in cases to protect children or in disputes between married couples.

If you are charged with a crime, you have the right:

- to be presumed innocent until proven guilty
- to know the charges against you
- to adequate time and facilities to prepare your defence and to speak with a lawyer of your choice
- to be tried without undue delay
- to be present at your trial
- to defend yourself or to choose your lawyer
- to have free legal assistance when you cannot pay yourself
- to examine witnesses
- to have free interpretation
- not to be forced to testify against yourself or to confess guilt.

The trial must take into account the age of children being tried as well as their need for rehabilitation.

If you are convicted, you have the right to appeal to a higher tribunal.

You have the right to compensation if you are wrongly convicted.

You cannot be tried a second time for the same offence.

## Limitations on trials

You cannot be tried and convicted for something that you did that was not a crime when you did it.

You cannot have a heavier punishment for a crime than the punishment in the law at the time you committed the crime.

You have the right to a lesser punishment if the law changes after you committed the crime.

# Our rights. Our freedoms. Always

## Recognition before the law

You should have legal protection in the same way everywhere, and like everyone else.

## Right to privacy

You have the right to ask to be protected if someone tries to harm your good name or your family, enter your house, or open your letters or other communications including emails.

## Freedom of religion

You have the rights to choose, replace or retain your religion or belief freely and to practise it either on your own or with other people.

No one can force you to adopt a religion or belief.

The State may limit this freedom when set out in law and necessary to protect the public and their rights and freedoms.

Parents and guardians have the liberty to choose the religious and moral education of their children.

## Freedom of opinion and expression

You have the right to think what you want, and to say what you like, and share ideas with others. However, you should act responsibly.

The State may restrict what you say when the restrictions are in the law and to protect the public and their rights and freedoms.

## Incitement to hatred

The State must prohibit propaganda for war. The State must prohibit incitement to national, racial or religious hatred.

## Freedom of assembly

You have a right to organize peaceful meetings. The State can limit this freedom only when the limitations are set out in law and necessary to protect the public and their rights and freedoms.

## Freedom of association

You have the right to meet with other people and to form and join trade unions. The State can limit this freedom only when set out in law and necessary to protect the public and their rights and freedoms.

## Right to marry

You have the right to marry and have a family once you are old enough.

You have the right to choose your spouse.

You cannot be forced to marry

You have equal rights and responsibilities during marriage and if you divorce.

## Child protection

The family, society and the State must protect all children.

Every child has the right to a name and to birth registration.

Every child has the right to get a nationality.

## The right to participate in public affairs

Citizens have the right to vote and to be elected, to choose the politicians who represent them. Elections must be by secret ballot.

Citizens have the right to apply to work for the public service in their country.

## The right to equality before the law

The law is the same for everyone. It should be applied in the same way to all.

## Minority rights

Where you belong to a minority, you have the right to enjoy your own culture, practice your religion and use your language.

## Implementation and entry into force

This Covenant sets up the Human Rights Committee composed of eighteen experts that consider how States are respecting civil and political rights. The Committee makes recommendations to improve enjoyment of these rights.

You can also send complaints to the Committee if you think your State has not respected your rights. Your State must first accept that people in your country can complain to the Committee.