

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in My Life

10 December is a date which changed the path of history. Whereas nobody could give a definite date before, now it can be stated with certainty that 10 December 1948 was the day when humankind opened a new page of its existence, a page with a totally different quality. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a remarkable international event. It demonstrated that collaboration between countries with different social and economic system is feasible. Though in legal terms the Declaration is a recommendatory document, long-term experience has demonstrated that it has made a profound positive impact on the development of countries towards democracy, freedom and the rule of law. The Declaration formed the basis for the adoption of numerous other international documents (declarations, conventions and covenants). Its provisions were reflected in the Constitutions of many countries, including the Republic of Belarus, thus confirming its significance. We hear talk about rights from different sources every day, but not everybody understands what the "rights" actually mean. Some do not understand, others may not value them, but these rights were won at the cost of many lives, those of human rights activists who sacrificed themselves for our well-being.

So what is the role of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in my life? Personally, when it comes to the Declaration, I distinguish two periods in my life. They differ in how I approached the concept of human rights: firstly, normal, quiet life before admission to the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, and secondly, gaining admission to the Academy of the Ministry of the Interior, continuing my studies and serving in the ministry's agencies. The first period was characterized just by the knowledge that there is a document called the Universal Declaration

A student essay contest on the theme "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in My Life" was organized by the UN Office in Belarus, in cooperation with the National Association for the Protection of Human Rights. This was timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The main objective of the contest was to improve students' knowledge and understanding of the Declaration's provisions and the values and principles of respecting and protecting human rights.

More than 250 students from 29 secondary schools and colleges and 25 higher education institutions took part in the contest. An official award ceremony for the winners was held on 10 December 2008 at the National Library of Belarus. The works of the winners, i.e. those who received first-class diplomas, will be published in the UN Bulletin. **This issue presents an essay by Evgeniy Chervinsky, a third-year student at the Investigation and Expertise Department of the Academy of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Belarus.**



Director of the National Library of Belarus Roman Matulsky and UN Resident Coordinator in Belarus Antonius Broek (in the center) with the contest winners.

of Human Rights which consists of 30 articles and was adopted on 10 December 1948. In that period I did not realize the significance of the Declaration. I could not understand how 30 text articles could be so significant. That period can be defined as cognitive. But then it was succeeded by another period which is remarkable not only in terms of the choice of my way in life but also led to a considerable reevaluation of many things and matters. Every day of my studies made me stronger and built

up a definite, informed position regarding many important things in the world. Among them was a true realization of the significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and each of its 30 articles. Understanding of the Declaration for me, a law enforcement student and officer, is associated with such concepts as a CITIZEN, DEFENDER and PROFESSIONAL. CITIZEN: a set of rights and obligations, a relationship to the state. A faithful citizen enjoys and actively implements his or her rights and

fulfils the obligations. The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus sets out a broad list of rights and freedoms, most of which are proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequently reflected in the Belarusian Constitution. The more faithful the citizens, the stronger the country and the force of law. This means that more and more people will not only have a statutory right to a certain benefit or value, but also realize this right.

DEFENDER. One of my key professional obligations is to protect life, health, dignity, rights, freedoms and the statutory interests of an individual against unlawful acts i.e. to protect the fundamental rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Belarusian Constitution and other regulations. The ideas of the Declaration and other documents adopted to implement the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are realized to the extent that "WE" – law enforcement and human rights organizations and ordinary citizens – perform this function (protection).

PROFESSIONAL. To perform one's duties at a high level, to reveal infringements of rights and freedoms and to respond immediately. To know whether one or another action is lawful, to prosecute offenders and not to call the innocent to account. A professional should have sound knowledge and skills. The better the professional skills, the more capable we are of protecting ourselves. The competence of the law in spheres of human rights lets us feel protected and enables us to assist others for the communal benefit.

Consolidating these three concepts (citizen, defender and professional) and uniting them with the philosophy of the Declaration, we come to the understanding that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must be the basis and cornerstone in law. The 30 articles of the Declaration should for us become the Ten Commandments of the Scriptures and, as the process of spiritual and educational development unfolds, they should be enhanced and corroborated by other rights and freedoms.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights gave a strong impetus to the development of the international human rights mentality and activity. It was the philosophical, political and legal principles of the Declaration which inspired the emergence of such important international law instruments as the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocols to it, etc. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights laid the political and legal foundation for the activities of the Commission, Committee, the Strasbourg Center of the Council of Europe, the European and Inter-American Courts of Justice, Economic and Social Council, UNESCO, the International Labor Organization, the International Helsinki Movement and the Regional Movement on Cooperation and Security in Europe. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights contributed to the establishment



Human Rights are....

The results of the creative work contest "Human Rights are..." have been published. The objective of the contest arranged by the UN Office in Belarus, in partnership with the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, was to expand children and young people's knowledge and understanding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – including the specific provisions and the enshrined values of respect and protection of human rights. Contestants were asked to continue the phrase "Human Rights are...", using artistic means.

The prize-winners are: Christina Baranovskaya, Margarita Gordei and Olga Chekun, students of Gantsevichi grammar school, along with their supervisor, history teacher Nadezhda Petruchenya; Natalia Derman, student at the Finance and Law faculty of Baranovichi State University; Elena Lobanova, student at the International Relations faculty of the Belarusian State University; Darya Minina, student in class 2A of Minsk secondary school #213; Irlina Nechai, student of class 4B of Novogrudok secondary school #4; Ulyana Skobla from vocational educational centre "Pramen" in Grodno.

The award ceremony was held on February 16, the anniversary of the creation of the UN Human Rights Commission. The winners' works will be published in the form of posters, and also displayed on the website of the UN Office in Belarus (www.un.by) and the Belarusian Helsinki Committee (www.belhelcom.org).

of dozens of organizations in the UN system and international organizations such as the Council of Europe, Organization of American States, OSCE and other regional and inter-regional organizations, national committees, hundreds of the national non-governmental organizations. Today's civilized international relations, democratic development of nations and countries, successful efforts of man and mankind in combating different forms of collective and individual despotism and violence, and the existence of the most humane of all known values, human dignity, would be inconceivable without this universal human rights instrument, without other global humane instruments developed on the basis of its principles and without an integral system of international, regional and national organizations focused on promoting and protecting human rights. Many new international and national covenants and organizations dealing with human rights protection all over the world may emerge, but it was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which laid the foundation for all international law

instruments in the second half of the Twentieth Century and proclaimed the greatness of the human mind and true humanism as the fundamental principle of international human rights ideology and, furthermore, the fundamental principle of the universal world outlook. In the latter capacity, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gave a strong impetus to the further improvement of the content and enhancement of the structure and scope of the human rights mentality and activity.

As a student, citizen, defender and professional, I have already dealt directly with some institutions based on the principles and ideas of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As for my service after graduation, the scope of relations will broaden and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its provisions will become a part of my daily work. As long as I watch over the Law, I will be accompanied by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and my understanding of the Declaration will continue to develop.