

charity which solely treats torture survivors. Over 50,000 people have been referred to it so far, and the need continues. Freedom from Torture provides medical and psychological documentation of torture, a range of therapies and practical advice and support.

**Reprive** is one of several organisations which work against the death penalty, with a particular focus on legal support for those facing the death penalty or held in secret prisons around the world. It was founded in the UK, but is now in the USA, Australia and the Netherlands.

The rights and values articulated by declarations, charters and treaties are too often violated or distorted, but they do remain a standard to which most human beings would aspire to and wish their governments to achieve.

### Want to know more?

Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

### Getting Involved: Contact:

Human Rights Watch  
<http://www.hrw.org>

Reprive  
<http://www.reprive.org.uk>

Amnesty International  
<http://www.amnesty.org>

The Peace & Justice Centre promotes

Nonviolence  
Conflict Resolution  
Peace Building  
Human Rights  
Ecological responsibility

Peace and Justice News monthly, Speaker Series fact sheets, leaflets, diary of peace, justice and environment events, , campaigning for disarmament, promoting alternative to war.



Networking & Advocating for justice, peace & disarmament in Edinburgh & across Scotland.

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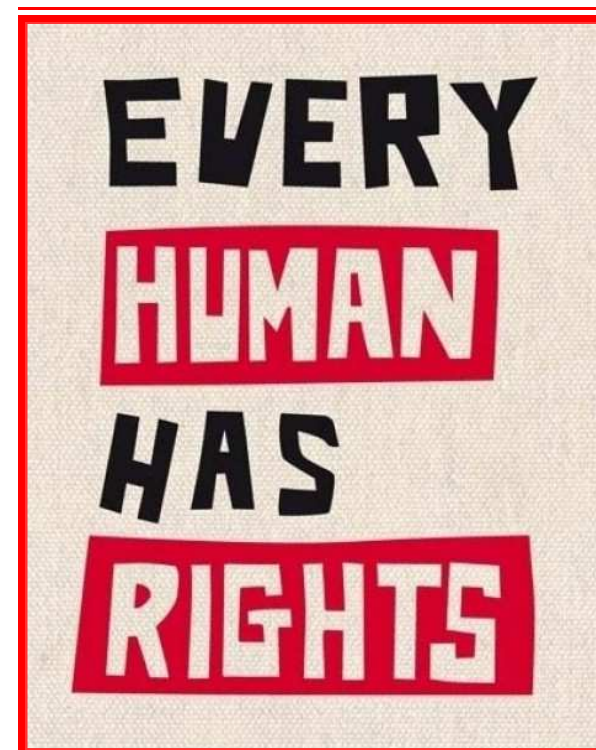
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Edinburgh Peace & Justice Centre  
Fact Sheet Series



*'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights....' (Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)*

The protection of liberty for all people is not a new aspiration. In 1100 AD, under King Henry 1 of England, the Charter of Liberties was designed to limit the power of kings, with subsequent charters and acts following. In 1166 came the Assize of Clarendon, abolishing trial by combat and trial by ordeal. The Magna Carta (1215), and the later Levellers' 'Agreement of the People' (1647), the Habeas Corpus Act (1679) and the English Bill of Rights (1689), followed, to protect people from being imprisoned without lawful cause. Public pressure was instrumental in bringing this about.

Read more...

Fast forward through revolutions, wars and local and global change to the Second World War, and the suffering witnessed and experienced during it, and we have the United Nations and its founding Charter, (1945) of which the purposes include the protection of human rights both in peace and in war:

**Article 1** includes in its 'Purposes' the maintenance of international peace and security, prevention of aggression; respect for 'equal rights and self-determination of peoples', humanitarian ways of solving problems and respect for 'fundamental freedoms'.

In December 1948, after two years of deliberation, the General Assembly of the UN voted in the Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), with eight abstentions but no dissenters. The preamble to the UNDHR illustrates the felt need to bring about a better world, promoting:

- The inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family; the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world
- The enjoyment of freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want
- The protection of human rights by law
- The development of friendly relations between nations
- A belief in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women...'
- Social progress and better standards of life

All nations and organisations, and all individuals were to be enabled to understand and promote these rights everywhere, at every level, and observe them.

European Human Rights law, and the laws and constitutions of most countries pay attention to this, and it is on the UNDHR that organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch base their work. The European Convention on Human Rights drawn up by the Council of Europe (drafted 1950 and effective from 1953), on which the European Court of Human Rights is based, was intended to deliver a human rights agenda 'through which serious violations could be avoided'.

The Convention was also a response to the growth of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and designed 'to protect the member states of the Council of Europe from communist subversion. '

In turn, the Scotland Act, and the Scottish Human Rights Act of 1998 are based on the European Convention on Human Rights.

Non governmental organisations concerned with the protection and promotion of a rights culture include Liberty (currently directed by Shami Chakrabarti), whose first president was the writer, E.M. Forster. The impulse for the establishment of what it was called for many years the National Council for Civil Liberties was the National Hunger March of 1932. It was inaugurated at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, in February 1934. Their first campaign was against the criminalisation of pacifist or anti-war literature.

Amnesty International was founded in London in 1961, following the publication of the article "The Forgotten Prisoners" by the lawyer Peter Benenson. Amnesty's brief now includes a wide range of human rights abuses, including economic and social rights, women, children, refugee and gay rights, and compliance with international laws and conventions such as the Geneva Convention.

**Anti-Slavery International, founded in 1839 as the Agency Committee of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions"**, is the oldest international human rights organisation, working solely against any forms of slavery. In 1990 it was renamed and works to draw attention to and combat any kind of slavery and related abuse.

The **Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC)** is a non-profit organisation based in London, founded in 1997. Its mission is to 'work with different organizations from Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds, to campaign for justice for all peoples regardless of their racial, confessional or political background.' Since 2007, it has had consultative status with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

'Several Human Rights organisations focus on a particular Article of the UNDHR, for example **Freedom from Torture** (previously known as *The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture set up in 1985*) is a British registered