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UN officials call for building on momentum to promote human rights everywhere



HUMAN RIGHTS DAY
10 DECEMBER 2011

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Building on the momentum for change triggered by the Arab Spring, top United Nations officials have urged everyone, everywhere to join in the Internet and social media campaign [launched](#) on the occasion of [Human Rights Day](#) to help more people know, demand and defend their rights.

“In 2011, the very idea of ‘power’ shifted,” High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said in a [message](#) to mark Human Rights Day, which is observed annually on 10 December.

We know there is still too much repression in our world, still too much impunity, still too many people for whom rights are not yet a reality.

“During the course of this extraordinary year, it was wielded not just by mighty institutions in marble buildings, but increasingly by ordinary men, women, and even children, courageously standing up to demand their rights,” she said.

“The message of this unexpected global awakening was carried in the first instance not by the satellites of major media conglomerates, or conferences, or other traditional means – although these all played a role – but by the dynamic and irrepressible surge of social media.”

This year’s Day is building on the pro-reform movements witnessed across North Africa and the Middle East, and social media’s vital contribution to them, to encourage more people to get involved in the global human rights movement.

The campaign by the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)) focuses on the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), and aims to help more people know, demand and defend human rights.

“Today, as in the past, editorial and financial factors – as well as access – determine whether or not protests, and repression of protests, are televised or reported in newspapers around the world,” noted Ms. Pillay. “But, wherever it happens, you can now guarantee it will be tweeted on Twitter, posted on Facebook, broadcast on YouTube, and uploaded onto the Internet...

“Instead we are seeing real lives in real struggle, broadcast in real time – and it is in many ways an exhilarating sight,” she added. “In sum, in 2011, human rights went viral.”

Today at UN Headquarters, Ms. Pillay hosted a global human rights dialogue at which she answered questions sent in via different social media platforms from all over the world.

It was one of several elements of the “Celebrate Human Rights” campaign, which also featured an online discussion on Facebook and Twitter that began a month ago called “30 Days and 30 Rights” that counted down to the Day with a daily posting about one article of the Declaration.

Speaking to reporters in New York, Ms. Pillay noted that the events were built around the idea that, even though much time is spent focusing on human rights violations, there is also much to celebrate in terms of what has been achieved thanks to the vision laid out in the Declaration.

“The response to our social media campaign has been tremendous, with hundreds of questions pouring in from dozens of different countries all over the world, confirming – if we really still need confirmation after a year like 2011 – that human rights are indeed universal,” she said.

[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon, in his [message](#) for the Day, noted that human rights belong to everyone, without exception. “But unless we know them, unless we demand they be respected, and unless we defend our right – and the right of others – to exercise them, they will be just words in a decades-old document,” he stated.

“Many of these peaceful demonstrators persevered despite being met with violence and further repression. In some countries, the struggle continues; in others, important concessions were gained or dictators were toppled as the will of the people prevailed...

“We know there is still too much repression in our world, still too much impunity, still too many people for whom rights are not yet a reality,” said Mr. Ban.

“Yet at the end of an extraordinary year for human rights, let us take strength from the achievements of 2011: new democratic transitions set in motion, new steps to ensure accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, new and ever-spreading awareness of rights themselves.”

Judge Sang-Hyun Song, President of the International Criminal Court (ICC), said in his [message](#) that the Declaration’s adoption in 1948 was the first time that the world articulated in detail fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to all human beings without distinction.

Half a century later, the adoption of the Rome Statute – which established the ICC – represented another “ground-breaking” development toward a more humane world, he said.

“The crimes under the ICC’s jurisdiction – genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes – inherently involve violations of the right to life and liberty, as well as subjection to torture and slavery.”

The ICC has become one of the major institutions for addressing massive violations of human rights. “It is a means for thousands of victimized children, women and men to see justice done and, through the possibility of victims’ participation and reparations, to lead a better present.

“Above all, the ICC is an essential building block for a better future – because the trials of today will deter the crimes of tomorrow,” stated Judge Song.

Today also marks the 60th anniversary of the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#), and Ms. Pillay stated that the ultimate responsibility for preventing genocide lies with States. “Genocide is the ultimate form of discrimination. We must do everything in our power to prevent it,” she stated.

The UN Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide, Francis Deng, and on the Responsibility to Protect, Edward Luck, called on Member States, regional and sub-regional organizations, civil society and the UN system to work together to prevent genocide and other atrocity crimes as a matter of the highest priority.

“Doing so will demonstrate our common humanity, our fundamental values, and our collective and individual determination not to repeat the mistakes of the past,” they said in a joint statement.

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