



Every 10 December the world celebrates human rights. It was particularly eventful this year as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights turned 70 years old. It was on the 10 December 1948 that 48 countries adopted the Declaration that grants fundamental rights to all people, regardless of their race, colour, nationality, sex, religion or political opinion. Since then, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has become the most translated document in the world and is now available in over 500 languages.

A lot has been achieved in the last 70 years, but safeguarding and promoting human rights is still an urgent duty in Europe and in the rest of the world today. This year provided us with an opportunity to take stock of the situation, to look back at the past 70 years and to double our commitment to ensure that human rights reach everyone across the globe, leaving no one behind.

To mark the important milestone a number of events were held in Europe, targeting wide audiences. Young people were mobilized in Belgium to learn more about the Declaration and its relevance in the world today. A series of educational activities focusing on Human Rights culminated on Human Rights Day with a series of visually-powerful events in various European capitals. In Brussels, for example, youth representatives, grassroots organizations, artists,

Belgium turns blue to celebrate Human Rights Day

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celebrities and the Mayor of Brussels stood on the balcony of the Town Hall and read the 30 articles of the Declaration. The audience that gathered in Brussels most famous square listened to the Declaration, while all buildings in the square were lit in blue, the colour most associated with the United Nations.

The Grand Place was not the only symbolic venue in Brussels marking the celebration. In the days leading up to 10 December, the Atomium hoisted the United Nations flag in the company of Spirou, one of Belgium's favourite comic-book heroes, and the choice of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as the champion for the 70th anniversary of the Declaration. Inside the Atomium, school children had the chance to attend guided tours and to learn more about human rights.



High school students were also involved in reflecting upon human rights at an event hosted at the Palais des Academies in Brussels earlier in December. The impressive neoclassic building came alive with 2,500 young people roaming its corridors and halls, invited by the pro-active Association for the United Nations (APNU). The spotlight was on the works that the young people themselves had created, all inspired by human rights, displayed in the form of video installations, concerts and an interactive exhibition. An award ceremony provided a much-deserved memento for the creators of the inspiring work.

UNRIC's popular series of CINE-ONU screenings also chose human rights as the central topic for a range of compelling film screenings in Brussels and around Europe, in partnership with the UN Office of Human Rights in Europe and the European Commission. On Tuesday 4th December, it was standing room only at Cinema Galleries in Brussels, with the audience engrossed in Jaha Dukureh's story about her fight against female genital mutilation. The documentary "Jaha's Promise" reminded everyone of what can be achieved through the sheer determination of one inspiring individual fighting human rights violations. The film was a timely tribute to all the brave women and men around the world defending human rights.

These events wrap up a year dedicated to human rights. It was a year which saw a growing number of civil society activists and young people embrace the fight for human rights, working hard in their communities to make human rights a reality. Birgit Van Hout, OHCHR Regional Representative for Europe, encapsulated a shared feeling: "When I see all of you, young people, gathered here, ready to get engaged and to promote human rights, I feel a sense of optimism. You bring a huge hope and it makes me happy."

It is now up to each and every one of us to start a new year with the same determination and conviction highlighted so often throughout 2018. Because the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be reached without free and equal rights for all.