

# The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 60

With simultaneous parties in New York and Geneva, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December. **Fernando Scornik Gerstein** might send a card, but is looking for a declaration of change

*It is difficult to imagine today just what a fundamental shift the Universal Declaration of Human Rights represented when it was adopted sixty years ago. In a post-war world scarred by the Holocaust, divided by colonialism and wracked by inequality, a charter setting out the first global and solemn commitment to the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings, regardless of colour, creed or origin, was a bold and daring undertaking.*  
—UN High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Louise Arbour

HUMAN RIGHTS Day 2007 saw the launch of a year-long commemoration leading to the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The United Nations is rightly proud of the UDHR. The organisation holds that since its adoption in 1948 “the *Declaration* has been and continues to be a source of inspiration for national and international efforts to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

But a clear perspective reveals that the presumption in that statement is not wholly true. This is because humanity’s most ‘fundamental freedom’ of all is not even mentioned in the UDHR: the most basic universal human right, which should have been declared in that historic document in order to establish that freedom, is missing from its pages. The UN’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is silent on our human right to be on earth and enjoy the fruits of nature and community. The missing ‘right’ is the right to a radical land reform settlement. Without that basic right, all other rights, as set out in the thirty articles of the *Declaration*, are built on sand. And in time, without fundamental land rights, one by one, they will collapse into that sand. Without the right to land, and equitable access to the common inheritance of nature and society, it is not possible reliably to exercise any ‘right’ to, for instance, ‘security of person’ [Article 3], or freedom from ‘servitude’ [Article 4]—never mind rights to ‘shelter’ [Article 25], ‘work’ [Article 23] or ‘education’ [Article 26].

The United Nations calls the *Declaration* a ‘living document’. Yet there seems little awareness—whether at the UN itself, or in

government, in the media, in business, in the education sector, or among civil society—that the *Declaration’s* ‘life’ might enable, and indeed require, it to change, as humanity’s enlightenment increases. The UDHR prefers instead to proclaim the UN’s “enduring relevance” and its “universality”; and certainly those qualities are real enough, so far as they go.

But the UN is wrong to claim of the *Declaration*, as it does, (if we are to take a literal interpretation of their statements) “that it has everything to do with all of us.” It does not have “everything”: it has a large and important piece missing. For our twenty-first

century universal human rights, that will not do. The UN’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* has been proven inadequate—and it must now be reformed, into a *Declaration of Universal Human Rights*. **L&L**

[www.UNpetition.net](http://www.UNpetition.net)

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Poster girl for human rights: Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the committee that drafted the *Declaration*

Photo of Mrs Roosevelt © United Nations

## 100 WORDS TO SAVE THE WORLD

**THIS ISSUE** Nick Dennys’ opportune word in the well-chosen ear of his fellow reformers

My mother-in-law said, “The trouble with you is, I need a lecture to understand what you are about! ‘Children in Need’ says it all”. How can a georgist express himself in a hundred words!? He must spend the first hundred trying to define terms, the next avoiding the word ‘tax’, the next explaining there’s only one solution, the next saying he meant that in a wholly reasonable way, the next dismissing SVR or full LVT according to preference, the next deflecting vituperative attacks by fellow georgists, and the next blaming the audience for not listening—no harm, they’ve gone.