

# WATETEZI TV HUMAN RIGHTS CLASSES

## TOPIC: ORIGIN OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Yes, Human Rights are the rights that every human being is born with. Some would even argue that they are the rights someone possesses the minute a zygote is formed. That is why abortion is considered a crime in some countries including Tanzania, as the being is considered to hold the 'Right to Life'

There is a myth in most African countries that human rights are synonymous to Western civilization and a remnant of neo-colonialism, where the colonialists try to invoke the concept of human rights while introducing foreign culture. On the contrary, human rights have nothing to do with culture or civilization. Every man is born with all the basic rights, in other words, the natural rights; Right to life and liberty, Freedom of opinion and expression, Freedom to choose of residence, religion, education and work as well as freedom from slavery and torture, among many others. Some would even argue that in the modern world, Internet Freedom is also a human right as argued by the THRDC National Coordinator Mr. Onesmo Olengurumwa, in his Article "Consider Internet Freedom in Tanzania as a Human Right".

Everyone is entitled to these rights regardless of their race, religion, ideology, ethnicity, gender, social, economic or political status.

Human Rights have existed since the onset of mankind on planet Earth. In the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran, God raised concerns over Cain after murdering his own brother Abel, depriving him (Abel) of his fundamental 'Right to Life'. In ancient times, human rights were mostly connected to religion and religious doctrines.

As much as human rights existed, they were not documented or have any proper protection mechanism. Recognizing and taking measures to protect human rights officially gained momentum in the 13th Century following the Cyrus Cylinder.

According to the United Nations, the origin of Human Rights dates as back as the year 539 B.C, when the troops of 'Cyrus the Great' conquered Babylon. Cyrus freed the slaves and declared that all people had the right to choose their own religion, and established racial equality. These and other precepts were recorded on a baked-clay cylinder known as the Cyrus Cylinder, whose provisions served as inspiration for the first four Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Based on these decrees, civilizations in India, as well as Greece and Rome, expanded on the concept of 'Natural Law' and society continued to make progress, leading to yet another cornerstone in the history of Human Rights: The Magna Carta of 1215. The Magna Carta, was accepted by King John of England and considered by many experts as the document that marks the start of modern democracy. Also known as the Great Charter, this document covered, among other things, the right of widows who owned property to choose not to remarry, and established principles of equality before the law.

In 1232 King Sundiata Keita of the Mali empire in Western Africa followed suit in documenting human rights when he produced the “mande charter”. This document has been widely argued in showing that human rights are not Western traditions. King Sundiata has been titled the “lion king” who fought against slave trade that had prevailed during that time. He also strived to ensure that there is no room for human to hurt another human being or take someone else’s property without their consent. In the Mande Charta King Sundiata specifically states that “all human life is one life” thus advocating for equality.

There article “Did Africa Invent Human Rights” by Anthropometrics, shows how many of the principles documented in the Mande Charter and Kurukan Fuga (Ancient Western Africa hunters oath on how they were all equal and would respect each other) form the basis for most of the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,1948.

The concept of natural rights forms a basis for many philosophers such as John Locke who came up with strategies to ensure that all human beings access human rights throughout the modes of production (Slavery and Feudalism) where the only rights that prevailed were those of the states and the kingdoms the leaders.

In the ancient world only the Kings and nobles had rights especially during slavery. People started to rise and fight against suppressing systems such as capitalism until human rights were regarded in the 17th Century, following poor working conditions and low wages in industrial areas and the rise of democracy. In United Kingdoms, a Petition of Right of the Freeholders and Free-men of the Kingdom of England was produced and signed by millions of people. It was during the 18th century when mechanism to officially document and protect human rights in laws and Constitutions such as American Constitution of 1787 and the French Declaration of 1789.

For the first time, Human Rights were internationally recognized and documented in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948. This is the international human rights Magna Carta for all human beings. It is the historic landmark for internationally recognizing human rights, documenting them and a reference point to most of the human rights laws and policies in the world. UDHR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its 183 session.

UDHR preamble states that the people of the United Nations are determined to reaffirm fundamental faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another. And the first Article of UDHR states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

**Tune in every Friday at 16:00 hours, on Watetezi TV YouTube channel, to catch the next episode on the Origin of Human Rights. Follow the link below**

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