

PART I:

# Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Fundamentals

*[R]ecognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.*

Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights



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# ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Long before human rights were written down in international documents and national constitutions, people revealed their commitment to principles of propriety, justice, and caring through cultural practices and oral traditions. Basic rights and responsibilities, such as the right to food and the golden rule of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” revolved around family, tribe, religion, class, community, or state.

## The Foundation of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

The earliest attempts of literate societies to write about rights and responsibilities date back more than 4,000 years to the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi. This Code, the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, the Analects of Confucius, the Koran, and the Hindu Vedas are five of the oldest written sources which address questions of people’s duties, rights, and responsibilities. In addition, the Inca and Aztec codes of conduct and justice and the Iroquois Constitution are Native American sources dating back well before the eighteenth century. Other pre-World War II documents, such as the English Bill of Rights, the US Constitution and Bill of Rights, and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, focused on civil and political rights. They concentrated on the rights of citizens to equality, liberty, and due process and of participation in the political life of their community and society through activities such as voting.

At the end of World War II, citizens working through ***nongovernmental organizations*** urged the creators of the United Nations system to include the promotion of a spectrum of human rights in the ***UN Charter***. These are rights to which all people are entitled, regardless of who they are or where they live. The United Nations created a ***Commission on Human Rights*** in 1946. Forcefully led by Eleanor Roosevelt, the Commission drafted the ***Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)***. It includes fundamental rights to life, liberty, and security as well as a broad range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

On December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted unanimously by 48 members of the United Nations, with eight countries abstaining.

Today, the promotion of human rights is guided by what is referred to as the ***Inter-national Bill of Rights***. It includes the UDHR and two ***treaties***—the ***International***

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\* This and other terms indicated in bold italic type are defined in *A Human Rights Glossary*, p. 99.