

Human Rights Day

‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’ declares the first Article of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such a milestone declaration in the history of human rights sets out the fundamental human rights of all human beings. This Declaration first set out core principles of human rights, such as universality, interdependence and indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination.

This year marks 70 years since world leaders, in seeking to avoid a repetition of the horrific human rights violations committed during the Second World War, set out fundamental rights that every individual should expect and demand. These rights were adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on the 10th December 1948 and remain as relevant today as they were back then.

On this day, we celebrate the achievements brought about by this declaration worldwide. This Declaration, which is generally recognised as the foundation of international human rights law, inspired a body of legally binding international human rights treaties. Since 1948, 18 treaties and optional protocols found agreement on the need to advance human rights. Over the years, treaties became more focused and specialised and strengthened the human rights of specific groups of women and men. Currently, fifty-seven percent of countries have a national human rights institution.¹

National Human Rights Institutions are the cornerstone of promoting and protecting human rights². The Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions, also known as The Paris Principles, require these institutions to protect human rights including by receiving, investigating and resolving complaints as well as to promote human rights through education, outreach, the media, training and capacity building. These principles specify the criteria that such institutions have to meet, namely to have a broad mandate based on universal human rights norms and standards; autonomy from government; independence; pluralism; adequate resources; and adequate powers of investigation.

In Malta a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) is envisaged to be established in line with the Paris Principles and work is underway to transform the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) into a Human Rights and Equality Commission (HREC). NCPE has participated in ongoing consultations in relation to the HREC and looks forward to the establishment of this institution. With this transformation, Malta’s legal framework on human rights and equality will be strengthened with the widening of NCPE’s remit. The new Commission will be answering directly to Parliament and thus being wholly independent.³

¹ <http://standup4humanrights.org/layout/files/proposals/UDHR70-MediaFactSheet.pdf>

² https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/PTS-4Rev1-NHRI_en.pdf

³

https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Annual_Reports/Annual_Report_2017.pdf

This institution will monitor the strengthened equality legislation and provide individuals with a stronger mechanism against discrimination and other human rights breaches.⁴

These upcoming developments in Malta are envisaged in the context of ensuring respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms as called for by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As stated by the former UN General-Secretary Ban Ki Moon *“The international community has a duty to uphold and defend these rights. Let us ensure that those people who most need their rights protected are made aware that this Declaration exists — and that it exists for them. Let us each do our part to make these universal rights a living reality for every man, woman and child, everywhere.”*⁵

For further information, contact NCPE on 2295 7850, equality@gov.mt or on Facebook.

⁴ https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Pages/Consultations/HumanRights.aspx

⁵ <http://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/foreword.shtml>