

## INTRODUCTION: Fifty Years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**T**he health and human rights movement finds its genesis in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a revolutionary document which, 50 years ago, set out the underlying conditions necessary for optimal health and well-being. The Journal is happy to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the UDHR with a special thematic issue devoted to its history and contents.

In 1997, the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, along with Global Lawyers and Physicians, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and Physicians for Human Rights joined together to form The Consortium for Health and Human Rights. Our collective work this past year has focused on promoting the links between health and human rights, in particular through observance of and activism around the fiftieth anniversary of the UDHR. A natural evolution of this effort was for the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights to invite the other members of the Consortium to coedit this issue of the Journal. Together, we discussed its structure and contents and invited contributors, and we now take great delight in offering this commemorative issue.

Since its creation, the Consortium has endeavored to stimulate health professionals and schools of medicine, public health, nursing and the allied health professions to increase awareness of the linkages between health and human rights within the framework of the UDHR. The Consortium Call to Action which appears next as an editorial has been widely circulated. Information concerning the work of the Consortium and the mandates of each of the organizations appears as the final Annex to the Journal.

Opening the issue are commentaries from three leaders within the United Nations system directly concerned with human rights and with health. These distinguished individuals were asked to reflect over the relevance of the UDHR and

its relationship to health in this anniversary year. The United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan poses that this fiftieth anniversary will help remind us of the indivisibility of rights, and of their relevance to recognizing health as a right to be fought for. The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Gro Harlem Brundtland, stresses that the world confronts increasingly complex and difficult challenges with serious consequences for health and for human rights and suggests ways in which the UDHR may inspire the work of WHO. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, emphasizes the importance of the UDHR for health issues globally and proposes that the success of our efforts in promoting human rights can be measured by the improved health and well-being of individuals around the world. We are indebted to these three prominent leaders for their enthusiastic contributions to this special issue.

The ensuing section of the Journal is dedicated to articles of the UDHR selected for their diverse relevance to the health and human rights paradigm. In the spirit of the UDHR, each piece highlights the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights. It is hoped that the arbitrary selection of rights highlighted in this section will stimulate further analyses about other elements of the UDHR, and its overall meaning to our work. To this end, the UDHR has been included as an Annex to the Journal.

We invited authors to take articles of the UDHR as entry points and analyze the reciprocal linkages to health. Jonathan Mann engaged to emphasize the broad connections between health and both the concept of dignity embodied in the first article of the UDHR and the principle of nondiscrimination which appears in the second. Jonathan's tragic death prevented him from completing his draft on these two dimensions of the UDHR which had so inspired his work and his life. He eloquently points out that the UDHR expands our understanding of the domain of human suffering, and therefore also the capacity for its alleviation. Taking the example of current German policy, Christian Pross focuses his analysis on Article 14 — the right to asylum — as it was understood when the UDHR was drafted, and proposes to use this right to scrutinize the current asylum policies of

wealthier countries. Ingar Brueggemann and Karen Newman of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) reflect on the influence that Article 16 — the right to marry and to found a family — has had on the evolution of thinking in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Through his analysis of Article 19 — the right to freedom of expression — James Welsh illustrates the complex links between this right, and related freedoms, and the health and well-being of individuals and of society. Dorothy Logie and Michael Rowson consider the implications of Article 25 which they argue not only promotes health as a right, but brings into focus the implications of debt relief and other economic reforms as determinants of health. Vincent Iacopino and Zohra Rasekh examine the relationship between health and the right to education, spelled out in Article 26 of the UDHR, by focusing on the current situation in Afghanistan where direct threats to health are being created by prohibitions on education for women and for girls. Victor Sidel reflects on Article 28 — the right to a just and peaceful social and international order — and asks whether we are any closer to a “just social and international order” today than we were 50 years ago, when the UDHR was drafted.

The Journal then brings together three pieces which project our thinking into the future. Richard Claude and Bernardo Issel review the genesis of the provisions on health, medicine and science in the UDHR, and the historical debates which resulted in the adopted language. Hurst Hannum draws a picture of the current status of the UDHR in national and international law and of the ways in which health, or the protection of health, are found in the constitutions of countries around the world. Finally, Leonard Rubenstein and Leslie London use the concrete example of South Africa to consider the limits of the medical ethical framework. They argue that South Africa’s recent history of human rights abuses condoned by health professionals calls for a new set of principles inspired by the UDHR.

This issue of the Journal has been planned for publication in time for the actual fiftieth anniversary of the UDHR, on December 10, 1998. It has been the product of enthusiastic collective work for which I wish to thank in particular several individual members of the Consortium: Susannah

Sirkin, Barbara Ayotte, Michael Grodin and Brian Rawson. It is hoped that this landmark issue in the history of the Journal, dedicated to Jonathan Mann, will further contribute to enhancing the health and human rights movement around the world.

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Editor