

## 75 years of the United Nations | Our shared quest for equality, dignity and a healthy planet continues

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**Our Director, Phil Lynch, reflects on the important role the UN still plays in making the world a better and fairer place.**



We are all part of the one human family. We share a common humanity and strive to meet common needs – we all want to learn, to have peace and good health, to provide for our families and loved ones, and to live free and dignified lives, without discrimination on any grounds. We might not always agree on how to achieve these things, but there is far more that unites us than divides us.

**That's why it's so important that we have places like the United Nations, where we can come together to talk, work through our differences and find solutions to our shared challenges.**

This week marks the 75th anniversary of when the UN Charter entered into effect and the United Nations officially came into being.

In the decades that have followed, the UN has played a vital role in maintaining peace and security by helping to resolve conflict and harnessing our collective knowhow to confront everything from health and humanitarian emergencies to gender inequality. The UN has also been a vital space for civil society and communities to testify against injustice, confront power, challenge impunity, demand accountability, and push for change.

It's by no means a perfect organisation, but without a shadow of a doubt the world today is a far better, fairer, healthier and safer one than it would be without the UN. This is due in no small part to the importance the UN places on the protection and promotion of human rights.

**No matter who we are or where we live, our lives are better when we treat each other fairly and with respect. That's what human rights are all about - making sure that values like freedom, equality and solidarity are at the heart of our decisions and are reflected in behaviours and laws around the world.**

Unfortunately, sometimes laws passed by governments are repressive or not sufficiently protecting us, in particular the most vulnerable among us. And companies may act in ways that put their profit first, at the expense of human rights. . Often it takes people and communities to hold powerful politicians and corporations to account and make sure that everyone can benefit from the human rights and freedoms that we are all meant to share.

**Human rights defenders are the people that work to make this happen.**

These are the people that speak out against injustices like systemic racism, sexism or the climate crisis and who work on the frontlines with communities to find solutions and advocate for better ways of doing things. These are the people who make sure that, as humanity advances, no one is left behind.

It's of the utmost importance that human rights defenders have a seat at the table so they can give voice to the concerns and ideas of the people impacted by the very policies, practices and objectives being discussed at the UN.

**Unfortunately, some governments - concerned about facing criticism - try to lock human rights defenders out of the conversations. Worse still, in some countries, the government or groups with powerful vested interests harass or discredit people who defend human rights. In some countries, they are beaten up, imprisoned and even killed.**

As the UN's Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, recently told the General Assembly, the UN is only as strong as its members' commitment to its ideals and each other.

There is no way we can advance the UN's noble aims if we continue to let members get away with human rights violations and reprisals against people who defend human rights. The duty falls to all member States and their diplomats to uphold the very principles at the heart of the UN's mission – peace, equality, dignity and healthy planet – and the promise that their country has made to support that mission.

At the International Service for Human Rights, we help human rights defenders access the UN system so their voices are heard. We build their capacity on the frontlines and at the UN. We work to strengthen the UN's human rights systems and we seek justice and accountability for human rights violations.

As we celebrate 75 years of the UN, we know the world is facing many challenges, but as we've done so many times in the past, we can, we must and we will find our way through them – and that is always done best when we do it together acting with care and solidarity.

**The pursuit of peace, equality, dignity and a healthy planet continues. Thanks for being a part of it.**

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