

Transcript: Statement of Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2014

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

"'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' In perhaps the most resonant and beautiful words of any international agreement, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promises, to all, the economic, social, political, cultural and civil rights that underpin a life free from want and fear.

"These human rights are not country-specific. They are not a reward for good behaviour, or particular to a certain era or social group. They are the inalienable entitlements of all people, at all times and everywhere, 365 days a year.

"They are the rights of people of every colour, from every race and ethnic group; whether or not they have disabilities; citizens or migrants; no matter their sex, their class, their caste, their creed, their age or sexual orientation.

"The commitments made to the people of the world through the Universal Declaration are in themselves a mighty achievement – discrediting the tyranny, discrimination and contempt for human beings that have so painfully marked human history. And since the Declaration was adopted, countless people have gained greater freedom.

"Violations have been prevented. Independence and autonomy have been attained. Many people – though not all – have been able to secure freedom from torture, unjustified imprisonment, summary execution, enforced disappearance, persecution and unjust discrimination, as well as fair access to education, economic opportunities, rich cultural traditions and adequate resources and health-care.

"They have obtained justice for wrongs, and national and international protection for their rights, through the strong architecture of the international human rights legal system. The power of the Universal Declaration is the power of ideas to change the world. It tells us that human rights are essential and indivisible – 365 days a year. Every day is Human Rights day: a day on which we work to ensure that all people can gain equality, dignity and freedom."