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Public Issues Proposal

All are born free and equal

Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

On 10 December 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in Paris (France). This historic milestone in international human rights law continues as a source of inspiration for states and people in the fight for the dignity of all humans.

“The Universal Declaration has helped countless people gain greater freedoms and equality,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein. “Violations have been prevented; independence and autonomy have been attained.”

The 70th anniversary of the declaration reminds us that human rights are universal, belonging to every human being. This same yearning is found throughout the deep and rich traditions of Christianity. The opening passages of our Holy Scriptures affirm this equality in dignity as all are made in the image of God. Later, in his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul proclaimed that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

These fundamental messages are often lost in Europe today. Recent years point to a time of rising populism and intolerant nationalism. The promotion and protection of human rights is as urgent as ever before. Maintaining what was created and inspired by the Universal Declaration on Human rights is an ongoing task for the churches and global actors, including the United Nations, European Union, Council of Europe, and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Conference of European Churches and Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe are deeply committed to the promotion and protection of human rights. In our European context, this includes advocating for more robust implementation of existing laws and continuing our fight for freedom of religion or belief across the continent. Our human rights horizon also extends beyond European borders, with repeated calls for migrants and refugees to have safe passage and warm welcome here. Human rights exist for all humanity and can only be effectively advanced when we see ourselves as part of this bigger picture.

On this occasion we recognise the value of the declaration and human rights law, and their role in combatting ongoing violations. The CEC human rights education program

continues its theological and advocacy work to help churches use legal instruments in support of those facing human rights violations.

The Governing Board of the Conference of European Churches joins with all people of goodwill in working to promote, engage, reflect on, and advance the achievements of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We recall in all our work, as simply stated in Article 1, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and right."