



**Permanent Mission  
of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
Geneva**

**Human Rights Day 2007  
Launching of a campaign to  
commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
The Universal Declaration on Human Rights**

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**Statement by  
H.E. Ambassador Sameh Shoukry  
Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
on behalf of the African Group**

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**Geneva, 10 December, 2007**

*Please check against delivery*

Thank you Mr. President,

I have the honor to make this statement on behalf of the African Group. We thank the High Commissioner for her statement, and look forward to her Office's activities in the context of the international campaign to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights .

Since 1948, the 10<sup>th</sup> of December of every year has marked a special occasion where the world celebrates the proclamation of the Universal Declaration on Human rights. 2008 will be a particularly auspicious year, as it will mark the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a milestone in the history of humanity, one that placed the dignity and worth of the human person at the centre of International Community's priorities and objectives, by recognizing that the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

The UDHR was proclaimed as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations, reflecting the significant contribution to humanity made by all peoples and civilizations, and the fact that this historic document constituted a feat of common human heritage, not a creation or a monopoly of some, as opposed to others.

Mr. President,

When the UDHR was proclaimed, only a few African countries had the privilege to participate in its elaboration and represent the African conscience in this process. The vast majority of the peoples of the Continent were subjugated under foreign occupation and domination. The notions of freedom of fear, slavery and want, and the right to life, liberty and security of the person, were of little meaning, in practice, for Africans.

It would only be a decade or more later before the right of all peoples to self-determination would be recognized and take effect for most African peoples, but others still suffered under racist regimes that had persisted for far too long, whether in apartheid South Africa, or the former Rhodesia.

While Africa is a free continent today, its conscience still yearns to see the Palestinian People realize its right to self-determination, free from the Israeli occupation which has systematically denied it and violated all its rights. Tyranny and oppression, as the UDHR put it, are not admissible nor sustainable.

**Mr. President,**

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights has played a vital and direct role in improving the situation of all human beings around the world. From its womb, came the International Bill of Rights, and the various specific Conventions which make up the international legal framework on human rights today.

However, in the midst of remarkable progress in establishing this human rights framework, an artificial separation was created between civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights, on the other. This historical mistake was partially corrected in the World Conference on Human Rights of 1993, which recognized the indivisibility of all human rights, and today, the International Community has before it an unprecedented opportunity to settle this issue once and for all, by effectively reaffirming the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights. Indeed, the UDHR did not envisage that essential primary education, basic medication for fighting pandemics, or freedom from hunger, be matters of preference or charity.

For its part, the African Continent, has by and large embraced human rights, through the elaboration of its own comprehensive legal framework embodied in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the establishment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African Court on Human Rights. These bodies and mechanisms have helped develop the African regional jurisprudence and practice in the field of human rights, and assisted the countries of the Continent in developing their relevant national legislations and policies.

**Mr. President,**

The achievements that emanated from the proclamation of the Universal declaration in Human Rights are undeniable. Yet the international community should always bear in mind that vision contained in the UDHR, will be of little consequence, especially to those most in need, if it does not help protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of peoples and individuals alike.

The realities of today certainly do not suggest that the vision contained in the UDHR has been fulfilled. It is difficult to understand what development of friendly relations between countries means, when we see those racing to impose war, conflict and strife on others. It is hard to believe that human beings are born free and equal, when the truth is that the scourges of racism

and racial discrimination, whether in their old forms or new ones, have not only persisted, but have sharply increased in some parts of the world, feeding on racial and religious hatred. We wonder if some human beings were born freer or "more equal" than others.

Freedom from want is a distant notion when we see millions dying of hunger and malnutrition each year, because of apathy and economic greed. The right to development remains largely in the realm of rhetoric, not reality, and so is the eradication of poverty. Slavery, which was supposedly abolished, has resurfaced in various form, not least evil of which is human trafficking, particularly when associated with the abduction of children, and forced prostitution. The right of women to non-discrimination is obviously a long way from being realized.

It is equally difficult to grasp the meaning of cooperation between states to promote the universal respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, when we witness human rights being used and abused by some as a mere tool for achieving political ends, accompanied by extreme selectivity and double-standards. Last but not least, whereas the UDHR considers that a common understanding of human rights is of the greatest importance for their realization, one would not know it as persistent attempts at imposing one view of these rights on others continue.

Mr. President,

What is most needed today is concrete and concerted action, at all levels, to address the various scourges impeding the realization of the vision of the UDHR. Failure is not an option. Our message on this Human Rights Day is the following: as we celebrate and commemorate the proclamation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and make it the focus of our activities in the lead up to its sixtieth anniversary, we should also remember that there are those who are not celebrating.

I thank you.