

What is a human right?

From the start of our lives, because we are human beings, there are certain things our governments must do to help us achieve our potential. These expectations and claims we have towards our governments are called human rights. Every single man, woman and child has them.

How does it work? Rights mean that governments must:

- Respect – avoid putting limits on some things that a person can do.
- Protect – safeguard a person from abuse.
- Fulfil – provide basic conditions to enable a person to achieve their potential.

The most basic minimum human rights standards have been discussed and written down by countries. Countries have agreed to follow them. These have become international law. An example where human rights can be found at home is in the constitution.

Promoting respect for basic human rights is one of the main purposes of the United Nations. This is achieved through the activities of the United Nations organisations around the world. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is responsible for leading the UN's human rights programme. There are also committees of experts that monitor how well countries put their human rights promises into practice, and there is an assembly of countries called the Human Rights Council, which discusses different human rights topics and situations from around the world.

What can I do? Find out what your rights are. Learn more about the UN human rights programme. And spread the word.