

UNIT 6: HUMAN RIGHTS

Introduction to Human Rights

In a democracy, citizens enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms. This unit will explore the concept of human rights, their basic features, classifications, and the roles of citizens and the state in realizing these rights. We will also look at the instruments designed to protect human rights.

Key Terms:

- **Eternality:** Human rights last for a lifetime.
- **Human Rights:** Basic entitlements inherent to every person.
- **Inalienability:** Human rights cannot be taken away.
- **Indivisibility and Interdependence:** All rights are connected and cannot be fully enjoyed in isolation.
- **Irrevocable:** Rights cannot be withdrawn by any authority.
- **Personality Right:** Rights related to personal dignity and identity.
- **Universalism:** Human rights apply to all people everywhere.

The Concept of Human Rights

1. Understanding Human Rights

Human rights are fundamental entitlements that apply to everyone, everywhere, just because they are human. They protect people's dignity and worth and include basic standards necessary for a decent life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) confirms that everyone is entitled to these rights without discrimination.

2. Basic Features of Human Rights

- **Universalism:** Human rights are universal, applying to all individuals globally without any exceptions.
- **Eternality:** These rights last for a lifetime, from birth until death.
- **Inalienability:** They cannot be taken away, although some may be restricted under specific circumstances, such as during emergencies.
- **Indivisibility and Interdependence:** Rights are interconnected; the enjoyment of one right depends on the fulfillment of others. For instance, enjoying civil rights often depends on having access to economic and social rights.
- **Inviolability:** Human rights should not be violated or restricted. Even in crises, these rights should be respected as much as possible.

- **Irrevocability:** No authority can revoke human rights, as they are inherent to every human being.

3. Classification of Human Rights

Human rights are categorized into three generations:

- **First Generation Rights:** Civil and political rights, such as freedom from discrimination, the right to a fair trial, and freedom of expression.
- **Second Generation Rights:** Economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to work, education, and an adequate standard of living.
- **Third Generation Rights:** These include the right to development, a healthy environment, and participation in cultural heritage.

Citizens and State Obligations in Realizing Human Rights

1. Citizens' Obligations

As individuals, we have responsibilities to respect and uphold the rights of others. This includes respecting religious and gender equality and honoring the national flag. Our rights come with duties to ensure that we do not infringe upon the rights of others.

2. State Obligations

States have three main duties in protecting human rights:

- **Obligation to Respect:** States must refrain from interfering with individuals' enjoyment of their rights. This includes not conducting unauthorized medical experiments or excluding individuals from education based on disability.
- **Obligation to Protect:** States must safeguard individuals from abuses by non-state actors and ensure legal remedies are available. For instance, protecting children's right to education from interference by third parties.
- **Obligation to Fulfill:** States must take proactive steps to ensure human rights are realized, such as providing free and compulsory education and creating conditions for the full enjoyment of these rights.

3. Instruments for the Protection of Human Rights

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** A foundational document defining basic human rights and freedoms.

- **International Human Rights Conventions:** Include treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- **Regional Mechanisms:** Regional systems in Africa, the Americas, and Europe work alongside international frameworks to protect human rights.
- **Ethiopian Human Rights Instruments:** The FDRE Constitution (1994) outlines human rights and incorporates international agreements into Ethiopian law.

Unit Summary

Human rights are essential for treating everyone with equal dignity and respect. They are detailed in legal documents and international conventions and encompass various aspects of life, including work, education, and personal freedom. The realization of these rights is an obligation for both states and individuals to ensure everyone can live a dignified life.