

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN DUTIES

(UDHD – Canonical Text, Version 1.0)

Love as the creative, guiding and driving force of existence

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PREAMBLE

This Declaration starts from a simple fact about how we exist: we are never alone. From the beginning we find ourselves among others, and every human life is played out in relation to them.

Within this shared life, two opposing logics appear.

We call love the self-giving of one's life for the true good of others, without demanding anything in return, and willing that the other be free and able to flourish. Such love cannot exist in a void: by its very nature it presupposes at least two subjects, a giver and a receiver. In this sense, love does not merely accompany existence; it calls for it.

Love is the creative, guiding and driving force of existence.

It is the ultimate truth to which humanity must conform in order to reach genuine happiness.

Its rightful effects are not bound by time or space, but extend beyond the life of any single person or generation.

We call domination the relation in which the other is reduced to a means: something to be used, controlled or exploited in order to preserve one's own power, safety or advantage. It also requires the existence of others, but only in order to deny them as subjects and bend them to oneself.

We hold that the human being reaches the highest form of existence when living according to the logic of love and the duties that flow from it: recognising the other as someone who has value in themselves, accepting that our existence alongside them generates responsibilities, and rejecting ways of life built on use and superiority. Domination, however reasonable or necessary it may appear, is always a distortion of this truth.

Believers and non-believers may disagree about the ultimate source or name of this creative love. Some traditions speak of God, others of moral law, others of inherent human dignity. This Declaration does not require agreement on that final language. It does require agreement that no human power creates the worth of persons, and that acknowledging this worth entails concrete responsibilities of non-domination and mutual care.

The modern language of "rights" has often served to protect persons from abuse. Yet when it is detached from the logic of gift and responsibility, it can slide into permanent entitlement, competing claims and the illusion that dignity depends on what others or the State are bound to provide. The thesis of this Declaration is that rights are best understood as flowing from something prior: the duties that arise from love and from recognising the reality of others.

To propose a Universal Declaration of Human Duties is therefore not to idealise human nature or to deny the need for laws, institutions and limits on power. On the contrary, it is to

take seriously both the human capacity to love and the constant temptation to dominate. What follows should not be read as a catalogue of threats, but as an invitation: to discover that true freedom does not consist in escaping every duty, but in choosing to respond to the gift of existence by placing others before oneself.

In this spirit, the following Universal Declaration of Human Duties is offered as a starting point for dialogue, and as a guiding framework for persons, communities, institutions, laws and technologies in a time of global turmoil.

PART I – FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Article 1 – Primacy of Love and Duty

1. Love, understood as the willing and seeking of the true good of others, is affirmed as the creative, guiding and driving force of existence; all genuine duties arise from it and are ordered towards it.
2. Duties arising from love precede and ground any legitimate claims styled as “rights”.
3. Any exercise of freedom that intentionally denies, undermines or destroys the being of others is contrary to this Declaration.

Article 2 – Equal Dignity and Personal Responsibility

1. Every human person possesses equal, inherent worth by virtue of their existence and their capacity freely to respond to what life presents.
2. This worth does not depend on any human decision, recognition or status, and cannot be annulled by injustice, poverty, illness or contempt.
3. Dignity is realised above all in the manner in which a person assumes responsibility for their duties and faces circumstances, including suffering and injustice, with integrity.
4. Each person shall recognise this worth in themselves by accepting their duties, and in others by refraining from domination and, where possible, supporting their capacity to fulfil their duties.
5. No person shall be treated as a mere object, instrument or means for the purposes of another.

Article 3 – Non-Domination

1. No person shall exercise power over another for the purpose of domination, exploitation or humiliation.
2. Power, in any form, shall be exercised only as service directed to the protection and genuine flourishing of persons and communities.
3. Structures, customs and practices that systematically reduce persons to instruments or property are incompatible with this Declaration.
4. Domination is a practical denial of love as the creative force of shared existence, and it degrades both the one who dominates and the one who is dominated.

Article 4 – Primacy of the Person over Systems

1. Systems, institutions, laws, markets and technologies exist for the benefit of persons and communities, and not vice versa.

2. Every person and institution has a duty to resist and reform systems that systematically sacrifice persons to abstractions such as profit, ideology, efficiency or the convenience of the powerful.

PART II – DUTIES OF THE PERSON

Article 5 – Duty to Preserve Life

1. Every person has a duty to preserve and protect human life, beginning with their own and extending to that of others.
2. No one shall intentionally take innocent human life or co-operate in its unjust destruction.
3. In situations of unavoidable conflict, all reasonable measures shall be taken to minimise harm and to protect the most vulnerable.

Article 6 – Duty of Truthfulness

1. Every person has a duty to seek, honour and speak the truth.
2. Deliberate lying, manipulation or deception, especially where it seriously harms others or the community, is a grave violation of this duty.
3. Truth shall be spoken in a manner ordered towards correction, healing and guidance, and not as a means of cruelty or domination.

Article 7 – Duty of Responsible Self-Care

1. Each person has a duty to care for their own body, mind and spirit so as to remain reasonably capable of fulfilling their duties towards others.
2. Self-destructive conduct that rejects one's own worth or gravely impairs one's ability to meet one's duties to others is contrary to this Declaration.
3. Seeking appropriate help in times of weakness, illness or distress is itself an exercise of responsibility towards those who depend on one's presence and gifts.

Article 8 – Duties within the Family

1. Those who bring children into the world or assume parental responsibilities have a primary duty to protect, nurture, educate and guide them towards mature freedom and responsibility.
2. Parental authority shall be exercised solely for the good of the child and never for the satisfaction of parental ego, fear or ambition.
3. Children have a duty to show respect and due gratitude to those who care for them, whilst retaining the freedom to seek truth and goodness as they mature.
4. Family relations shall be governed by love, mutual respect and service, and not by domination, manipulation or violence.

Article 9 – Duty of Solidarity

1. Every person has a duty to show effective concern for those who suffer injustice, exclusion or extreme need.
2. Indifference in the face of serious suffering is a refusal of love and a wound to the human family.
3. According to their abilities and circumstances, all persons shall contribute to the common good of their communities.

Article 10 – Duty of Stewardship of Gifts

1. Talents, knowledge, wealth and positions of influence are entrusted to individuals not solely for their own benefit but for the service of others.
2. The deliberate hoarding or exclusive use of such gifts for oneself, whilst others lack what is essential for a dignified life, contradicts the duty of love.
3. Generosity, to retain its character as love, shall be freely given and not the result of unjust coercion.
4. Every person has a duty to respect the legitimate property of others.

PART III – DUTIES IN COMMUNITY AND INSTITUTIONS

Article 11 – Duty of Justice

1. Individuals and institutions have a duty to give each person what is due to them as a person of equal dignity.
2. Laws and practices shall be framed and applied so as to protect life, uphold truth and create conditions favourable to genuine human flourishing.
3. Justice does not require identical outcomes, but fair treatment and the refusal to treat any person as a thing.

Article 12 – Duty of Subsidiarity

1. Public responsibilities shall be exercised at the lowest level competent to discharge them, closest to those affected.
2. Larger communities and institutions have a duty to support, and not unjustly to displace, smaller communities and families, intervening only when necessary.
3. No higher authority shall arbitrarily deprive lower communities of their rightful responsibilities and freedoms.

Article 13 – Duty of Honest Authority

1. Those who hold authority—political, economic, cultural, religious, military or technological—bear a heightened duty to serve the common good.
2. Authority shall be exercised transparently, accountably and with particular care for the weakest.
3. The use of authority primarily for personal gain, factional advantage or group domination is a grave betrayal of duty.

Article 14 – Duty of Civic Participation

1. Each person has a duty, according to their capacities, to contribute to the life and governance of their community.
2. Persistent withdrawal into apathy or indifference, where one is able to assist in remedying unjust or harmful conditions, neglects one's duties towards others.

PART IV – DUTIES IN EXPRESSION, KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURE

Article 15 – Duties in Expression and Reception

1. Every person has a duty to use their freedom of expression in the service of truth and love, including the freedom to criticise ideas, beliefs, practices and authorities, even sharply.
2. Persons and public authorities have a duty not to impose sanctions or coercive measures solely on the basis of the expression of thoughts, beliefs, opinions or feelings, however offensive or erroneous, where such expression does not form part of a concrete and intentional organisation of serious harm.
3. Individuals and communities have a duty to respond to harmful or hateful expression with better speech, patient correction and, where necessary, firm but non-violent opposition, rather than resorting to the suppression of opinion as such.

Article 16 – Duty to Act on Manifest Projects of Serious Harm

1. When the expression of a person or group clearly and seriously reveals a concrete project to inflict serious harm on the life, basic integrity, fundamental freedom or essential means of subsistence of other persons, such expression ceases to be mere opinion and shall be regarded as evidence of an unlawful enterprise.
2. In such cases, individuals and competent authorities have a duty to take lawful and proportionate measures to prevent the project from being carried out, acting upon the preparation of the acts and the means to execute them.
3. This duty of prevention does not authorise a general censorship of opinions, however offensive or erroneous, but only intervention where there is a sufficiently determined purpose of serious harm.

Article 17 – Duty in Education and Culture

1. Parents, educators and cultural institutions have a duty to transmit truth, critical judgement and the habits of love and duty to younger generations.
2. Education shall aim to form persons capable of self-gift, responsibility and respect for the dignity of all, and not merely consumers, workers or instruments of ideology.
3. Cultural and media creators remain free to depict all aspects of human experience, including evil and domination. They have a duty, however, to consider the foreseeable impact of their work and not deliberately to glorify domination or the reduction of persons to objects as if such states were good in themselves.
4. Individuals, communities and institutions have a duty to engage critically with cultural and media works, to refuse complicity in messages that celebrate domination or dehumanisation, and to respond by argument, example and alternative creation rather than by coercive suppression.

5. Nothing in this Article shall be interpreted as authorising censorship, prior restraint or legal penalties based solely on ideas or depictions, save as provided in Articles 15 and 16 concerning the concrete organisation of serious harm.

Article 18 – Duty of Intellectual Honesty

1. Researchers, educators and communicators have a duty to seek and present truth as faithfully as possible, acknowledging uncertainty and correcting error.
2. Distorting or suppressing knowledge for purposes of propaganda, profit or control violates this duty and harms the common good.

PART V – DUTIES IN CONFLICT, POWER AND DEFENCE

Article 19 – Duty to Avoid and Limit Violence

1. All persons and communities have a duty to avoid violence wherever reasonably possible and to exhaust peaceful means of resolving conflict before resorting to force.
2. When force is used in defence against unjust aggression, it shall be proportionate, discriminate and directed to the protection of life and the restoration of a just peace.
3. Revenge, cruelty and unnecessary destruction are always forbidden.

Article 20 – Duty of Mutual Defence

1. Communities that freely associate to form a larger people or nation share a mutual duty of defence against external unjust aggression.
2. Armed forces exist solely to protect life and the conditions for peaceful coexistence, and shall not be used as instruments of internal domination or unjust conquest.
3. Those who serve in defence roles have a duty to refuse manifestly unlawful or gravely unjust orders, even at personal cost.

Article 21 – Duty of Mercy and Restorative Justice

1. Following wrongdoing, the primary duties are to protect the innocent, to acknowledge truth and to seek, where possible, the genuine reform of the offender.
2. Punishment, where necessary, shall aim at protection and rehabilitation, not vengeance or degradation.
3. Societies have a duty, without denying the gravity of harm done, to leave open the possibility of repentance and reintegration.

PART VI – DUTIES TOWARDS CREATION AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Article 22 – Duty of Care for the Earth

1. Humanity has a duty to care for the natural world as a shared home and not merely as a store of resources.
2. Environmental destruction that recklessly endangers present or future life is contrary to love and to duty towards unseen neighbours.

Article 23 – Duty to Future Generations

1. Present generations have a duty to consider the foreseeable impact of their actions on those yet unborn, recognising that love and its rightful effects extend beyond the span of their own lives and time.
2. Policies, technologies and economic systems shall be evaluated not only by immediate advantage, but also by their long-term effects on the possibility of a humane and loving life for future persons.

Article 24 – Duty in the Creation and Use of Technology

1. Creators and users of technology, including artificial intelligence, have a duty to ensure that such tools serve persons and communities rather than enslave, manipulate or systematically degrade them.
2. Technologies shall not be designed or deployed primarily for domination, unjust surveillance or the erosion of authentic human relationships.

PART VII – FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 25 – Unity and Integrity of Duties

1. The duties contained in this Declaration form a coherent whole and shall be interpreted in harmony with one another.
2. No person, group or institution may invoke one duty as a pretext to violate another or to justify domination, cruelty or the denial of another's basic dignity.

Article 26 – Relation of Duties to Rights

1. Where the language of "rights" is employed in law or custom, such rights shall be understood as flowing from antecedent duties, as set out in this Declaration.
2. Any law or policy that enforces claims fundamentally contrary to these duties, especially by sacrificing persons to systems or selfish interests, lacks moral legitimacy even where it enjoys legal form.
3. The proliferation of claims styled as "rights" that weaken personal responsibility, humility in the face of adversity or the assumption of one's duties is contrary to the dignity of the person as understood in this Declaration.

Article 26 bis – Plurality of Justifications

1. This Declaration does not require agreement on any particular religious or philosophical explanation of the ultimate source of human worth.
2. Believers may understand this worth as flowing from creation, providence or a transcendent personal source; non-believers may understand it as arising from the nature of persons as conscious, self-transcending beings.
3. What is common and binding in the public order is the acknowledgement that such worth is not conferred by human power and that it imposes duties of love and non-domination towards every person.

Article 27 – Call to Interior Responsibility

1. The faithful observance of these duties cannot be secured by external enforcement alone; it requires the interior assent and ongoing conversion of persons towards love.
2. Every person is invited freely to accept these duties and to overcome selfishness and domination by daily acts of service.

Article 28 – Responsibility of All

1. The observance of this Declaration depends upon the conscience and goodwill of individuals, families, communities, nations and the international community.
2. Each is called, according to their capacity, to live, teach and embody these duties, so that public and private life may more clearly reflect the love by which all exist.

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