Eleanor Roosevelt

***Address to the United Nations General Assembly***

**On the Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Delivered 9 December 1948 in Paris, France

We stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of humankind. This Universal Declaration of Human Rights may well become the international Magna Carta of all people everywhere. We hope its proclamation by the General Assembly will be an event comparable to the proclamation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man by the French people in 1789, the adoption of the Bill of Rights by the people of the United States, and the adoption of comparable declarations in other countries.

At a time when there are so many issues on which we find it difficult to reach a common basis of agreement, it is a significant fact that 58 states have found such a large measure of agreement in the complex field of human rights. This must be taken as testimony of our common aspiration first voiced in the Charter of the United Nations to lift people everywhere to a higher standard of life and to a greater enjoyment of freedom. The human desire for peace lies behind this Declaration. The realization that the flagrant violation of human rights by Nazi and Fascist countries sowed the seeds of the last world war has supplied the impetus for the work which brings us to the moment of achievement here today.

In a recent speech in Canada, Gladstone Murray said:

"The central fact is that man is fundamentally a moral being, that the light we have is imperfect does not matter so long as we are always trying to improve it … we are equal in sharing the moral freedom that distinguishes us as men. Man’s status makes each individual an end in himself. No man is by nature simply the servant of the state or of another man … the ideal and fact of freedom -- and not technology -- are the true distinguishing marks of our civilization."

This Declaration is based on the true spiritual fact that people must have freedom in which to develop their full stature and through common effort to raise the level of human dignity. We have much to do to folly achieve and to assure the rights set forth in this Declaration. But having them put before us with the moral backing of 58 nations will be a great step foreword.

As we here bring to fruition our labors on this Declaration of Human Rights, we must at the same time rededicate ourselves to the unfinished task which lies before us. We can now move on with new courage and inspiration to the completion of an international covenant on human rights and of measures for the implementation of human rights.

In conclusion, I feel that I cannot do better than to repeat the call to action by Secretary Marshall in his opening statement to this Assembly:

“Let this third regular session of the General Assembly approve by an overwhelming majority the Declaration of Human Rights as a standard of conduct for all; and let us, as Members of the United Nations, conscious of our own short-comings and imperfections, join our effort in good faith to live up to this high standard.”

http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/eleanorrooseveltdeclarationhumanrights.htm