



Photo: Canadian Press

Together, the declaration, the two covenants and the protocol have come to be known as the International Bill of Rights. As of December 31, 1988, some 92 states were party to the ICESCR, 87 to the ICCPR and 41 to the Optional Protocol, thus binding themselves by law to respect the provisions of these instruments.

Even outside the covenants, the declaration has had an enormous influence. It has served as the inspiration for the United Nations' continuing role in promoting human rights for 40 years. Its basic principles are reflected in the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the Draft Convention on the Rights of the Child; as well as numerous declarations on such questions as the rights of disabled persons. These principles are also relevant to current work in areas such as the rights of aboriginal populations.

The Universal Declaration has also inspired concrete action by individual countries to promote human rights. The philosophy, and even the very words, of the declaration now appear in human rights legislation and national constitutions throughout the world, including the Canadian Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

many of the principles contained in the Universal Declaration now are considered declaratory of customary international law and are therefore binding on all states.

In 1966, the UN enacted two covenants to give further effect to the Universal Declaration: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These instruments elaborate more specifically on the rights and

freedoms set out in the declaration, and make one important addition: the right of peoples to self-determination, to freely decide their political status, and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

The UN also enacted an Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This gives people in countries that ratify the protocol the right to appeal to the UN Human Rights Committee if their rights are violated.

Canadians have the right to protest and to express their views.

A 200-Year Legacy

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in Paris 40 years ago last December. This June, Paris will have another anniversary to celebrate — the bicentenary of the storming of the Bastille.

That event was a key point in the French Revolution, eventually leading to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen — a document that helped set the stage for the Universal Declaration almost 160 years later.