

MEDIA RELEASE from The Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) on UN Human Rights Day: “Embrace diversity, End discrimination”

As the world commemorates Human Rights Day on 10 December, the Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) calls on each citizen to reflect/act on the theme chosen for 2009: “*Embrace diversity, End discrimination*”.

CCSJ agrees with Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, that:

“Discrimination lies at the root of many of the world’s most pressing human rights problems. No country is immune from this scourge. Eliminating discrimination is a duty of the highest order...Our main objective is to help promote discrimination-free societies and a world of equal treatment for all.”

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights states: “All too often, when faced with prejudice and discrimination, political leaders, governments and ordinary citizens are silent or complacent. Yet every one of us can make a difference.”

Now is the time to act. Martin Luther King described “discrimination” as a “hellhound”. Today the scourge of discrimination, the hellhound, adversely impacts on and gnaws away at the economic, social, religious, cultural, civil and political rights of millions of persons in our world. Discrimination is an affront to the dignity and worth of the human person; it prevents us from building communities.

For us as Catholics, the principle of the dignity of the human person is embedded in our scriptures and lies at the centre of all Catholic Social Teaching. God has made each of us in His image and likeness; He has endowed each of us with an inherent, inalienable dignity which underpins our human rights.

CCSJ recalls the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was adopted on December 10, 1948, and notes that the UDHR is based on the simple truth that everyone has the same basic rights everywhere and at all times.

The opening words of the UDHR state unequivocally that human beings, "born free and equal in dignity and rights," are entitled to human rights "without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." The Declaration states that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts."

If we are to change the world, we must start with ourselves: "Change the world, Lord, and start with me". Therefore, let us reflect on the various ways in which we consciously or unconsciously discriminate against others and pray for a conversion of our hearts and of the hearts of those who act out their prejudices and discriminate against others in so many ways. Let us recognize God in our neighbours and stand in solidarity with those whose human rights are violated - in our families, our work places, our communities, our parishes and in our troubled world.

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