



United Nations officials today marked [Human Rights Day](#) by declaring that everyone has the right to be heard and to shape the decisions that affect their lives and communities.

"International law is clear: No matter who you are, or where you live, your voice counts," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his message for the Day, observed annually on 10 December. "On this Day, let us unite to defend your right to make it heard."

This year's theme for the Day, which is being observed through numerous events around the world, is 'Inclusion and the Right to Participate in Public Life.'

The General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on 10 December 1948 – and the date has since served to mark Human Rights Day worldwide. The UDHR sets out a broad range of fundamental human rights and freedoms to which all men and women, everywhere in the world, are entitled, without any distinction.

In his [message](#), Mr. Ban noted that there has been "undeniable" progress over the past century along the path of inclusion. However, far too many groups and individuals face obstacles, including women, indigenous peoples, religious and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities or those with a different sexual orientation or political opinion.

"These are not just nice ideas," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, stated in her remarks to a Human Rights Day event in Geneva, referring to this year's theme.

"Millions of people have gone on to the streets over the past few years, some demanding civil and political rights, others demanding economic, social and cultural rights," she said. "This groundswell is not simply a question of people demanding freedom to say what they think.

"They have been asking for much more than that. They have been asking for their right to participate fully in the important decisions and policies affecting their daily lives. That means not only the democratic processes, but also the key economic decisions that can have such a huge impact on individuals, families, and even entire groups and nations."

In a separate statement for the Day, Ms. Pillay saluted all those who have suffered so much seeking what is rightfully theirs, saying that "we have a voice, we have our rights and we want to participate in the way our societies and economies are run."

The voices of too many women and girls, in particular, continue to be stifled through discrimination, threats and violence, the Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)), Michelle Bachelet, said in her message for the Day.

"This is holding back progress for women and for all members of society," she stated. "Women's participation is fundamental for sustainable development, peace and democracy. It is time to remove the barriers to women's full and equal participation in the economy, in politics and in all aspects of public life."

As part of today's celebration, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) is holding a high-level event at its Paris headquarters in support of girls' education, with a special tribute to Malala Yousafzai, a 15-year-old girl who was shot by the Taliban in October for her efforts to defend the education of girls in her native Pakistan.

'Stand up for Malala – Girls' education is a right' aims to accelerate political action to ensure every girl's right to go to school, and to advance girls' education as an urgent priority. Speakers include UNESCO's Director-General, [Irina Bokova](#) , Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown.

"Whenever and wherever a young girl is forbidden from going to school, it's an attack against all girls, against the right to learn, the right to live life to the full; and it is unacceptable," Ms. Bokova stated last month in support for Malala, who is recovering in a hospital in the United Kingdom.

Observances for Human Rights Day also include a special event at UN Headquarters in New York on Tuesday on the role of leadership in the fight against homophobia, which is organized by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and a number of permanent missions to the UN as well as international human rights organizations.

Source: [UN News Centre](#)