

Why we celebrate International Human Rights Day in Tennessee | Opinion

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When we protect the rights of people of Tennessee, we are carrying on the mission and the message of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Beverly Watts is executive director of the Tennessee Human Rights Commission.

Each year on Dec. 10, International Human Rights Day is celebrated around the world to commemorate the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations.

It is generally agreed to be the foundation of all human rights law. The articles represent the universal recognition that basic rights and fundamental freedoms are inherent to all human beings, inalienable and equally applicable to everyone, and that every one of us is born free and equal in dignity and rights. When we protect the rights of people of Tennessee, we are carrying on the mission and the message of the Universal Declaration.

The 30 articles and its preamble frame the foundation and principle that all human beings have human rights that are interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

The principles in this includes the right to decent housing, education, the right to be free from discrimination of any kind, to have free thought and speech, to vote, to be free from violence, to have equal access to public service and to have fair working conditions.



Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the founders of the human rights movement and chair of the drafting committee worked for three years to make it a reality. She said that universal human rights begin in small places, close to home and requires concerted citizen actions close to home before progress will occur in the larger world. She said that these rights occupy “the world of the individual person: the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination.”

Nashville’s 2019 celebration occurred on Dec. 10 at the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. During the program there was a panel discussion surrounding this year’s theme with recognition of concerted action by human rights champions in our community. A group of human rights organizations work together each year to plan the event.

The theme for the Nashville celebration this year was “Vote on Purpose: The Communal Impact of One Vote,” and focused on the 100-year anniversary of the women’s suffrage movement and how voter’s rights impact all other human rights. The women’s suffrage movement was a long fight to win the right to vote for women in the United States. On Aug. 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was finally ratified.

The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Abby Rubenfeld and Rev. Edwin C. Sanders II. The Outstanding Service Award was presented to Rev. Keith Caldwell and Rashed Fakruddhin. The Rising Advocate Award was presented to Frances Anderson and Tequila Johnson.

Information about the event and photos are available at <https://nashvillehumanrights.org/>.

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