

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**Remarks on Human Rights Day
New York, 9 December 2010**

Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Madame Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women,
Mr. Simonovic, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us to mark Human Rights Day ... and a warm welcome to you all.

Let me begin with a declaration of fundamental principle:

Human rights are the foundation of freedom, peace, development and justice.

They are at the heart of the United Nations and its Charter ... the core of our UN identity.

Over the decades, we have put in place a remarkable body of human rights conventions and standards ... practices and procedures ... laws and international covenants that have proven to be indispensable.

Yet in the end, progress comes down to people ...

Courageous women and men striving to protect their rights and the rights of others ... determined to make human rights a reality for all.

We honor them, today, as human rights defenders.

To them, we dedicate this Human Rights Day.

They might be journalists ... lawyers or scholars ... international NGOs ... lone citizens, spurred to action by injustice.

Diverse as their backgrounds may be, they share a common cause — a commitment to stand against wrongdoing ... to protect the weak and vulnerable ... to speak against discrimination, intolerance and injustice ... to combat impunity.

Too often, they fight for the rights of others at considerable risk to their own.

Too often ... in too many places ... they are stripped of their right to work.

Friends and family are targeted for intimidation.

They themselves become victims of violence.

On this day, we recognize their courage and achievements.

We call on governments everywhere to uphold the rights of these brave individuals.

We call on every nation to embrace the freedoms that they stand for — in particular the freedoms of thought, expression and peaceful assembly.

And we urge every nation to adopt the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as binding national legislation.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Each year, global institutions and civil society organizations correctly choose to honor human rights defenders around the world.

In some countries, such choices have been a cause for celebration; in others, they have sparked controversy.

This in itself testifies to the power ... and the importance ... of the underlying issue: the essential role of human rights defenders.

It is an issue we all must champion ... with courage and perseverance, despite criticism and controversy ... in every corner of the world.

Together, we must work to expand the space for civil society ... everywhere ... and to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Let me say: at the United Nations, we constantly ask ourselves.

How best can we achieve the results we all seek.

Often, we choose to speak out ... loudly and publicly.

Other times, a less public diplomacy may be the better path.

It could be the case of a journalist jailed for doing his job ... an activist or opposition leader persecuted for speaking her mind.

It might involve a couple jailed for their sexual orientation ... or discrimination against those with HIV.

In each case, the ultimate goal is the same: to advance human rights.

That is why, with a full heart, I salute the human rights defenders with us this evening ...

Just as I salute all of you, who do so much on behalf of this great cause.

And I want to renew my pledge to support you ... to help those whom you seek to help ... to the best of my ability.

In the past, I have always done my best, privately or publicly, to protect human rights defenders ... to secure the release of those unjustly imprisoned ... to voice the concerns and interests of those who have been silenced or deprived of basic rights.

And I promise to carry on this important work, hand in hand with you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your work is vital.

You raise awareness and mobilize action.

You push and press world leaders to do more.

The truths you speak are not always music to the ear.

But they must be heard.

Ours is a partnership for change.

On this Human Rights Day, let us be inspired by those who defend these rights and essential liberties.

Let us find new hope and energy in the citizens' movements that seek a better and more just world.

And let us remember: defending human rights is everyone's responsibility.

It requires courage and a deep sense of justice.

Let each of us exercise that responsibility ... with firmness and tenacity ... and abiding faith in our ultimate victory.

Thank you.