

Universal Declaration of Human Rights
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December 10, 2006 marks the fifty-eighth anniversary of the United Nations unanimously adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For this reason the United Nations has designated December 10th, “Human Rights Day.”

All Canadians should be proud of John Peters Humphrey, the man who wrote the first draft of the Universal Declaration. I am particularly pleased to note that my home province, New Brunswick played a role in the development of this touchstone of human rights.

Humphrey was a native of Rothsay New Brunswick, a graduate of both Mount Allison and McGill Universities. He would go on to become a Professor and Dean of Law at McGill. Following the end of the Second World War, Humphrey was given the monumental task of setting up the UN Division on Human Rights. In the shadow of the atrocities of the Second World War, Humphrey began to sketch out a set of international rules intended to help protect the rights of all.

Working closely with the Chair of the UN Human Rights Commission, Eleanor Roosevelt, Humphrey’s vision of a Universal Declaration was realized little more than a year after he had written the first draft. In support of the Universal Declaration Roosevelt

commented that “The destiny of human rights is in the hands of all our citizens in all our communities.”

Here in Canada we have a strong respect for the Universal Declaration. This is evidenced through the work of various provincial human rights commissions and through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which helped to entrench in Canadian law these important values.

As it states in the preamble, the Universal Declaration is meant to serve as “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this *Declaration* constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.” These are values that all Canadians share, and ones that were recently echoed by Prime Minister Harper during his visit to Vietnam.

I ask you to join with me in recognizing this important anniversary and the leading role that many Canadians have played in triumphing the cause of Human Rights around the globe.