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### **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

On December 10, 1948, the General Assembly convened at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City and adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Established after a devastating world war, the *Declaration* acted as a sentinel over each individual's most basic rights, regardless of race, religion, or creed. The thirty articles outlined the fundamental civil, political, and physical liberties that each person is entitled to. Nearly sixty years later, the *Declaration* is still more relevant than ever – however, one article remains distinctive: Article Twenty-Six.

Article Twenty-Six of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that, “Everyone has the right to an education” (United Nations 12). Defined as, “the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge and of developing the powers of reasoning and judgment” (Education 255), education is an essential asset. As the most significant article, Number Twenty-Six guarantees each man, woman, and child to schooling that they are entitled to.

A Greek philosopher once said, “But if you ask what is the good of an education in general, the answer is easy: that good education makes good men, and that good men act nobly” (Plato). Learning is a natural process for human beings, and only through learning

can we form our unique personalities. An adequate education is key in the development of the individual, and in the awareness of one's rights: education imparts knowledge of basic human liberties. Only with such knowledge can you defend your own rights, as well as the rights of others.

Society today has placed great value on education. The "American Dream" was founded on the basis that education could provide endless opportunity. Any person of any social status could better their lives through scholarship. Education provides political, social, and economic opportunities for the two billion people in the world living on less than two dollars a day (UN Representative). An adequate education is the most valuable investment in an individual; to take away education is to rob someone of their choices and of their hopes for the future.

Education is the most important of all human rights because it is fundamental to the human existence. In 2000, the United Nations issued eight millennium goals, which included ending extreme poverty and hunger, increasing gender equality, reducing child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, and ensuring environmental stability ("The Goals"). Nearly all of these goals can be achieved through universal primary education. Through education, agricultural techniques could be spread to farmers worldwide to combat starvation and promote environmental sustainability. Of the seventy-two million children not attending school, fifty-seven percent are female (UN Representative). Providing young girls with sufficient instruction can lead to gender equality and a number of other outcomes: increased awareness of HIV/AIDS could sharply increase the use of protection and reduce the number of fatalities; health education would encourage mothers to seek care at the earlier stages of pregnancy, improving maternal health and reducing child

mortality; and in general, educated women tend to have fewer and healthier children (UN Representative). The far-reaching impacts of education act like a domino effect, each time improving the circumstances of someone in the world.

When the General Assembly adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948, they had sought to protect each individual's unalienable rights. Although often overlooked, Article Twenty-Six remains vital today. Education, by far, is the most significant right; it encourages the growth of the human personality, it promotes tolerance for all peoples, it breaks the vicious cycle of poverty, and drastically improves health. Education offers hope for a better life to millions of people, and Article Twenty-Six represents hope for that future.

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