Module 3
Human Rights & the United Nations

Human Rights
Learning Outcomes

1. An understanding of the development of the concept of Human Rights

2. An understanding of the role of the United Nations, particularly in regard to the promotion of human rights through the Human Rights Council

3. A knowledge of the content of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

4. A knowledge and appreciation of the place of Non-Government Organizations within the UN system

5. An understanding of how the system of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) works and of its potential usefulness for those involved in advocacy

Contextualisation

Q. Define ‘Human Rights’ in 7 words or less!

Watch this video explaining the history of human rights, the UN and the Declaration of Human Rights

Click to play youtube.com/watch?v=nCQWwkERit4
Q. What are our human rights? Name as many as you can!

Q. Which human rights are not enjoyed by people in your country?

Q. Why do some people not enjoy all their human rights?

Q. What are the limitations of the UDHR?
Although the UDHR is the most comprehensive document ever produced on human rights, the UN are fully aware of its limitations. Here are a few examples of how the UN has sought to ensure Member States are accountable to the UDHR:

**Treaty:** A ‘treaty’ is a formally concluded and ratified agreement between States. The term is used generically to refer to instruments binding at international law, concluded between international entities (States or organizations). Under the Vienna Conventions on the Law of Treaties, a treaty must be (1) a binding instrument, which means that the contracting parties intended to create legal rights and duties; (2) concluded by states or international organizations with treaty-making power; (3) governed by international law and (4) in writing.

**Convention:** A ‘convention’ is a formal agreement between States. The generic term ‘convention’ is thus synonymous with the generic term ‘treaty’. Conventions are normally open for participation by the international community as a whole, or by a large number of States. Usually the instruments negotiated under the auspices of an international organization are entitled conventions (e.g. the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989).

**Special Rapporteur:** A title given to individuals working on behalf of various regional and international organisations who bear specific mandates to investigate, monitor and recommend solutions to specific human rights problems.
NGO: Human rights are often most effective when citizens within a country hold their own government accountable. In fact, movements and institutions established to protect human rights, such as non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), are most powerful in holding perpetrators accountable and decreasing the quantity or severity of human rights violations. NGO’s are not-for-profit, voluntary citizens’ group, which are organized on a local, national or international level to address issues in support of the public good. These other groups actually play a very big part in how your country operates, and they fall into a category known as civil society. A civil society is comprised of groups or organizations working in the interest of the citizens but operating outside of the governmental and for-profit sectors.

Civil society is the “third sector” of society, along with government and business. It comprises civil society organisations and NGOs.

Treaties and Conventions add accountability but there is no obligation to sign or ratify the Treaty. So, the UN introduced the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Process in 2008.
Reflection & Engagement

Group discussion:

Because the UPR Process is a ‘cycle’ lasting 4.5 years, advocates can monitor their state’s part in it chronologically and critically.

Link: www.upr-info.org/en

A copy of the Edmund Rice Network’s submission to the UK’s UPR in May 2017 is attached as an appendix. As part of the lobbying and follow-up processes, we also submitted an oral statement which was read out by Br Tino D’Abreu at the adoption session in October 2017 (42:36).


Task

- Explore where your country is up to in the review process.
- What types of human rights issues might be raised as part of the next review of your country?’