

International Human Rights Day Statement, December 10, 2025

On International Human Rights Day, we mark the 77th anniversary of the U.N. General Assembly's proclamation of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). It is the cornerstone of an international human rights system designed to prevent a repeat of the great crimes against humanity suffered during World War II. Its authors bridged differences of background and opinion to affirm that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

This universal principle is the foundation of human rights. But it is under threat, including from within our own government.

Congress has led on human rights through legislation and policy. Part of this legacy is the bipartisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, which I am proud to cochair. We have seen how people rely on international human rights law not as an abstraction, but as a tool to improve their lives. When foreign governments deflect criticism of their human rights records, we point to the shared standards set by the Universal Declaration and remind them of their obligations through their own commitments.

China and Russia are among the governments threatening the international human rights system by twisting definitions to suit ideological ends and undermining multilateral institutions. Sadly, our own government is now doing the same.

The Trump Administration is attacking the principle of universality by asserting a hierarchy of rights defined by a far-right ideology hostile to LGBTQ persons, migrants and marginalized communities. They are institutionalizing such bias by creating offices in the State Department for "Western Values," "Natural Rights" and "Remigration." This is offensive.

The Administration withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council, sanctioned officials of international courts, and slashed funding for human rights and pro-democracy programs. Make no mistake: these actions make Americans less safe. It reduces our capacity to respond to crises and mitigate risks to our national security. It diminishes our moral credibility.

America is best when we lead by example. But the increasing reports human rights violations by our own government—from [attacks on freedom of expression](#) to [torture in detention centers](#) to the extrajudicial killing of people on boats in the Caribbean—do the opposite. When we break the rules and shirk responsibility for the consequences, we set a terrible precedent and invite others do the same to Americans. Instead we must seek the moral high ground.

As we confront these threats, it is worth remembering that as chair of the drafting committee, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt infused the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the very best of our country's values. The principles laid out by the Declaration are part of our legacy—and they are worth defending.