

INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATION
ASSOCIATION

Educational Booklet The Foundations of Human Rights



NANO PRAYER

Loving God,

You called Nano Nagle to be a light in dark places,
to see suffering and respond with courage, to walk
with the poor, the forgotten, and the excluded.

Give us her compassion,
that we may recognise injustice and not turn away.

Give us her courage,
that we may act even when the cost is great.

Give us her hope,
that we may believe change is possible.

May we, like Nano,
carry your light into the world,
especially where dignity is denied
and voices go unheard.

We ask this in faith and trust.

Amen.



WELCOME!

This booklet introduces the foundations of human rights in a way that is accessible, grounded, and relevant to everyday life and mission. It is designed to help people understand what human rights are, why they matter, how injustice shows up in the world, and the different ways we can respond with compassion, responsibility, and courage.

This is not a legal or academic guide. It is an invitation to see human rights as a way of understanding human dignity and shaping how we respond to suffering and injustice.



WHAT IS A RIGHT?

A right is a freedom or an entitlement. It is something a person can claim because they belong to a particular group. Rights exist to protect people from harm, exploitation, and abuse, and to ensure fairness, dignity, and opportunity.

There are many kinds of rights, connected to different groups and contexts. For example:

- Workers' rights apply to people because they are workers.
- Children's rights apply to people because they are children.
- Indigenous peoples' rights apply to people because they belong to Indigenous communities.
- Environmental or Earth rights recognise protections connected to the natural world.

To claim these rights, you must belong to that specific group. A child can claim children's rights. A worker can claim workers' rights. These rights respond to particular vulnerabilities, responsibilities, and realities.

But there is one group that every person on earth belongs to.

That group is humanity.



WHAT IS A HUMAN RIGHT?

Human rights are the rights we all have simply because we are human. You do not need to qualify for them. You do not need to earn them. You do not lose them because of who you are, where you come from, or what has happened to you.

Human rights belong to everyone, everywhere, at all times.

They exist to protect human dignity at its most basic level: the right to live, to be safe, to be treated with respect, to have access to what is needed to survive and thrive, and to participate fully in society.

When human rights are denied, it is often because someone's humanity has first been questioned, diminished, or ignored. That is why clarity matters so deeply in this work. If we allow the definition of "human" to be distorted, conditional, or selective, human rights become fragile.

As human rights defenders, our role is not to complicate this truth, but to safeguard it. To insist, again and again, that being human is enough!



HUMAN RIGHTS

ARE RIGHTS YOU HAVE

SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU ARE

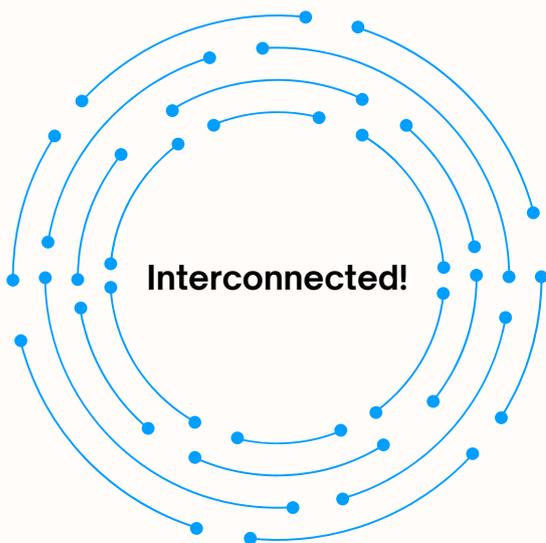
HUMAN!



INTERCONNECTED

Human Rights are inherent (natural), meaning they are not earned, granted, or taken away. Every person is born with equal dignity and worth, regardless of where they live, who they are, or what they believe.

Again, they are inherent (natural) to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, gender identity, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status!



Human rights do not exist in isolation. They are deeply interconnected, meaning that the enjoyment of one right often depends on the protection of others.

When one right is denied, it rarely happens alone. Instead, it sets off a chain of harm that affects many areas of a person's life.

For example, when someone is denied access to education, it can limit their ability to work, participate in society, and advocate for themselves. When people lack safe housing or access to clean water, their health is affected. When communities lose their land or environment, their culture, livelihoods, and dignity are placed at risk.

This interconnectedness reminds us that human rights are not a menu from which we can pick and choose. They form a whole. Civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights all rely on one another to create the conditions for a dignified life.



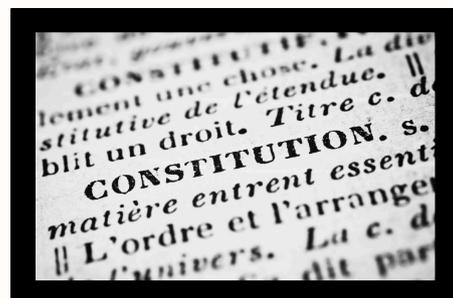
WHERE DO HUMAN RIGHTS COME FROM?

Human rights are not ideas that belong to one culture, country, or institution. They are grounded in the shared understanding that every human being has inherent dignity. Over time, this shared understanding has been expressed and protected through international agreements and national laws.

Globally, human rights are set out in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This declaration affirms that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and it outlines basic freedoms and protections that apply to everyone. Although it is not a law, it has shaped human rights standards around the world and provides a shared global language for naming injustice.

Human rights are also protected within each country through its **constitution** or **bill of rights**. These documents set out the rights that governments are legally required to uphold and protect. Because constitutions are binding, they are powerful tools for accountability when rights are violated.

Together, international declarations and national constitutions help ensure that human rights can be recognised, claimed, and defended. They remind us that human rights belong to people, and that governments exist to protect them.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

1. **Equality and dignity**
2. **Freedom from discrimination**
3. **Right to life and safety**
4. **Freedom from slavery**
5. **Freedom from torture**
6. **Recognition as a person under the law**
7. **Equality before the law**
8. **Right to justice when rights are violated**
9. **Freedom from unfair arrest**
10. **Right to a fair trial**
11. **Presumed innocent until proven guilty**
12. **Right to privacy**
13. **Freedom of movement**
14. **Right to asylum**
15. **Right to a nationality**
16. **Right to marriage and family**
17. **Right to own property**
18. **Freedom of belief and religion**
19. **Freedom of expression**
20. **Freedom of peaceful assembly**
21. **Right to participate in government**
22. **Right to social support**
23. **Right to fair work and pay**
24. **Right to rest and leisure**
25. **Right to basic needs (food, housing etc.)**
26. **Right to education**
27. **Right to culture and creativity**
28. **Right to a fair world**
29. **Responsibility to others**
30. **You cannot use your rights to take away another's**

EQUAL
Rights ♀

It's vital that we learn our rights in order to defend them!



INJUSTICE

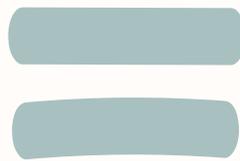
Injustice occurs when human dignity is denied, ignored, or violated. It happens when people are prevented from enjoying their rights, or when systems and actions cause harm, exclusion, or inequality.

Injustice is not always loud or obvious. Sometimes it shows up in visible acts of violence or discrimination. Other times, it is quiet and normalised, built into laws, policies, economic systems, or social attitudes that advantage some people while harming others.

Importantly, injustice is not only about individual behaviour. While personal actions can cause harm, injustice is often systemic. This means it is woven into the way societies are organised – who has access to resources, whose voices are heard, whose lives are valued, and whose suffering is ignored.

At its core, injustice thrives when people's humanity is questioned or diminished. When certain lives are treated as less valuable, less deserving, or less visible, rights are more easily denied.

HAVE ACCESS TO
HUMAN RIGHTS



JUSTICE

DON'T HAVE ACCESS
TO HUMAN RIGHTS



INJUSTICE

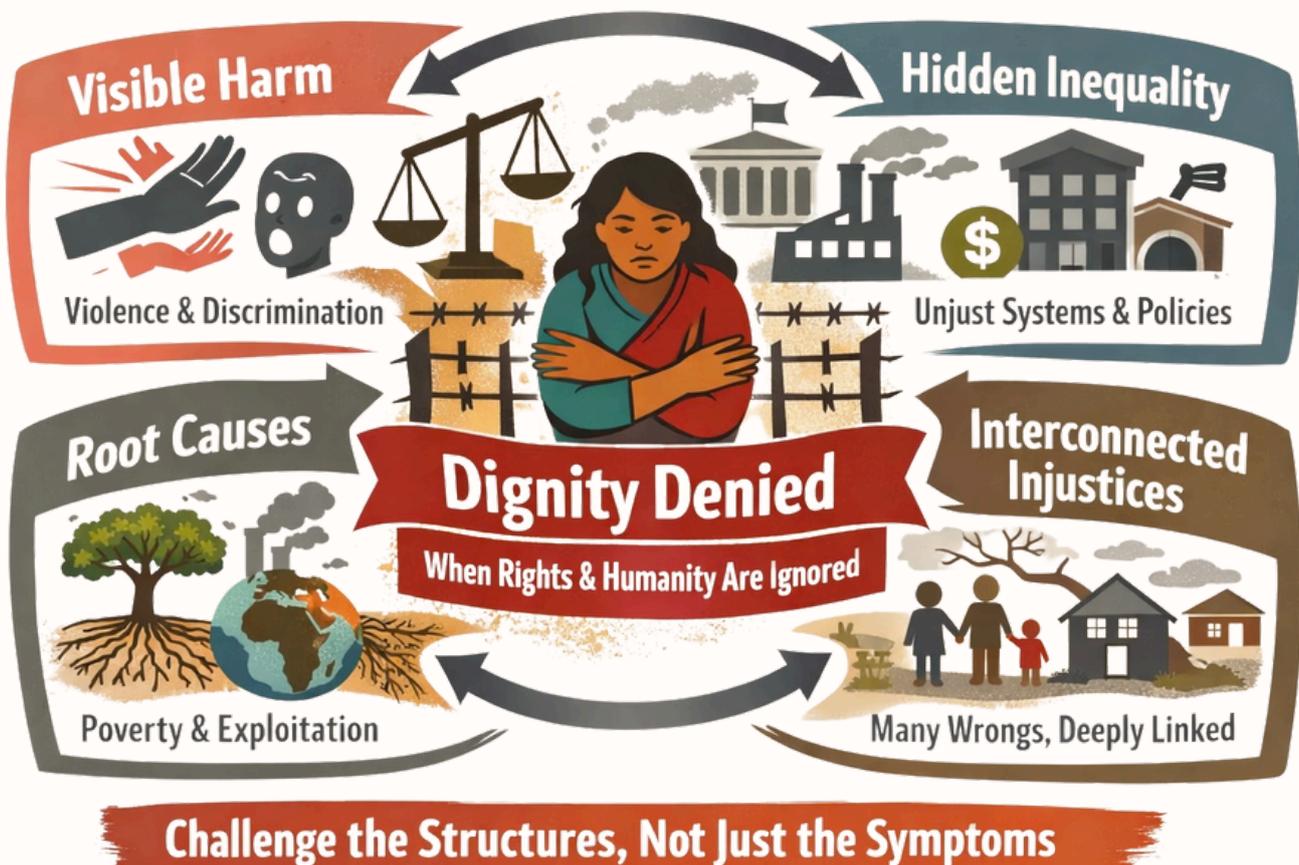


INJUSTICE cont...

Understanding injustice helps us move beyond blaming individuals toward recognising the structures and systems that must be challenged. It also reminds us that responding to injustice requires more than charity alone. While compassion is essential, lasting change depends on addressing the root causes of harm.

To recognise injustice is the first step toward justice. It calls us to pay attention, to listen to those most affected, and to respond with courage, responsibility, and solidarity.

Understanding Injustice



Understanding Injustice: The Tree Metaphor

Injustice can be understood like a **tree**.

What we often see first are the **branches** – the **visible results** of injustice. These might include poverty, violence, hunger, displacement, discrimination, environmental destruction, or lack of access to education and healthcare. The branches are real and harmful, and they affect people's lives every day.

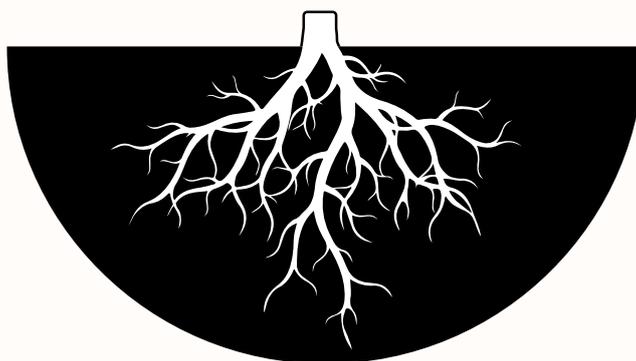


But branches do not grow on their own.

They are sustained by **roots** that lie beneath the surface. These roots represent the **underlying causes** of injustice – unfair laws, unequal systems, abuse of power, historical oppression, discrimination, and economic structures that benefit some while harming others.

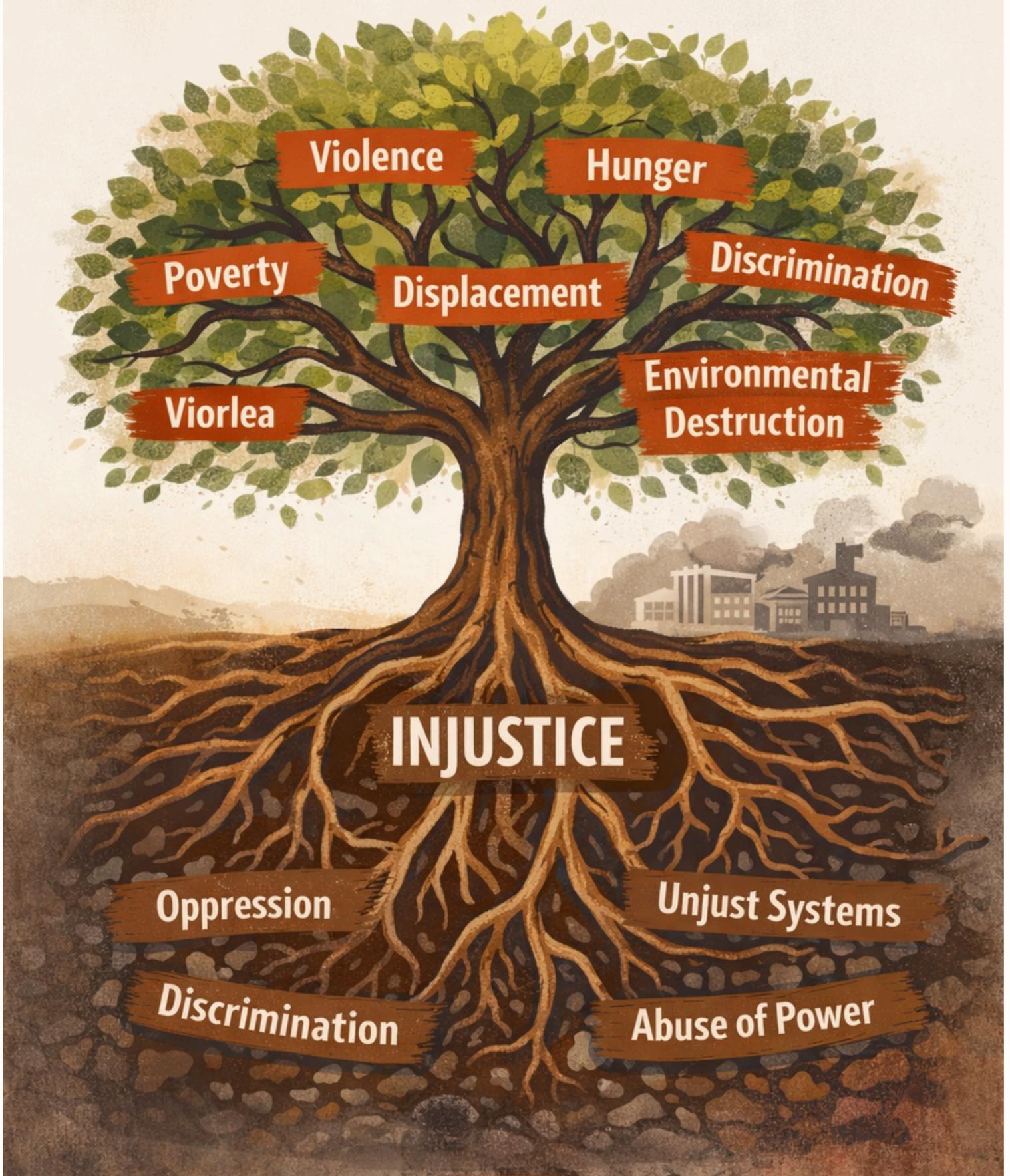
If we focus only on the branches, we may respond to immediate harm, but the tree continues to grow. True justice requires us to look deeper, to the roots that make these outcomes possible.

Human rights work calls us to care for those harmed by the branches, while **also** challenging and transforming the roots. Only by addressing both can we prevent injustice from continuing to grow and take hold in new ways.





Understanding **Injustice**: The Tree Metaphor



To address the harms, we must challenge the roots.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Instructions

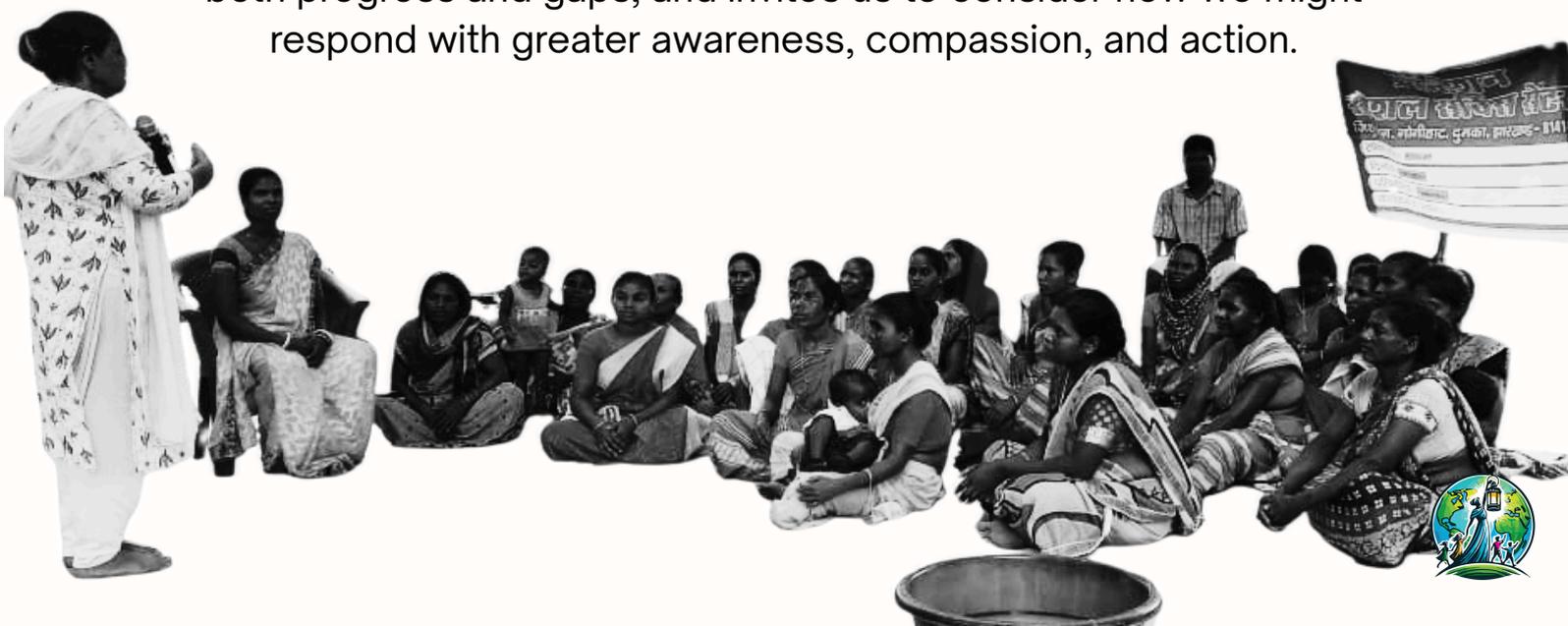
Choose one human right to focus on. This could be a right that feels especially important to you, one that is often violated in your context, or one you would like to understand better (for example: the right to education, healthcare, housing, safety, or equality).

Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions. You may write your responses individually, or discuss them together in a group.

Reflection Questions

- What does this right mean?
- In your own words, describe what this right looks like in everyday life.
- What should people be able to expect or experience if this right is respected?
- Why does this right matter?
- Who has access to this right in my community or country?
- Do all people have equal access to this right?
- Who is most likely to be excluded or disadvantaged?
- What barriers prevent people from enjoying this right fully?

Human rights are best understood when we examine how they are lived, protected, or denied in real contexts. This activity helps us see both progress and gaps, and invites us to consider how we might respond with greater awareness, compassion, and action.



Responding to Injustice: Three Key Pathways

When we encounter injustice, whether in our own communities or elsewhere in the world, it can feel overwhelming. Many people ask, “**What can I do?**” or “**Where do I even start?**”

While injustice is complex, our responses do not have to be confusing. There are three core mechanisms through which individuals, communities, and organisations can respond to injustice: **raising awareness**, **charity**, and **advocacy**. Each plays a distinct and valuable role, and all three are often needed together to create lasting change. These mechanisms are vital in the fight for justice!

These three mechanisms are not separate or competing. They are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Raising awareness helps people understand what is happening and why it matters. **Charity** responds to immediate suffering with compassion and care.

Advocacy works to ensure that the conditions causing harm are changed so that fewer people suffer in the future.

In healthy justice work, all three are present. Awareness without action can become empty. Charity without justice can become never-ending. Advocacy without grounding in lived reality can become disconnected.



RAISING AWARENESS



Overview

OBJECTIVE

Inform and educate the public about a particular issue or cause.

Spreading knowledge to increase public understanding and concern.

FOCUS

METHOD

Using media campaigns, social platforms, events, or educational workshops to make people more aware of injustices, environmental concerns, or health crises.

A social media campaign to highlight the effects of climate change, where the aim is to inform people and mobilize them to take action.

EXAMPLE



Raising awareness is one way people respond to injustice and human rights violations. It involves **helping others see, understand,** and **acknowledge** issues that may be hidden, ignored, or misunderstood.

Raising awareness can take many forms. It might include education, storytelling, research, public conversations, sharing lived experiences, art, media, or community dialogue. At its best, raising awareness creates understanding, empathy, and a shared language for naming injustice.

Awareness is often the first step toward change. Many injustices continue because people do not see them, do not understand their impact, or have been taught to accept them as normal. By bringing issues into the light, awareness challenges silence and indifference.

RAISING AWARENESS

- **Objective:** Inform and educate the public about a particular issue or cause.



Objective:

Inform and educate the public about a particular issue or cause.

Focus: Spreading knowledge to increase public understanding and concern.



However, raising awareness on its own does not always lead to action. Knowing that injustice exists does not automatically change systems, policies, or behaviour. Awareness becomes most powerful when it leads to responsibility, reflection, and response.

Raising awareness is not about speaking over others or simplifying complex experiences. It requires **listening, accuracy, humility,** and **respect** for those directly affected. When done well, it helps create the conditions for **compassion, solidarity,** and **meaningful change.**

In human rights work, raising awareness plays an important role, but it is most effective when it is connected to charity and advocacy.



CHARITY



Overview

OBJECTIVE

Provide immediate relief or support to those in need.

Addressing symptoms of social issues, often with short-term solutions.

FOCUS

METHOD

Donating money, food, clothes, or resources to help individuals or communities facing crises like poverty, hunger, or natural disasters.

Organising a food drive for a community affected by a natural disaster to provide temporary relief from hunger.

EXAMPLE



Charity is another way people respond to injustice and human rights violations. It focuses on meeting **immediate human needs** through **care, compassion, and practical support** when people are experiencing harm, crisis, or exclusion.

Charitable responses can take many forms, including providing food, shelter, healthcare, education, emotional support, emergency relief, or access to basic resources. Charity often steps in where systems have failed, or where people are suffering while longer-term solutions are still being pursued.

Charity matters because injustice has real human consequences. When people are hungry, unsafe, sick, displaced, or denied dignity, they cannot wait for systems to change before receiving support.

CHARITY

- **Objective:** Provide immediate relief or support to those in need.
- **Focus:** Addressing symptoms of social issues, often with short-term solutions.



- **Method:** Donating money, food, clothes, or resources to help individuals or communities facing crises like poverty, hunger, or natural disasters.

- **Example:** Organising a food drive for a community affected by a natural disaster.



Charity responds to the urgency of suffering and affirms the inherent worth of every person by saying: **you matter, your needs matter, and you are not alone.**

At the same time, charity on its own does not usually address the root causes of injustice. If harmful conditions remain unchanged, the same needs will continue to arise again and again. This is why charity is most effective when it is connected to raising awareness and advocacy.

In human rights work, charity plays an essential role in protecting dignity and responding to suffering, while reminding us that care and compassion must remain at the heart of justice.



ADVOCACY



Overview

OBJECTIVE

Create long-term systemic change by influencing policies and social structures.

Addressing the root causes of issues to bring about sustainable reform

FOCUS

METHOD

Lobbying for legislative changes, participating in policy discussions, influencing decision makers, or using legal systems to challenge unjust laws or practices.

Advocating for prison reform by pushing for changes in sentencing laws and the criminal justice system to reduce mass incarceration.

EXAMPLE



Advocacy is another way people respond to injustice and human rights violations. It focuses on **changing the systems, laws, policies, and power structures** that cause or allow injustice to continue.

Advocacy can take many forms. It may include speaking out, influencing decision-makers, engaging with governments or institutions, using legal processes, participating in campaigns, or bringing the voices and experiences of affected communities into spaces of power. Advocacy seeks to **address injustice at its root**, rather than only responding to its consequences.

Advocacy matters because many human rights violations are not accidental. They are the result of decisions, policies, and systems that benefit some while harming others.

ADVOCACY

- **Objective:** Create long-term systemic change by influencing policies and social structures.
- **Focus:** Addressing the root causes of issues to bring about sustainable reform.



- **Example:** Advocating for prison reform by pushing for changes in sentencing laws and the criminal justice system to reduce mass incarceration.



Without advocacy, injustice can become normalised, and harmful practices can remain unchallenged.

Advocacy often takes time and can be uncomfortable. It may involve confronting authority, questioning the status quo, and challenging deeply embedded ways of thinking. For this reason, advocacy is most effective when it is grounded in **lived experience**, informed by awareness, and connected to compassion.

In human rights work, advocacy plays a critical role in creating **lasting change**. When combined with raising awareness and charity, advocacy helps ensure that injustice is not only responded to, but transformed.



GROUP ACTIVITY

Choose a human right and explore the reality: As a group, or individually, choose one human right to focus on, such as access to education, healthcare, housing, clean water, safety, or freedom from discrimination.

Discuss or reflect on:

- What does this right mean in everyday life?
- Who has access to this right in our community or country, and who does not?
- What barriers prevent people from fully enjoying this right?

Respond through raising awareness: Consider how awareness could help improve access to this right. Discuss:

- What do people misunderstand or not know about this right?
- Whose voices or experiences are missing?
- How could awareness be raised in respectful and accurate ways?

Respond through charity: Next, reflect on how charity could respond to immediate needs related to this right. Discuss:

- What urgent needs exist because this right is not being fulfilled?
- How could care, support, or resources be provided right now?

Respond through advocacy: Finally, consider how advocacy could address the root causes of the problem. Discuss:

- What systems, policies, or decisions contribute to this injustice?
- Who has the power to bring about change, and how could they be influenced?

Bringing it together: Reflect together:

- How can raising awareness, charity, and advocacy work together?
- What is one realistic action you or your group could take?

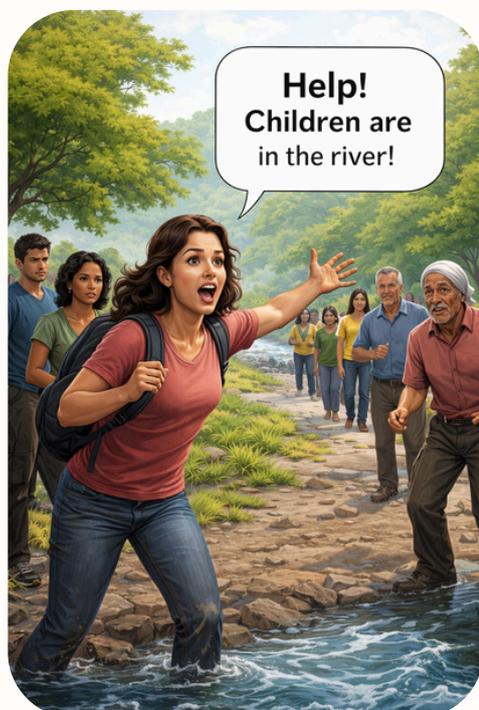
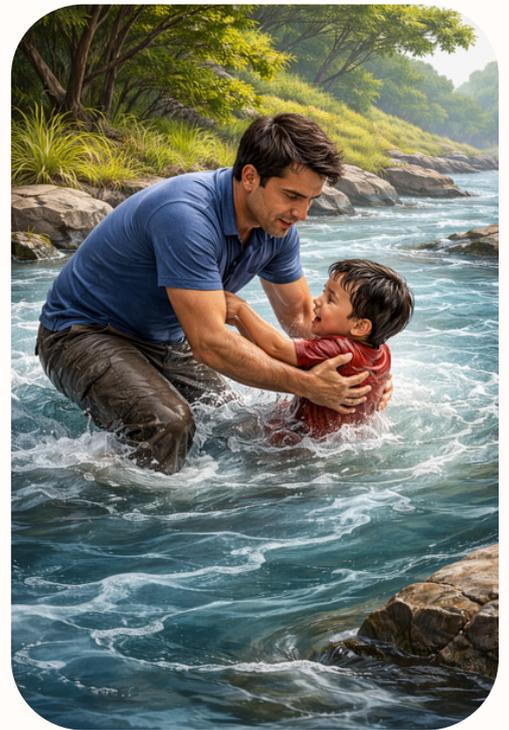


The River Story: Understanding Our Responses to Injustice

Imagine you are walking alongside a river when you suddenly hear crying. You look into the water and see a child struggling to stay afloat. Without hesitation, you rush in and pull the child from the river, saving their life.

As you kneel by the riverbank, trying to calm and dry the child, you hear another cry. This time, two more children are being carried downstream by the current. It takes more effort, but you manage to rescue them as well.

Moments later, you hear even more cries. Three children are now coming down the river. Realising you cannot do this alone, you call out to others walking nearby and ask them to help. Together, you pull the children from the water and bring them to safety.



But the cries do not stop. Soon, six children are coming down the river. Then seven. Then ten. You and the others are doing everything you can, but there are simply too many. Despite your efforts, some children slip past. You keep rescuing children, over and over again, exhausted and overwhelmed, with no end in sight.

At that moment, someone asks an important question: “Where are all these children coming from?”





You decide to leave the riverbank and walk upstream to find out. As you do, you discover a bridge that children use every day to get to school. The bridge is broken and unsafe. Each time a child tries to cross it, they fall into the river below.

You realise that pulling children from the river will never be enough if the bridge remains broken.

So you fix the bridge. You make it safe and strong again. You also commit to checking it regularly, maintaining it, and ensuring it never reaches such a dangerous state again. Once the bridge is repaired and protected, no child falls into the river ever again.





This story helps us understand different ways of responding to injustice.

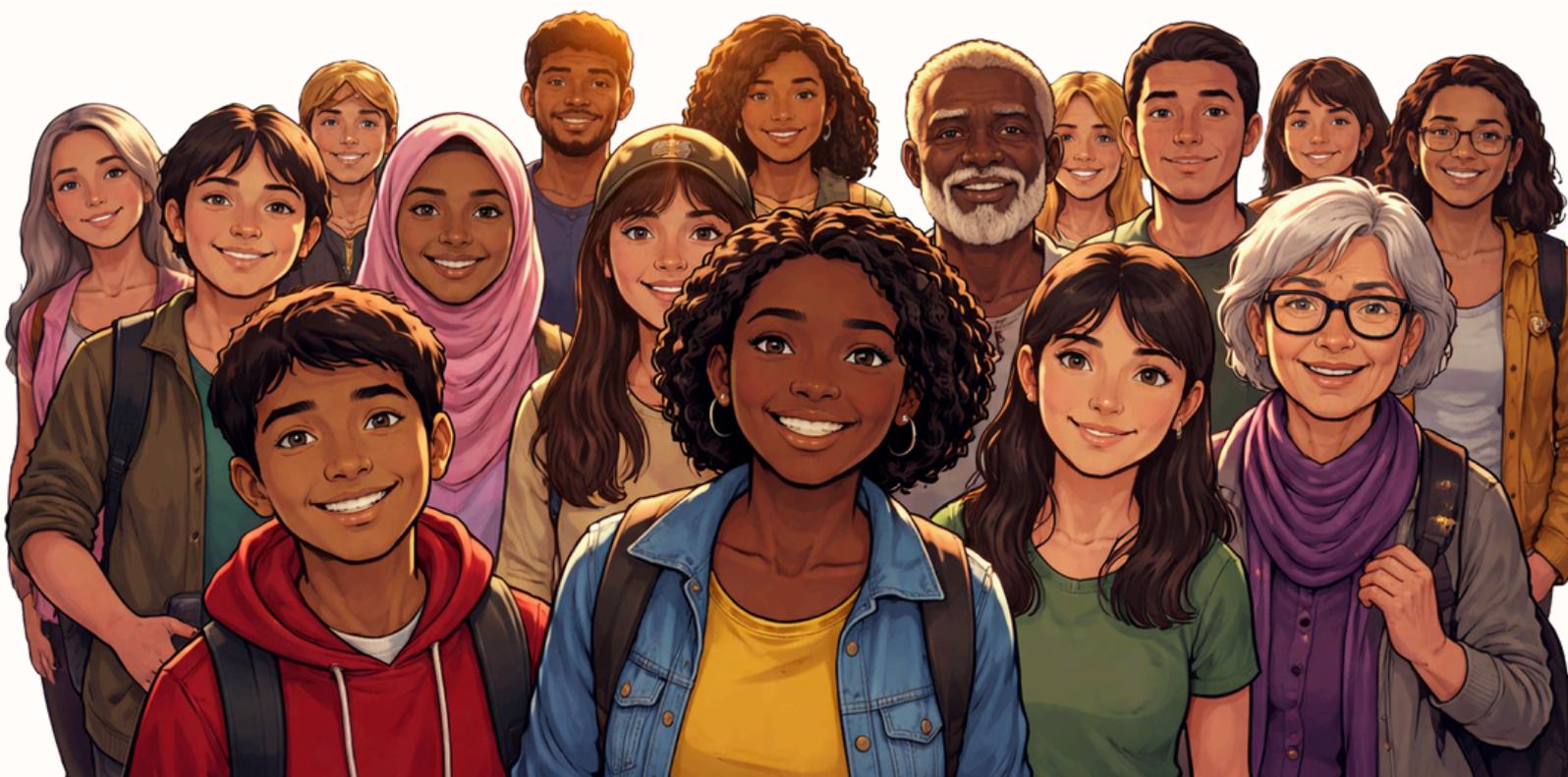
Calling out for help and naming what is happening is **raising awareness**. It brings attention to the problem and invites others to respond.

Pulling children from the river is **charity**. It meets immediate needs, saves lives, and responds with compassion to urgent suffering.

Fixing and protecting the bridge is **advocacy**. It addresses the root cause of the problem and changes the conditions that allowed harm to occur in the first place.

All three responses matter. Without awareness, people may not even know there is a problem. Without charity, people suffer and die while waiting for change. Without advocacy, the same harm continues again and again.

Justice work asks us not only to respond to the crisis in front of us, but also to **walk upstream, ask difficult questions, and work together** to ensure that no person falls into the river again.



LET'S DO THIS!



This booklet does not end here - because human rights do not live on pages. They live in **choices**. In how we **speak** to one another. In how we **challenge** injustice. In how we **show up** when it would be easier to stay silent.

Human rights are not only defended in **courts, policies, or global institutions**. They are defended in **classrooms, homes, streets, workplaces, and communities**. They are defended every time you choose **dignity** over discrimination, **courage** over comfort, and **justice** over indifference.

You do not need a title, a uniform, or permission to be a Human Rights Defender. **You already are one** when you stand up for yourself, protect others, and believe that every person matters - simply because they are **human**.

Carry what you have learned here into the world. Ask questions. Speak up. Act with compassion. And remember: change does not begin with “someone else”. **It begins with you.**

The world does not need perfect heroes. It needs brave, informed, and caring people who refuse to look away.

**Go forward. Stand firm. Defend human rights
- every day, everywhere, always.**





INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATION
ASSOCIATION

THANK YOU!

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. By engaging with these stories and ideas, you are already taking a step towards building a more just, compassionate, and human-centred world.

You can follow us on social media for stories, reflections, and updates from across our global community, or explore more resources like this on our website:

www.ipango.org

The International Presentation Association (IPA) is a global network of Presentation people and partners working together for justice, peace, and the dignity of all. Rooted in the vision of Nano Nagle, IPA connects grassroots voices to global spaces, including the United Nations, and supports education, advocacy, and action for human rights around the world.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we can continue to listen, learn, and stand for the rights and dignity of every person.