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Fighting for your rights

On Human Rights Day, city-based NGOs say that every person should know that they are entitled to basic human rights

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"All human beings are born free, and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood," states Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every human being is entitled to basic human rights, such as the right to equality, freedom of expression, and the right to social security. And it is something that is being brought into focus on Human Rights Day, which is being observed today.

Nafasha Jain, who works with the Youth for Human Rights International, feels that it's high-time there were rights awareness programmes in all spheres of society. "If people know their basic rights,

they can raise their voice against injustice," says Jain. She also adds that workshops advocating human rights must be held in schools, colleges and offices.

"Just knowing about human rights is not enough. Everyone should make it a point to treat others with dignity and respect," says Neha Shah, manager, social support services, Dignity Foundation, an NGO working for the aged. There are five rights specified by the UN for the elderly: Rights to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. There should be no abuse — verbal or physical — of the elderly, and they should be treated with respect.

Those infected with HIV and suffering from AIDS face a number of human rights-related problems, and even today, a social stigma hangs over the disease. "People afflicted with HIV-AIDS have the right to confidentiality, the right to work and the right to live," says Merlyn D'Souza, director, Social Work Programme, Oasis. She feels that it is important to spread awareness in every stratum of the society. Women are exploited in brothels and many girls are dragged into the sex trade against

their will. These women need to be told about their rights, and taught to raise their voice against injustice.

Recently the country's gay and transgender community came out and demanded their human rights. Nitia Karani, a trustee with the Humsafar Trust, says, "Spreading awareness is not only the responsibility of the NGOs, but also of every individual."

B Manjula, associate professor and chairperson, Centre for Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences firmly believes in people-centric development. She rues the fact that it is always the marginalised, such as the tribals, women, and the poor of the society whose rights are constantly violated.

"It is important that human rights are taught not only in schools and colleges, but also to illiterate people through informal education techniques," she says.

We all need to know our basic rights, and speak out against those who are having their's violated. This Human Rights Day, lets take a pledge to spread the word to at least one other person.

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