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Health and human rights are inextricably intertwined

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Human Rights Day is commemorated every year on 10th December as the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10th, 1948. The first sentence of the preamble reads, "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

Health and human rights are interconnected and their promotion fundamentally and inextricably intertwined. The effects of violations of dignity and physical integrity on health (mental or otherwise) are as crucial as the effects of poor health on dignity. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognise that health is central to the dignity of the person and the state's commitment to health of the population as a fundamental human right.

The realisation of other rights is not possible if an individual cannot maintain his/her own health: "Particularly crucial health needs to include the prevention of stillbirths and infant mortality; the improvement of environmental and industrial hygiene; the prevention, treatment, and control of diseases; and the provision of medical care to the sick.

The linkage of health and human rights refers to the understanding that health status is in a large measure determined by the degree to which human rights are enjoyed. It also entails the application of human rights norms to policies and programs of health systems and to the conduct

of health practitioners. The approach principally builds upon the scientific discipline of public health, epidemiology, and especially social epidemiology. Multilevel approaches to understanding social determinants of health, the role of social integration, social cohesion, and social networks, and similar concerns of social epidemiology all suggest a human rights context for policies to improve the prospects for vulnerable populations to lead healthy lives.

Poor health and inadequate health care are often related to human rights violations. And violation and underfulfillment of human rights are often due to poor health and lack of access to health care. The link is direct in the case of other basic social and economic human rights, such as the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one's family. But poverty and lack of health protection are also indirectly linked to failures to secure civil and political rights.

The ICESCR, Article 12 reads in part "the States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health". The interpretation of this article is elaborated in the General Comment 14, which the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued in 2000. Governments have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health as well as other human rights.

Human Rights are based on moral universals, their

