



## **HUMAN RIGHTS DAY (Dec. 10) Sermon Starters**

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) invites you to mark Human Rights Day by lifting up the need to shine a light on places where torture does occur in the U.S. You're invited to incorporate themes about the importance of light in preventing torture into your worship or other activities around December 10, particularly the weekend of December 7-9. In addition to these sermon starters, we have prayers and other resources at <http://www.nrcat.org/hrd-worship>.

One way to incorporate an anti-torture message is to highlight the need for the President to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. See the talking points on page 2.

### **What is Human Rights Day?**

In 1945 when the United Nations was created, its charter affirmed the "dignity and worth of the human person."

On December 10, 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirmed this basic tenet of the UN charter. The nations of the world and several faith groups now celebrate December 10 as Human Rights Day. There are 30 sections (articles) in the UDHR. The first article states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and human rights." The third article adds, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Article 5 states clearly, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." So the prohibition against torture derives from the agreement by the nations in the UN that the principle of honoring the dignity of human beings – a principle shared by all major religions – is an underlying principle for both nations and individuals. Thirty-six years later, on December 10, 1984, the UN General Assembly adopted the text of the Convention Against Torture, an international treaty ratified by the U.S. in 1994. The nations of the world and several faith groups celebrate December 10 as Human Rights Day. December 10, 2012 will be the 64th anniversary of the signing of the UDHR.

### **Possible Themes for Human Rights Day:**

- Light vs. darkness
- Hope
- Reversal/restoration
- Love



## Talking Points on the need for the U.S. to join the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture

- Torture happens throughout the world and most countries want it to stop. It is illegal, but that doesn't prevent it from occurring. Because prisons, jails, immigrant detention facilities, mental health institutions, youth detention facilities, and other places of detention are often not monitored, torture and abuse can occur – often by guards and other employees.
- The United States is also challenged by the use of torture and abuse. A Chicago Police Commander tortured people for decades; torture and abuse occurs in solitary confinement in the Pelican Bay supermax prison in California and similar prisons in other states; and rape, sexual and other abuse occur in U.S. immigration detention centers. *(Read more on these case examples at <http://www.nrcat.org/does-torture-happen-in-the-us>)*
- As people of faith, we have an obligation to protect those who cannot protect themselves and ensure that no person is tortured or otherwise abused.
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture can help prevent torture and abuse by requiring countries to establish oversight bodies to examine treatment of prisoners and detainees.
- The United States, which has not yet ratified OPCAT, can learn from the experiences of the more than 60 nations that have ratified it, including Great Britain, Sweden and Tunisia. OPCAT, which has been effective, sets up oversight bodies and other national mechanisms that prevent torture and abuse in places of confinement.
- By joining the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, the U.S. would shine a light on places of detention and thereby help to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

For Christians, Human Rights Day falls during Advent. For Jews, it falls during Hanukah. For resources for specific faith groups, go to <http://www.nrcat.org/hrd-worship>