

Celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**Successes and failure of the UDHR
Lymington Branch, UNA
Lymington Community Centre, New Street,
Lymington, Hants. SO41 9BQ.**

Saturday, 28th February 2009

Speaker:

Vijay Mehta

Shanti and Vijay Mehta went to give a talk on Building Better Human Rights in Lymington Branch, UNA. It was an excellent meeting, a good turnout with Lady Mayor of Lymington. The meeting was chaired by Patricia Mowbray (former UN Civil Servant). For full details of Vijay Mehta's speech you can click [here](#).

The end of the event is signing of Universal Declaration of Human Rights took place, photo is below. Full report of the event will be published in the Lymington Times and New Milton Advertiser.



Lady Mayor, Patricia Mowbray, Vijay Mehta and Shanti Mehta

Lymington Times Article on the event:

60 Years Towards Human Rights -

Lymington United Nations Association

Mayor Martina Humber opened the latest Lymington United Nations Association meeting by signing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on behalf of Lymington and Pennington Town Council. Deputy Mayor Jan Hawker was also at the meeting.

Herself a charter member of the Lymington UNA, the Mayor reminded the meeting that the British were important champions of the Declaration when it was signed at the UN General Assembly in December 1948. Sixty years on, the activist Vijay Mehta from Action for UN Renewal was introduced to give an account of progress towards its goals.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, often called just UDHR, was, said Mr. Mehta, the first global statement of the principle that all human beings have an equal dignity and therefore an entitlement to certain basic human rights. It was written and signed in the immediate aftermath of World War 2. With the Genocide Convention and the Geneva Conventions on civilians and prisoners of war, it introduced a new approach to international relations.

In 30 articles, the UDHR details rights that should be available to all, from life, liberty and security of person (Article 3), the prohibition of slavery (Article 4), freedom from torture (5), equality before the law (6 & 7), to freedom of conscience and religion (18), enough to eat (25), and education (26). It also emphasises "duties to the community" (29). All these should be available without discrimination.

The UDHR has had tremendous impact. It is the most translated document in the world, available in more than 360 languages. It has inspired constitutions. It has become a measuring stick for good governance around the world.

Post war, the Nuremberg trials established in principle that gross violators could be brought to trial, but the absence of an on-going enforcement mechanism has contributed to many international failures in protecting human rights. It has been too easy for countries of the United Nations to turn a "blind eye" towards even flagrant abuses. The crises in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda created pressure to do better.

The establishment of the International Criminal Court at The Hague and the arrest and indictment of General Pinochet for war crimes were landmarks in legal accountability. Extreme violations of human rights are now also crimes under international law.

The United States' announcement that Guantanamo Bay will be closed and the current very public controversy about rendition of prisoners represent a further practical step on international human rights issues. States acting outside their own boundaries are seen to be bound by UDHR principles.

Many challenges remain, including balance between state sovereignty and international enforcement. The United Nations' "responsibility to protect" requires international intervention when States fail to shield their own populations from genocide and other major abuses. Although adopted by treaty at the World Summit in 2000, the doctrine is mistrusted by some countries, who feel it may be used to justify political intervention.

Following 9/11, many western States have increased surveillance to combat terrorism. How should this be balanced against civil liberties? Trafficking of children and women also remains a major international problem. And the world is far from its goal of ensuring a basic human right to adequate food, water, shelter and basic education for all.

Mr. Mehta ended his talk with a list of things individuals can do in a local setting to foster human rights. Have a debate in your school or college to build better human rights. Make your view known: write to your MP or local press about abuses of human rights in Israel/Palestine, Darfur, and other parts of the world. Join in local debate about the balance between liberty and security.

Internationally, the UDHR still needs more exposure and enactment. Democracy, development, human rights and the UN's millennium development goals are all intertwined. "It is generally recognised," said Mr. Mehta, "that the number one enemy against all reforms and progress in human rights is indifference."

After a lively question and answer session, Mr. Mehta was thanked for his thought-provoking and inspiring talk.

The next Lymington UNA meeting is March 21st, and will focus on women in conflict situations. Visitors are cordially invited. A light lunch is available at 12:30 and the talk begins at 1:15 and finishes by 2:30.