

**A Business Case for Human Rights**  
as presented live  
by Art DeFehr with Stephanie Stobbe  
at MEDA Convention in Winnipeg  
on November 6, 2014  
at the Fairmont Hotel

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**Art:** Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion on how we apply our Christian faith to the reality of our world. This presentation represents a significant anniversary for me – it's exactly 50 years since my first speech to a MEDA Convention at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago. The subject then was the ethical challenges involved in running a public company.

On this occasion the subject is Human Rights – always an appropriate subject but especially relevant with the opening of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights here in Winnipeg—the first and only Museum in the world solely dedicated to this subject.

## **A Business Case for Human Rights**

**Art:** Specifically, we're going to examine the following question: Can a business case be made for human rights?

I have invited a Professor in Conflict Resolution Studies to join us this evening. She will be helping me ask some of the questions and at times will provide answers. Please welcome Dr. Stephanie Stobbe. Stephanie, could you introduce yourself?

**Dr. Stephanie Stobbe, Ph.D.**  
Associate Professor,  
Conflict Resolution Studies

**Menno Simons College  
at the University of Winnipeg**



**Stephanie:** Thank you, Art. I am a professor of Conflict Resolution at Menno Simons College, which is part of Canadian Mennonite University. My interest in Human Rights comes from personal experience - I was born in Laos during the Vietnam War, and left as a refugee with my family at the age of 7. We were given sanctuary in Thailand and UNHCR protection. We were eventually admitted to Canada under the private sponsorship program. Coming to Canada was a difficult experience for us, but eventually we ended up in Steinbach, and were taken in by the Mennonite community. Today I am a Canadian citizen, married with two children, and am a member of a Mennonite Church.

**Art:** Every phrase in that short introduction could be developed into a speech about human rights issues and some of those themes will be included as we get into the subject.

Are you with us so far? Thank you.

So. What kind of world are we living in today?

Despite undeniable progress, major issues like racial and gender prejudice, colonialism and even slavery in various forms are still alive and well a half-century after I gave that first speech and almost 70 years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was first drafted. The purpose of this dialogue is to explore our understanding of the meaning of human rights and how well we grasp the degree to which they are actually part of our reality today.

We hope to be informative while exploring these questions, but also provocative enough to make us all a little uncomfortable.

So, let's begin with a little self-examination:

## A Business Case for Human Rights

1. I believe that as Christians we should endorse, support and practice human rights.
2. I believe that respect and practice of human rights are important for the financial success for my business.

**Art:** I want you to consider these two statements. First, I believe that as a Christian we should endorse, support and practice human rights. And second, I believe that respect and practice of human rights are important for the financial success of my business.

A show of hands if you agree with the first statement.

How about the second one? Good start!

I'm going to assume that all of us are in favour of human rights in a general sense – so we're going to explore what they actually are and the implications for our attitudes and actions. We'll come to the actual contents of the Declaration in a couple of minutes but first, we need to set out some objectives for our discussion. This is an enormous subject so I'm going to ask Stephanie to help identify some questions about human rights that might be important to answer within the scope of this session.

## **A Business Case for Human Rights**

1. Does practicing Human Rights lead to business success?
2. Are Human Rights consistent with the teachings of the Bible?
3. Is the Declaration of Human Rights culturally biased?
4. Do Canada and the USA live up to the standards of the Declaration of Human Rights?

### **Question 1. Does Practicing Human Rights lead to Business Success?**

**Stephanie:** Thanks, Art. Well first, I would like to know if being respectful of human rights leads to Business Success. Is it good for business in the financial sense or does it simply make me feel better?

**Art:** Go on...

### **Question 2. Are Human Rights consistent with the teachings of the Bible?**

**Stephanie:** Second, are Human Rights based on Biblical Principles? Can I find them in the Bible?

**Art:** And your third question?

### **Question 3. Is the Declaration of Human Rights culturally biased?**

**Stephanie:** Who actually wrote the declaration? Would it have been different if initially written in India, China or somewhere else?

**Art:** Great question Stephanie – I can see you want me to become a little controversial! I think we'll have time to deal with a fourth question – what do you have?

#### **Question 4. Do Canada and the USA live up to the standards of the Declaration of Human Rights?**

**Stephanie:** Canadians and Americans consider themselves to be responsible, humane, ethical and in some way special societies and often exhibit a sense of moral superiority. Do we actually live up to the values of the Declaration of Human Rights? How good are we really?

**Art:** Well, that one should generate some discussion! Thank you Stephanie. They're all great questions and more than enough for this evening! But, before we begin, a little heads up.

Tomorrow morning after breakfast MEDA will conduct a Q&A about what you've heard here tonight. I'm interested to learn whether it will any way influence your future attitudes about human rights issues or possibly your business behaviour. Please think about that as we proceed and be ready to have a good discussion in the morning.

Alright. I want to start with a scenario from my own experience that illustrates how complicated the question of human rights can become.

A couple of years ago I was taking the train from Pyongyang in North Korea to the border of China. The person next to me was from India and an important middleman between garment factories in Asia and major brand name retailers around the world. That morning we had watched North Korean TV in the hotel. The news reported a major garment factory fire in Karachi. (This was a few months before the Rana factory collapse in Bangladesh). It was clearly a tragedy but given language and other limitations we did not know which factory. Needless to say my friend was extremely anxious to know if that was one of the factories he was using. As we crossed the Yalu River into China the authorities returned our mobile phones – that is the deal in North Korea – and when we hit the first cellular tower he realized with horror that this factory was a major supplier to him. He was returning to New York with a big problem —for himself, his company and his customers.

**Stephanie:** Yes. We've all heard the stories of locked fire escapes and bribery of inspection officials. So, who should be held responsible? And what about the reputational damage to the retailers who claim to be so ethical?

**Art:** Excellent questions. So, let's look at the ethical or human rights dimensions in this story. Many people died because of something. I'm sure we all want to know who is to blame. Why don't we start with the chain of responsibility.

## Chain of Responsibility

1. Consumers demand low retail prices
2. Retailers under pressure to buy globally at low cost
3. Middleman knows the globe and searches for the lowest cost suppliers
4. The pressure to reduce costs, both for the supplier and local government, can be overwhelming

### **# 1. Consumers demand low retail prices**

**Stephanie:** Well, as a consumer I try to get the best value, which often means the lowest price....

**Art:** Hands up, anyone here who shops for the highest price? I acknowledge that I too shop for value. Next, Stephanie?

### **#2. Retailers under pressure to buy globally at low cost**

**Stephanie:** So, the retailer feels forced to shop the world to find the best value.

**Art:** Correct. Any businessperson knows the competition is doing it as well. So, as the retail industry is currently set up, there's really no choice.

### **#3. Middleman knows the globe and searches for the lowest cost suppliers**

**Stephanie:** But in a globalized economy many retailers may not have their own international supply chains. So how can they source what their customers want?

**Art:** Retailers use specialized sourcing companies and middlemen to shop the world, so the retailers are often not directly connected to the actual producer. Our company does some of that and I suspect there are others in this room.

### **#4. The pressure to reduce costs, both for the supplier and local government, can be overwhelming**

**Stephanie:** So there's huge pressure on suppliers to deliver the lowest possible price.

**Art:** And these suppliers often pass on the pressure to their governments, which are already poor, desperate and often corrupt. So inspectors, who are usually underpaid, are susceptible to bribes and thus regulations can be avoided. This in turn allows factory owners to respond by minimizing wages and avoiding costs such as safety procedures or pollution control. Maybe even by using child labor.

The result is pretty predictable—crowded workspaces, long hours, building codes ignored—it's a recipe for disaster.

**Stephanie:** If workers are abused and put at great risk, wages underpaid, rivers and air polluted, governments corrupted, so that we get to buy really cheap clothing and other products, it would seem human rights have been violated. And if they were—who violated them?

## A Business Case for Human Rights

1. Does practicing Human Rights lead to business success?

**Art:** I think it's clear that many parties are implicated and it is not really fair to pin all of the blame on the factory owner at the end of the line. There seems to be plenty of blame to go around. You might want to have a go at that over coffee and dessert as you check the labels on your friends' clothing.

There are examples of companies very sensitive to reputational risk such as Enron and Arthur Anderson who were destroyed by making a serious ethical error. But check if any major retailer has quit buying product from Asia or whether the major American and European banks that were fined for large and serious violations have really suffered—they all seem to be rolling along just fine.

So, Stephanie. Have you come to any conclusions?

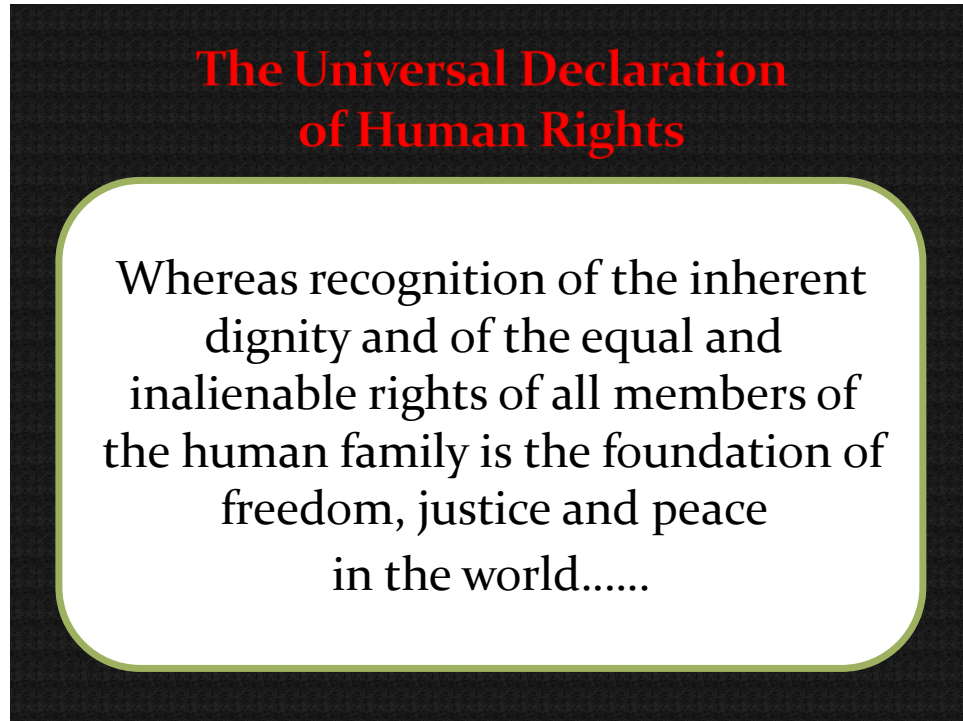
**Stephanie:** Hmmm, just more questions, I'm afraid. The topic was, is there a Business Case for Human Rights? Your example seems to suggest that if there is no harm to the business, we can then ignore human rights.

**Art:** You mean that if your company can survive the reputational damage you don't really need to worry about ethics or human rights? Well, that's one possible conclusion.

**Stephanie:** But, we've only looked at one story. Surely the Declaration must cover many different Human Rights. Are there other examples that might help us make our case?

**Art:** Maybe we should take a look at the actual human rights declaration since many of us may never have read the real document.

The Declaration is a set of principles—not laws. It has a one page preamble and then 30 articles – not a very long document considering how important it has become. Stephanie, why don't you start with part of the preamble and the first article.



**Stephanie:** The preamble starts with the words, 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...

**Art:** I encourage us to remember those words – that all humans have the same rights as we begin to make rules and especially borders - we'll come back to borders later. We have rights because we are human, not because we are Canadian or American, of a certain race, gender or education. Go on, Stephanie.

## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### *Article 1*

All human beings are born free and  
equal in dignity and rights....

**Stephanie:** Article 1 - All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights....

**Art:** Is there a difference between equal opportunity and equal rights? What do rights mean without opportunity? The hard questions start with Article 1. Go on Stephanie.

## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### *Article 4*

No one should be held in slavery....

**Stephanie:** Article 4 – No one shall be held in slavery



**Art:** We probably can all agree with that one... unless we take a hard look at the system of migrant labour around the world... or undocumented labour closer to home. Slavery means living and working under coercive conditions.

Let's take a look at a few other interesting articles

## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### *Article 5*

None shall be subjected to  
torture....or degrading treatment....

### *Article 6*

Everyone has the right to  
recognition....before the law.....

### *Article 9*

No one shall be subject to arbitrary  
arrest, detention or exile.....

**Stephanie:** Article 5 – None shall be subjected to torture....or degrading treatment. Article 6 – Everyone has the right to recognition ....before the law. Article 9 –No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. Hmmm. I wonder if Guantanamo Bay would meet those standards?

**Art:** Probably not. And many other places in our world would fail that same test. Let's jump to Article 18

## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### *Article 18*

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change his religion or belief.....

**Stephanie:** Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change his or her religion or belief.

**Art:** So how does this square with sharia and Islamic law, which demands the death sentence if you convert – or the Inquisition in an earlier Christian era. The reality is that Saudi Arabia never signed the Declaration. Iran did sign under its previous Government but has pulled back from full support after the 1979 Revolution. Afghanistan also signed but seems too occupied with other matters right now... Let's go to Article 23. It sounds more like it speaks to business.

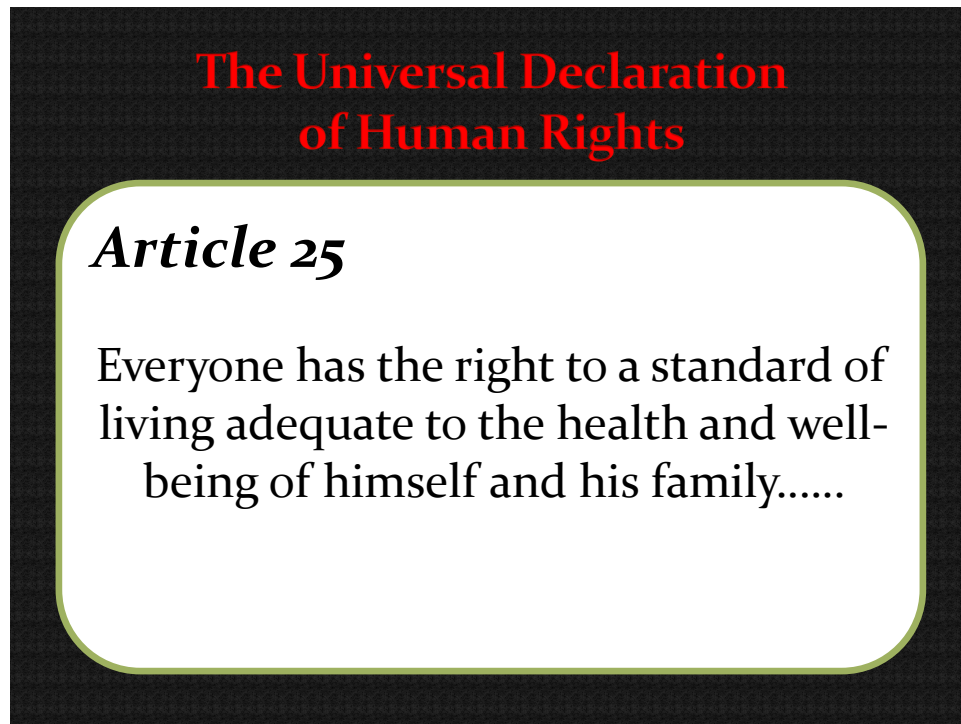
## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### *Article 23*

Everyone has the right to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.  
The right to form and join trade unions.

**Stephanie:** Article 23 reads. Everyone has the right to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and protection against unemployment. The right to equal pay for equal work. The right to form and join trade unions.

**Art:** Are we on board with the trade union clause? Equal pay? Go on Stephanie.



**Stephanie:** Article 25 is interesting. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate to the health and well-being of himself and his family...

**Art:** That sounds like a minimum wage high enough to assure a reasonable standard of living – are we all in on that one? Do we think Jesus might have signed on to that one?

And there is much more. Some of these clauses sound like the NDP in Canada and some Democrats in the US. As business people—as Christians—can we pick and choose which clauses we like and which we do not? Is this a smorgasbord of ideas or is it a universally applicable declaration that has meaning in every article?

**Stephanie:** Have we answered the question of whether supporting human rights is good for business?

**Art:** Not really. The Bible says that “the rain falls on the just and the unjust” so the answer may not be so obvious. But let me try.

Every year, Transparency International publishes a list of the best and worst countries in the world when measured by public perception of honesty and integrity of Government and society. Here are the top 20 for 2013. Take a look at the screen.

## Transparency International Top 20 Countries out of 177

<b>1</b>	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Luxembourg</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Germany</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Iceland</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Barbados</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Singapore</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Belgium</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Switzerland</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Hong Kong</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Japan</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Australia</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>UNITED STATES</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>CANADA</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Uruguay</b>

**Art:** Note that the countries near the top are all Western Democracies and the Nordic countries top the list. Canada and the US did not make it to the very top – maybe some room for improvement!

Now let's look at some of the names at the bottom of the list. Here are the bottom 10 countries.

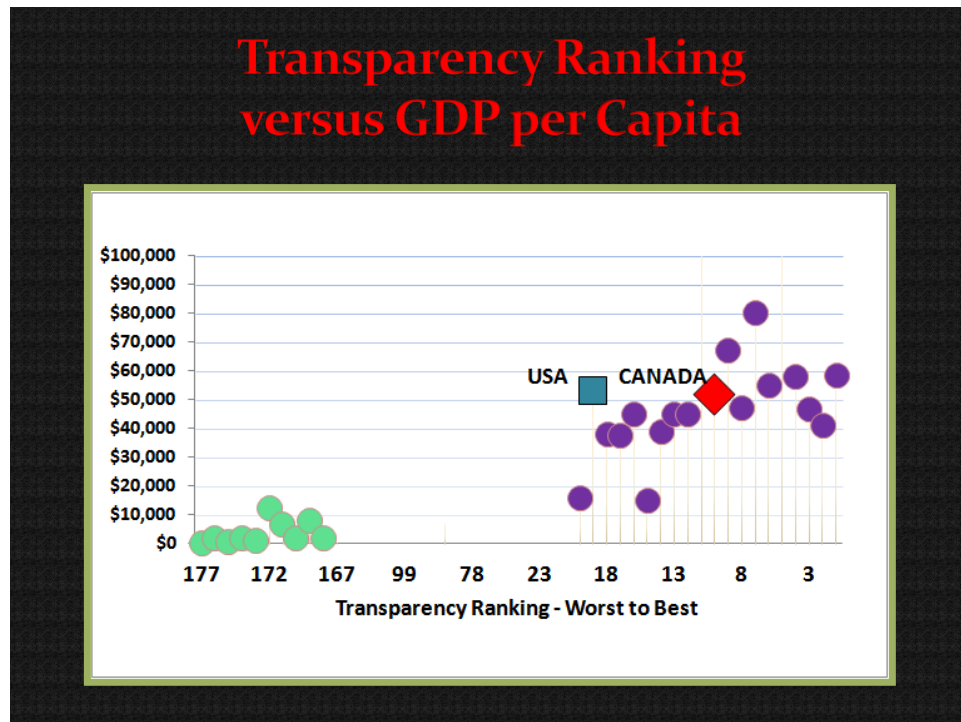
## Transparency International Bottom 10 Countries out of 177

<b>177</b>	<b>Somalia</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>Libya</b>
<b>176</b>	<b>North Korea</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>Iraq</b>
<b>175</b>	<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>Uzbekistan</b>
<b>174</b>	<b>Sudan</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>Turkmenistan</b>
<b>173</b>	<b>South Sudan</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>Syria</b>

**Art:** Does this tell us anything?

**Stephanie:** It seems that the more transparent countries near the top tend to be the more prosperous ones and the least transparent near the bottom are not.

**Art:** Do you think there is any connection between prosperity and levels of corruption and bad governance?



**Art:** Well, take a look at this graph, which plots GDP per person against the Transparency Index Ranking. What do you see?

**Stephanie:** Most OECD countries are in the upper quadrant and the lower quadrant is a pretty tough group. Does this suggest that running a clean and good government produces better economic outcomes for a county?

**Art:** Possibly. It's been said that capitalism, and by implication, business, has no inherent ethical foundation. That it's always about profits and maximizing shareholder value. But, when I look at that graph, I see something else. Success in business requires an environment of trust. That's what good governance provides and corruption undermines.

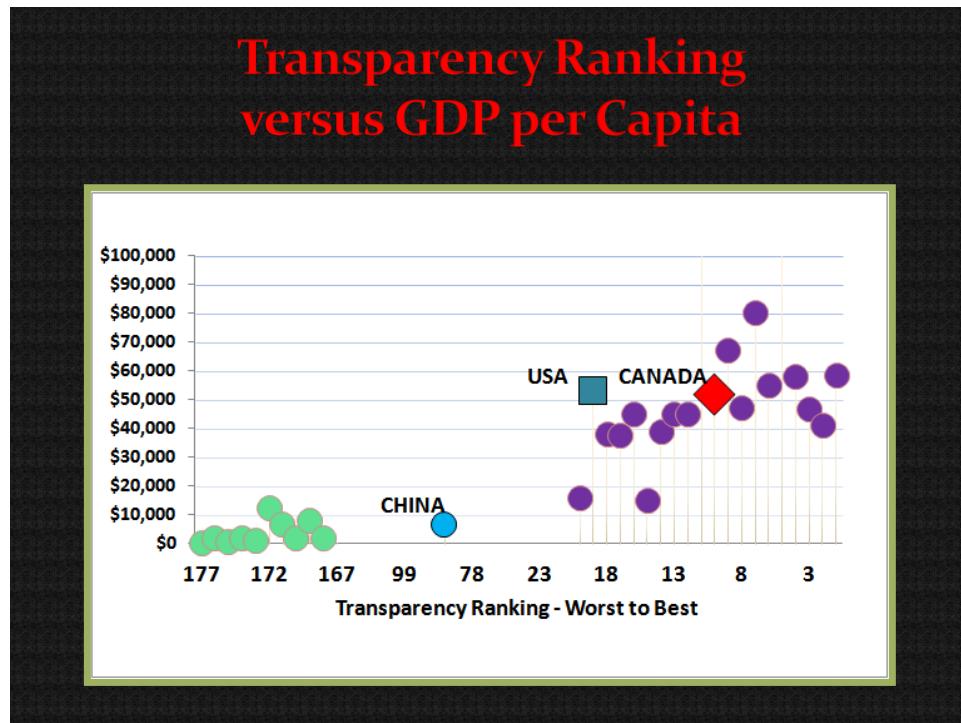
The countries in the upper quadrant have established processes and working institutions. Investors know the rules of the game and believe those rules will be consistently and uniformly enforced. That's the kind of environment where economies do well and respect for human rights tends to be strong.

**Stephanie:** That may be true for a country but does that apply at the level of the company or Enterprise? I come from a part of the world where, traditionally, a lot of manufacturing has occurred. Many big, successful businesses are headquartered in upper quadrant OECD countries, but many of those businesses have farmed out their manufacturing to countries that are much farther down the transparency list – for example, Thailand, Indonesia, Mexico, and many others. Are governments and companies in the wealthier nations simply “passing the buck” when it comes to human rights?

**Art:** That is a tough one. My guess is that corrupt persons and companies can often do well in very bad situations. On the other hand, it's certainly not in the interests of firms from upper quadrant countries to encourage behaviour that increases corruption in places where they do

business. Given how little connection there can be between suppliers and retailers in a global economy, it's something that's difficult to gauge.

On the whole, however, I think an excellent case can be made that good and transparent governance and rule of law seem to be inherent features of the wealthier and more stable countries – with a few oil rich places living on their own planet.



**Art:** Of course, the real outlier... so far at least, is China. Corrupt but getting rich. It'll be interesting to watch what happens there.

## A Business Case for Human Rights

2. Are Human Rights consistent with the teachings of the Bible?

**Question 2. Are Human Rights Consistent with the Teaching of the Bible?**

**Art:** Alright. I'd like to move on to the big second question you posed earlier, Stephanie. We've summarized and selected a few clauses from the Declaration, but there are a total of 30 articles. From a Christian and Anabaptist perspective - is there anything missing? More important – do these 30 articles connect to the Bible?

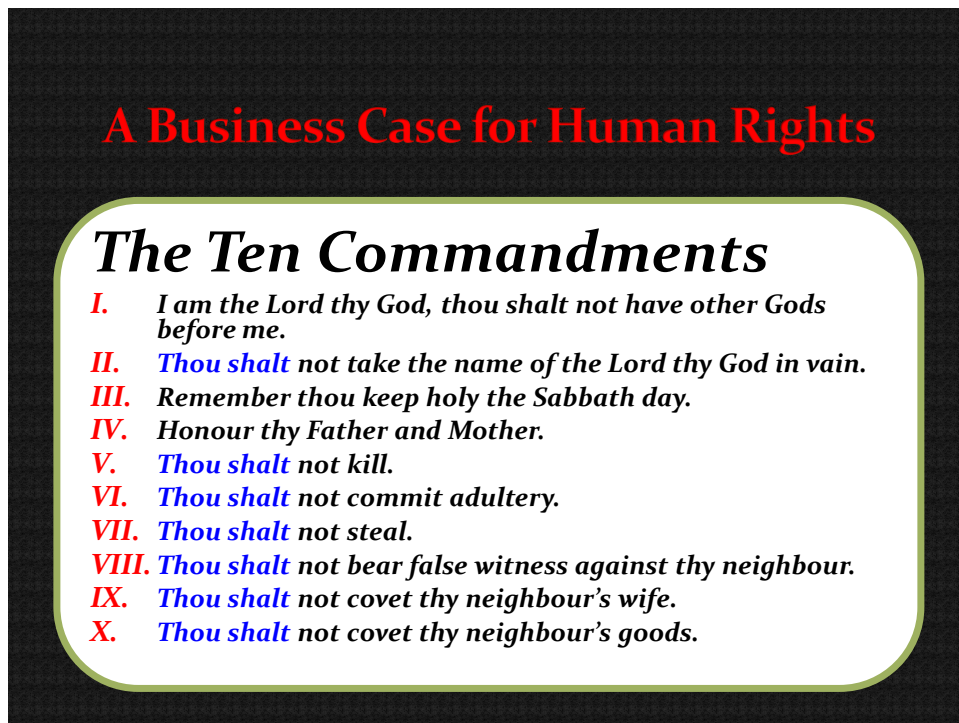
**Stephanie:** Well first, let's consider if anything is missing. I joined the Mennonite faith and was taught the principle of non-violence – which could be re-stated as the “right not to Kill”.

**Art:** The declaration actually doesn't speak to what we call the right to be a conscientious objector and what you correctly describe in human rights language as “The Right NOT to Kill”. Groups like Amnesty International state that this is the most important right that should be added to the original 30 – interesting that our very important Anabaptist concern did not make the original top 30 but is recognized today as very important – hopefully we continue to place full value on that as a faith community.

**Stephanie:** I wonder if the right to carry a gun was considered when the declaration was written?

**Art:** Good question! Maybe leave that one for breakfast.

Let's return to the question of whether the 30 articles in the Declaration are consistent with biblical teaching.



**Stephanie:** Well, what about the 10 Commandments?

**Art:** But they are very different – 7 out of 10 start with Thou shalt not - they speak about what WE SHOULD NOT DO – they are limitations, not rights. One friend found some of them a bit onerous and changed the name to the 10 suggestions – pick and choose. Is that what we do with the 30 articles from the Human Rights Declaration? Are they 30 suggestions?

**Stephanie:** OK. How about the New Testament passages like the Sermon on the Mount?

## A Business Case for Human Rights

### *The Beatitudes:*

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit*
- *Blessed are those who mourn*
- *Blessed are the meek*

**Art:** Well, the Beatitudes use words like these. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Hardly the language of robust rights. If we read the rest of the sermon there are passages such as

## A Business Case for Human Rights

### *Luke 6:29*

*If anyone slaps you on the right cheek,  
turn to them the other cheek also.....*

**Art:** If anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to them the other cheek also. Not exactly a great platform to demand my rights!



## A Business Case for Human Rights

### *Matthew 25*

*Lord, when did we see you hungry  
or thirsty or a stranger or needing  
clothes or sick or in prison  
and did not help you?*

**Stephanie:** Let's give the Bible one more try – how about Matthew 25: Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison and did not help you?

**Art:** Every passage you've suggested is either a Commandment or an obligation of what we do to the other person, rather than a right that applies to ourselves. How do we bridge that gap? Is the teaching of Christ a teaching about our rights or about our obligations?

**Stephanie:** But if I practice my obligations, won't that effectively recognize the rights of the other? And if they also practice their obligations then I will experience my rights. Correct?

## A Business Case for Human Rights

**2.** Are Human Rights consistent with the teachings of the Bible?

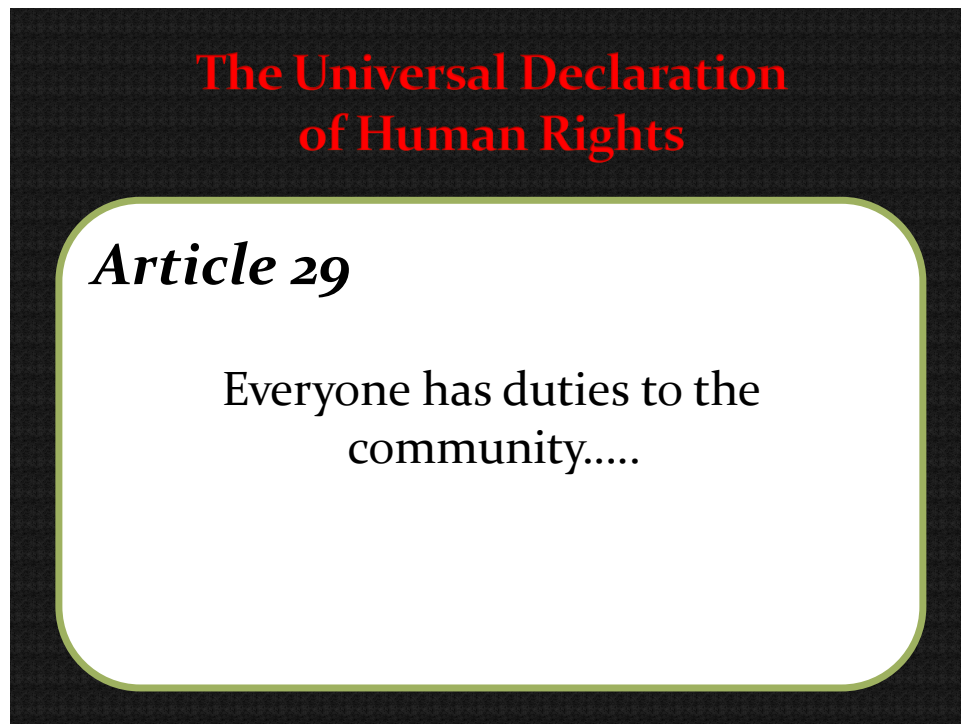
**Question 2. Are Human Rights Consistent with the Teaching of the Bible?**

**Art:** Interesting point – the Bible speaks of a mutuality rather than rights as they apply to me. The treatment of people may be the same but the sense of mutuality is not as deeply imbedded in the Declaration – so as Christians, maybe we can improve on it!

**Stephanie:** – How about adding the Golden Rule to the Declaration?

**Art:** There's a thought! Anything else missing?

**Stephanie:** My cultural heritage is one that comes from a collectivistic society, as opposed to an individualistic society. Certainly, as Anabaptists we talk a great deal about Community, but all of these rights seem to apply to the individual. Don't we live in Community with rights and obligations that affect us collectively as well as individually?



**Art:** We stopped going through the articles a bit early – if you go to article 29 it starts, Everyone has duties to the community. So, the idea of Community is not entirely forgotten but yes – this list of rights is very individual and oriented to the “I”.

**Stephanie:** This discussion is moving us toward our third question. I ‘m wondering if that slant, namely the emphasis on the individual rather than the community is indicative of who actually wrote the Declaration?

**Art:** The very first draft was written by a Canadian – John Peters Humphrey. Then Eleanor Roosevelt and others became involved and now everybody claims a piece of it.

## A Business Case for Human Rights

### 3. Is the Declaration of Human Rights culturally biased?

#### Question 3. Is the Declaration of Human Rights Culturally Biased?

**Stephanie:** I asked the question because I'm interested in learning whether the Declaration has any particular cultural or ideological bias. Or do all people and groups agree that it is the best possible list?

**Art:** Obviously, some Muslim societies have trouble with the way rights are given to women or with clauses like freedom of religion. Actually, it's probably fair to say that's true for most conservative believers, regardless of their religion.

In fact, I suspect that if we dig a little deeper, we might find that there are clauses that will give even those of us from the societies that wrote the Declaration some difficulties.

In fact, let's get back to the rest of the group for a moment. After hearing the discussion to this point, how many believe that if a company is very faithful in the observation and protection of human rights as defined by the UN declaration—that that behaviour will contribute to the financial success of that company? Two choices.

## A Business Case for Human Rights

- A. The faithful respect of Human Rights is financially good for business.
- B. Human Rights may be of ethical concern but whether we pay a lot of attention or not won't really affect the financial success of my business.

**Art:** A. The faithful respect of human rights is financially good for business. Hands? Or

B. Human rights may be of ethical concern but whether we pay a lot of attention or not won't really affect the financial success of my business. Hands? So, we still have people to convince.

All right. I want you to note that we missed reading quite a few of the articles. How about if we go back, look at a couple more and see if we can't push a few ethical buttons?

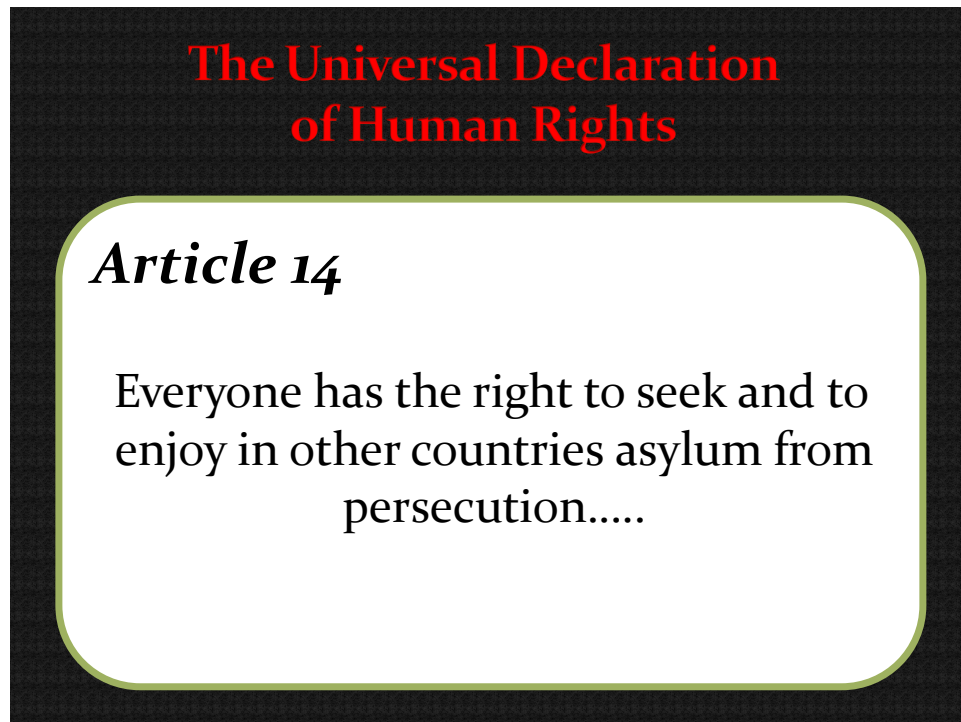
## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### *Article 13*

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state
- (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country

**Stephanie:** Article 13 (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country

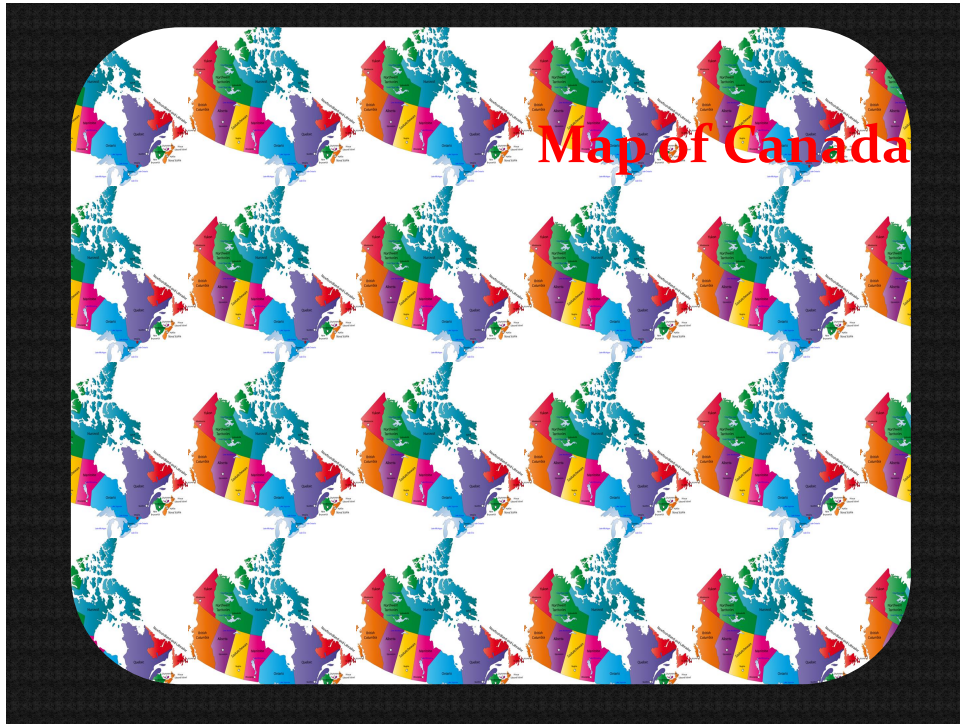
Well, that sounds pretty fair and reasonable – right?



**Stephanie:** Then there's Article 14: Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

So Art, since most countries of the world have signed on to these clauses, why are there 50 million people displaced by war or persecution inside or outside of their nations – and less than one percent – in fact only a quarter of one percent - will be resettled in any given year?

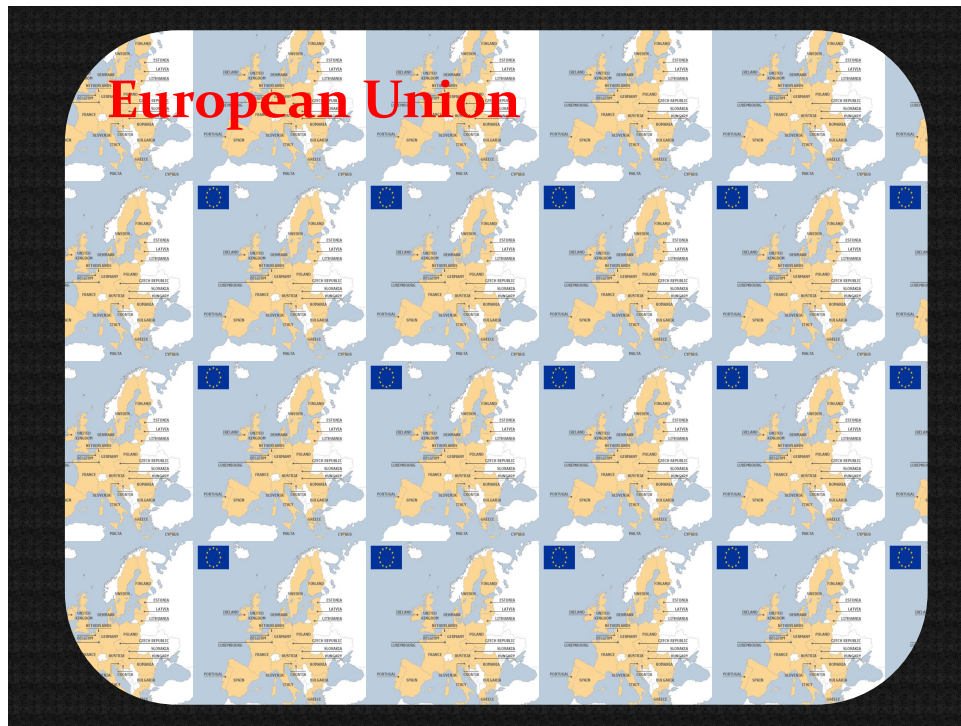
**Art:** Well. I think we should take a closer look at what the implications of these clauses really are – with the warning that this will reveal my bias on migration issues.



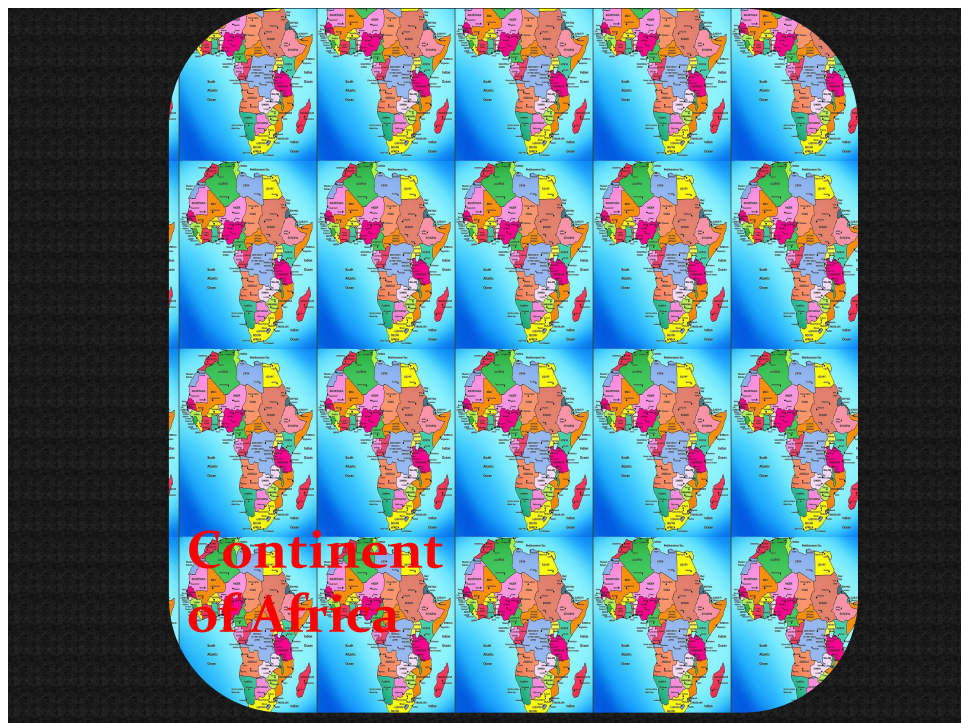
**Art:** As a Canadian, I have the right to travel and live anywhere in that vast area of land – maybe I will be cold – but not all that restricted.



**Art:** Plenty of choices – multiple climates. America is so big many Congressmen do not even think they need a passport to travel anywhere else.



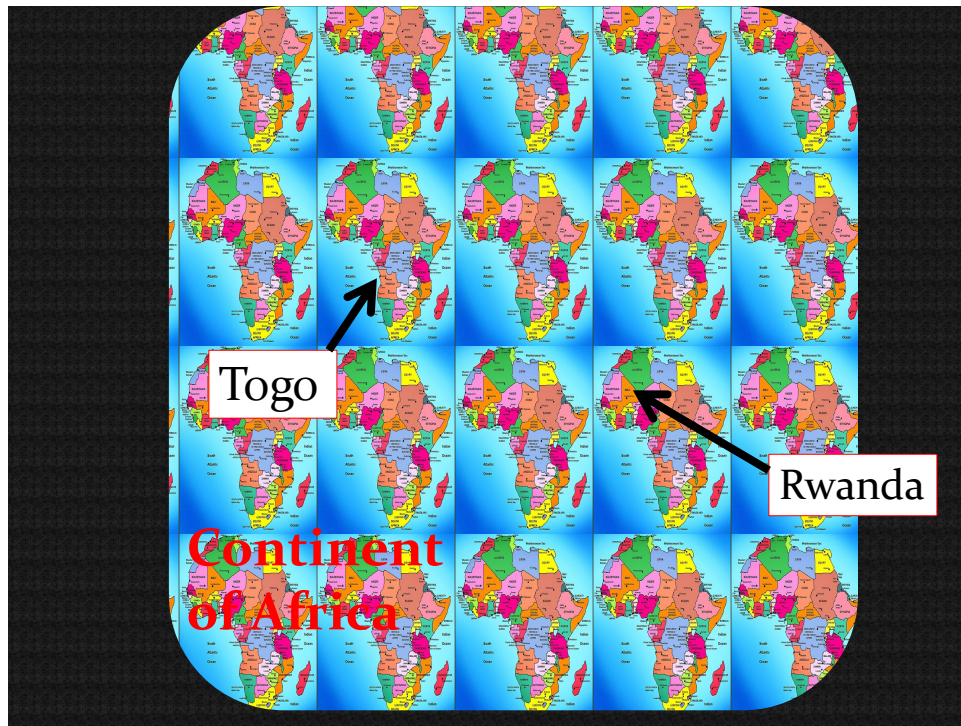
**Art:** What do you think Stephanie? Enough choices? You can ski in the Alps, beach on the Riviera, pasta in Rome, a bit of theatre in London. And, of course, there is Paris and quite a few other lovely places.



**Art:** Now let's look at Africa. 53 countries. Plenty of borders

**Stephanie:** So if I am born in Rwanda I have the freedom to travel anywhere in Rwanda. Is that correct?

**Art:** Absolutely, and if you are born in Togo you have the full freedom—at least by the rules of the Declaration of Human Rights—to visit any part of Togo, but no place else.



**Stephanie:** Then, if I am born in Rwanda or Togo or many other parts of Africa, why should I think that these parts of the Declaration are such a good idea? And by the way, who drew the borders of Africa to create such a mess?

**Art:** The Berlin Conference of 1884 led by Otto von Bismarck is an important starting point and many of the borders and divisions go back to those decisions.

**Stephanie:** Were Africans represented at that Conference?

**Art:** Regrettably not – the colonial powers acted on their own interests. It was the same with the Middle East in 1919, and in other places and times.

**Stephanie:** So let me get this straight. The majority of the world's population had no role in creating such ridiculous political boundaries and no role in writing the articles in the Declaration that affect their ability to live and move where they would like. So why should they think the Declaration of Human Rights—or at least these clauses—are such a great idea?

**Art:** Despite what the Declaration actually says, we sometimes think of immigrants or refugees as categories. Out of fear, we underestimate what they can contribute to our societies and overestimate what we think they'll take. It might be useful to consider Stephanie as an example. She's not a category but a real person and a real Canadian. Stephanie, could you give us a summary of your story....

**Stephanie:** My family which includes my dad, mom (6 months pregnant), and three small children) escaped the Secret War in Laos by taking a canoe across the Mekong River. We almost drowned. Then, after we were forced into a refugee camp in Thailand, we applied to come to Canada. Believe me, that was a huge adjustment! But our family was determined to get stronger, establish our independence, and succeed in our new home.

All four children went to college/university, and I became the first person in my family to graduate with a BA, MA, and PhD. One of my sisters manages a retail store in Vancouver, another sister works as director of human resources, and my brother works for Shaw cable. My father owns a successful restaurant and my mother has worked for several different organizations and held the family together. All things considered, I think of us a successful immigrant family, but not an abnormal one....



**Art:** My own mother, Mia, escaped from Stalinist Russia by swimming the Amur River into China, came illegally to the United States but was allowed to stay as student – and eventually earned three College degrees and became a Professor of German Literature.

The Declaration of Human Rights may indeed reflect a western bias. But that doesn't change the fact that it was written after the catastrophe of World War II with the hope that we can create a world that is more fair, with opportunity for all. Each of the 50 million displaced persons has a unique story and unique hope. Our goal, as reflected in the Declaration, should be to create many more stories such as Stephanie's or my mother's.

I know many of you can tell similar stories from your personal experience or from relating to people in your community. However, there are still 50 million others looking for their place in our shared world.

Which brings us to the final question Stephanie asked at the beginning.

## A Business Case for Human Rights

### 4. Do Canada and the USA live up to the standards of the Declaration of Human Rights?

**Art:** Do Canada and the US live up to the standards of the Declaration of Human Rights? We will stay with the migration focus for the moment.

So here's the picture. Our ancestors got to North America first—or actually second since the First Nations folk will always be here to remind us of their earlier presence.

Then we (Europeans and North Americans) contributed more than a little to messing up other places around the world, and creating their political and social structures. Now, when those people want to escape conditions we had some hand in creating and search out the best place for their families, we pull up the drawbridge.



**Art:** For example, we have a drug problem in North America—which is supplied through Mexico. We put pressure on Mexico, which transfers the drug problem to even weaker countries – such as El Salvador. Among other consequences, parents try to save their children from involvement in the drug wars and ship them north at great risk.

This problem isn't limited to the border of Mexico. Hundreds of thousands risk their lives to cross the Mediterranean into Europe or test other borders to escape their own versions of hell. The cause can be climate effects, poverty, bad Governance or civil wars as in Syria or Iraq.

**Stephanie:** It seems to me that any solution to these problems will be far from simple. The Declaration of Human Rights begins with the premise that we all start out equal, and even guarantees asylum in Article 14. But then the reality of political systems, borders, religious intolerance, the battle for economic and political dominance plus racism and other prejudices begin to carve these rights into little pieces.

**Art:** That's true. But does it have to be that way? The historic Mennonite Communities in North America all arrived from somewhere else and virtually all were seeking sanctuary from different forms of oppression or coercion. We sometimes refer to our group as "People of the Land" yet we really have no historic place that is our land unlike the claims of First Nations in North America, Jews in Israel and any number of other peoples. Should that mean we respond in a more generous way to the search of others for sanctuary?

Canadians and Americans respond somewhat differently to the question of immigration but essentially both nations view access to our countries as something that can be limited. We are inside now - pull up the drawbridge! As Canadians with a huge empty land, how should we view the desire of others to find a safer place? We've become reasonably colour blind but we are protected from the unwanted hordes by virtue of geography.

Americans have a different problem since their geography delivers people driven by distress or the search for opportunity. In some cases the distress may even be attributed in part to policies and actions of the USA and sometimes Canada. Yet, when they arrive, many are considered illegal. When we look at the Declaration of Human Rights, how can anyone be an

illegal human being? You can be undocumented, unregistered and many other things, but how can you be illegal?

**Stephanie:** Taking Human Rights into account when running a business or government is clearly not a straightforward proposition. As we've seen, human rights are difficult to deliver in equal portion to every human. So how then do we respond as Christians and as Christians of the Anabaptist persuasion?

**Art:** We can easily argue that big issues like immigration policy are beyond us. Yet here in Manitoba we've invented and implemented an excellent immigration program that, in terms of numbers relative to population, is 500% of the US rate of immigration – and politicians compete as to who will bring in more immigrants!

My own company, Palliser Furniture, has always had a focus on immigrants and refugees in part because of the experience of our family who all arrived as refugees. We operated special English and cultural classes, write our safety rules in 12 languages and in many ways try to make our workplace welcoming as the first work experience in Canada. We believe it has been good for the immigrant but has also given us a loyal and productive workforce.

In fact, after Vietnam, Canada was quite creative in harnessing the energy of churches and other groups to create space for the boat people and similar groups. The US response was also very generous initially, but those programs have become largely history.

**Stephanie:** Can we return to the larger picture of human rights? You've said the Declaration isn't an agreement that can be legally enforced on any country—that it's a statement of principles that most nations including Canada and the United States have ratified. So, in practical terms, how does the world make the Declaration meaningful?

**Art:** Two ways. The first is through a global architecture built around the United Nations – remember the United Nations is not a club of the good guys—it's all of us together. The UN creates agencies like UNICEF or the World Health Organization to implement programs that regulate things like air travel, deal with poverty and the concerns of children and at times acts to minimize war through actions like Peacekeeping. It's one way that human rights are made a reality for more people. If it's imperfect it's because we are imperfect – the UN acts as it is instructed and permitted.

Another approach is to develop what we call Conventions. These are agreements that nations subscribe to when there is a problem that needs to be solved. We can think of the Montreal Protocol to deal with the ozone layer—a resounding success—or the Kyoto Protocol on climate, which has been much less effective. Let's look at a list of some of these conventions.

## United Nations Conventions (Selected)

	Canada	USA
Prevention of Genocide	Yes - 1952	Yes - 1988
Racial Discrimination	Yes - 1970	Yes - 1994
Discrimination against Women	Yes	Not ratified
Rights of the Child	Yes	Not ratified
Rights of Migrant Workers	No	No
International Criminal Court	Yes	No
Land Mines Treaty	Yes	No
Rights of Domestic Workers	No	No
Torture and Degrading Treatment	Yes	Yes (!)
Discrimination on the Basis of Disabilities	No	No

**Art:** As you can see, a number of these conventions have not been ratified by one or sometimes even both of our own two countries. So, even in nations that score high in areas of human rights, there's still work to be done.

Alright, Stephanie. Time to wrap this up, I think. At the beginning of this session, you asked four questions related to making a business case for human rights. So, how did we do? Did we answer your questions?

**Stephanie:** I'm not sure. As you said a moment ago, there's still work to be done. On the other hand, I think we've laid out a path forward for faithful people who want to make the case for themselves.

**Art:** So, for people who want to follow that path, where do we go from here? What can we do individually and collectively if we believe that each human being is entitled to have their rights respected?

## A Business Case for Human Rights: The Path Forward

1. Educate ourselves
2. Develop diverse sources of information
3. Focus on issues that are close to home
4. Consider our personal investments

### **#1. Educate ourselves**

**Stephanie:** I have a couple of ideas. First, we need to educate ourselves so that we become aware and understand the underlying issues that are in play, such as the Land-mines Treaty or the International Criminal Court.

### **#2. Develop diverse sources of information**

**Stephanie:** Second, we have to develop sources of information that are diverse and that, in combination, provide a more complete range of available views and perspectives. If you watch Fox News I suggest you also read the New York Times and maybe try Al Jazeera English – not to mention the best news source today – the BBC. Art?

### **#3. Focus on issues that are close to home**

**Art:** I'd say focus on issues that are close to home where you can actually do something. I'd suggest that immigration policy and how we deal with refugees and migrants, whether documented or undocumented, is a test of our Christian faith. If you simply look around your own neighbourhood, I think you'll find the issue of immigration touches every single person in this room.

### **#4. Consider our personal investments**

**Art:** And finally, I think we all have to consider our personal investments. There are many companies whose actions affect the lives of people in various ways. If you control where your money is invested – ask questions about the ethics of a line of business and certainly the particular company.

Human Rights is an issue that can be considered in a global context, such as genocide. Or it can be the racism or asylum policies of your own business or community.

**Stephanie:** Certainly, there are things we can do better. But the people in this room live in conditions where our individual and collective rights are generally very well respected and

protected. Coming as I have from a place where this is much less true, you'll believe me when I tell you that, we are truly blessed.

**Art:** So, when you visit the Museum, when you walk the streets of Winnipeg or your own community - look around you to see if everyone feels equally positive about their human rights.

Then read the paper or watch a responsible newscast and ask what you and I can do to make this world the place God intended it to be.

Enjoy your dessert. Let's meet again at breakfast where we can continue the discussion.

Thank you Stephanie and thanks to each of you for your attention. Good night.