

# Major Human Rights Documents of Mankind

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Major Human Rights Documents of Mankind -  
Persia (Cyrus), U.S.A., France

## Introduction

My purpose in compiling this article is to make the ideas and concepts expressed in the fundamental human rights documents of mankind easily accessible and useful. I did it especially for the young Iranians on whom will fall most of the burdens of ending the Islamist regime in their country and replacing it with something that better meets their aspirations. More power to them.

## Cyrus Cylinder

Cyrus the Great of Persia completed his conquest of the Chaldaean empire of Babylonia in 538 BC. He treated his new subjects with enlightened tolerance and respect. This is recorded in cuneiform script on a clay cylinder from that time that is known as the Cyrus Cylinder. The original Cylinder is housed at the British Museum. A replica has a place of honor at the United Nations Building in New York City.

"I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, mighty king, king of Babylon, king of the land of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters ..."

Sovereignty resided in the person of the king. Cyrus's subjects were very fortunate that he was such an enlightened and benevolent king. In many other times and places people were not so lucky.

"... whose rule Bel and Nabu cherish, whose kingship they desire for their hearts' pleasures."

Cyrus claimed to have the approval of the Babylonian gods Bel (also known as Marduk) and his son Nabu. He did not try and impose his Persian god(s) on the Babylonians.

"Marduk, the great God, caused the big-hearted inhabitants of Babylon to...me. I sought daily to worship him."

Cyrus, the recent conqueror of Babylonia, honored and worshipped Marduk who as city god of Babylon was king of the gods of Babylonia.

"I did not allow any to terrorize the land of Sumer and Akkad. I kept in view the needs of Babylon and all its sanctuaries to promote their well being. The citizens of Babylon... I lifted their unbecoming yoke. Their dilapidated dwellings I restored. I put an end to their misfortunes."

Cyrus did not allow his army to plunder and loot the newly conquered country. He promoted the welfare of his new Babylonian subjects and supported their religious temples (sanctuaries).

"From ... to the cities of Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnuna, the cities of Zamban, Meurnu, Der, as far as the region of the land of Gutium, the holy cities beyond the Tigris whose sanctuaries had been in ruins over a long period, the Gods whose abode is in the midst of them. I returned to the places and housed them in lasting abodes ... The Gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus had, to the anger of the Lord of the Gods, brought into Babylon, I at the bidding of Marduk, the great Lord, made to dwell in peace in their habitations, delightful abodes."

During their conquests the Babylonians had destroyed the temples of people whom they defeated and had brought the idols (gods) to Babylon. Cyrus restored these ruined temples and returned the idols to them.

"I gathered together all their inhabitants and restored to them their dwellings."

The Babylonians had enslaved many conquered peoples. Cyrus freed them, sent them home and helped them to rebuild. In 537 BC he allowed more than 40,000 Jews to leave Babylon and return to Palestine.

Translation of text on the Cyrus Cylinder

## Virginia Declaration of Rights

Written by George Mason, the Virginia Declaration of Rights was adopted by the Virginia Constitutional Convention on June 12, 1776, 22 days before the U.S Declaration of Independence. It strongly influenced Thomas Jefferson in writing the first part of the Declaration of Independence and later provided the foundation for the U.S. Bill of Rights.

Section 1 states that all men are by nature equally free and have certain inherent rights that they cannot give up.

Section 2 states that all judicial and government power is vested in and derived from the people.

Section 3 states that the purpose of government is to promote the common interests of the people and that the people have an absolute right to reform or abolish any government that fails to follow this purpose.

Thinkers and writers of the European Enlightenment had recently introduced these important new concepts: that sovereignty resides in the people and is delegated by them to their government. Sovereignty does not reside in the government or the king.

Section 16 states that all men are entitled to the free exercise of religion based on their reason and conviction and should not be subjected to religious coercion by force or violence.

## Virginia Declaration of Rights

### U.S. Declaration of Independence

The U.S. Declaration of Independence was drafted by Thomas Jefferson between June 11 and June 28, 1776 and was adopted by the U.S Continental Congress in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776.

The first link below is to the second paragraph of the Declaration. I have broken the paragraph up to make it more easily readable.

The second link below is to the full Declaration.

Preamble of the U.S. Declaration of Independence

Full text of the U.S. Declaration of Independence

U.S. Bill of Rights

During the debates on the adoption of the Constitution, its opponents repeatedly charged that the Constitution as drafted would open the way to tyranny by the central government. Fresh in their minds was the memory of the British violation of civil rights before and during the Revolution. They demanded a "bill of rights" that would spell out the immunities of individual citizens.

When James Madison drafted the amendments to the Constitution that were to become the Bill of Rights, he drew heavily upon the ideas put forth in the Virginia Declaration of Rights.

On September 25, 1789, the First Congress of the United States adopted and proposed to the state legislatures 12 amendments to the Constitution. The first two amendments were not ratified. Articles 3 to 12 however were ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures by December 15, 1791. These first 10 amendments of the Constitution are known as the Bill of Rights.

The First Amendment enshrines freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

The Tenth Amendment affirms the principle that the Constitution delegates certain powers to the United States Government by the people and by the individual States. It does not grant rights and freedoms to the people by the U.S. Government. These rights and freedoms of the people are senior to and are in fact the sources of the authority of the U.S. Government.

U.S. Bill of Rights

French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

The National Assembly of France adopted this Declaration on 26 August 1789, 30 days before the First Congress of the United States adopted the U.S. Bill of Rights and sent it to the state legislatures. Thomas Jefferson was the U.S. Ambassador to France at that time. Some of the French Assemblymen who worked on the Declaration consulted with him.

Article 10 affirms freedom of opinion, including religious opinion.

Article 11 upholds freedom of speech.

Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

Thomas Paine's Observations on the Declaration of Rights

A Farsi translation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen may be seen at <http://www.ashti.org/>

A question for Iranian Muslims

The foundation of the modern concept of human rights is that these rights are sacred and senior to any government authority. In fact the people delegate power to the government and the purpose of government is to promote the common interests of the people.

In other words, sovereignty resides in the people and the proper function of government is to serve the people.

Democracy was implemented in the U.S., and later in European and other countries, for the very purpose of upholding, defending and safeguarding the human rights of the people.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is founded on the premise that sovereignty resides in Allah. Allah delegates power to the clergy, the Olama, and the Olama appoint the Rahbar. So the proper function of the Rahbar is to rule the people and the proper function of the people is to serve and obey the Rahbar.

This is similar to the concept of the "divine right of kings" that prevailed in Europe up until the 1700s and the Rahbar is in a way a Priest-King, a Caliph.

The view of the world that Islamic authority must rule every political, legal and social aspect of all peoples lives is called Islamism and people who think this way are called Islamists.

All Islamists are Muslims. Not all Muslims are necessarily Islamists

The foundation of human rights and democracy is completely different to the foundation of Islamism.

Islamism is completely incompatible with human rights and democracy. Islamic democracy has never existed, does not exist and never will exist. Islamic democracy is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms.

So if you are a Muslim then you need to decide: are you also an Islamist?

If you are an Islamist then human rights and democracy are not for you.

Suggested Exercises

For each of the Major Human Rights Documents of Mankind:

For each sentence, Section or Article of the document:

Make sure that you clearly understand the sentence/Section/Article. Look up any words that are not clear to you.

Decide whether you agree or disagree with the sentence/Section/Article.

If you agree then decide what, if any, relevance the concepts in the sentence/Section/Article may have for your country:

- How does your country measure up right now?
- How might your country be improved in the future?

After going through each sentence/Section/Article of the document then decide what, if any, relevance the concepts in the the document as a whole may have for your country:

- How does your country measure up right now?
- How might your country be improved in the future? Conclusion

Let me close with Article 16 of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen:

"Any society in which (human) rights are not guaranteed, nor the scope of (government) power determined, has no Constitution."