GUEST EDITORIAL

DIGNITY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL OF US:
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948–2008

by Katharine J. Phenix

We will be hearing a lot about human rights in 2008. Discussions have commenced with the year-long celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Opening events occurred on December 10, 2007, at the United Nations and will be followed by hundreds of international events and celebrations throughout the year, including two UNESCO conferences. In addition, China and its human rights violations will be prominent in the mainstream media leading up to (and partially because of) the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing. As scholars we have to continue to track and document the United States’ own human rights violations internally and its continued support of repressive regimes globally. Most importantly, note: librarians are deeply involved in discussions about human rights, democracy, and libraries.

We have been exploring the concepts of human rights (especially UDHR Article 19) and intellectual freedom and how they intersect with the principles and practices of librarianship. Our common purposes are clearly delineated by statements of the American Library Association (ALA). The Code of Ethics, the ALA Core Values statement, the Library Bill of Rights, and ALA’s endorsement of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are clear examples. From the ALA Policy Manual:

58.3 Threats to the freedom of expression of any person become threats to the freedom of all; therefore ALA adopts as policy the principles of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The Association will address the grievances of foreign nationals where the infringement of their rights of free expression is clearly a matter in which all free people should show concern. Resolutions or other documents attesting to such grievances will be brought to the attention of the Executive Board and Council by the ALA International Relations Committee….

58.4 Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference
and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.

_ALA Handbook of Organization_

Most recently, the first annual _Library Journal_ Teaching Award has been presented to Toni Samek who “is deeply informed,” says Kenneth Gariepy, “by her commitment to, and scholarship in, human rights and the core values of the profession” (Berry 2007).

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon speaks to librarians in his call to inform and empower those who “most need their human rights protected” with these words,

> It is our duty to ensure that these rights are a living reality – that they are known, understood and enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. It is often those who most need their human rights protected, who also need to be informed that the Declaration exists – and that it exists for them.

– Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

This year we should go beyond bookmarks and bibliographies. This year our place is central to information dissemination, dignity and justice for all of us.

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