

JENA Statement for Human Rights Day 2025

Theme: *Human Rights – Our Everyday Essentials*

10 December 2025 | Nairobi

Today, as we commemorate the **77th anniversary of Human Rights Day**, we recall the historic moment in 1948 when the United Nations adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*. Emerging from the ashes of global war and unspeakable human suffering, the UDHR boldly affirmed that every human being regardless of background, culture, creed, or affiliation possesses inherent dignity and inalienable rights. Seventy-seven years later, it remains a moral and ethical anchor for the global community, reminding us that human rights are not privileges for a select few but *everyday essentials* that all must enjoy. This year's theme, "**Human Rights – Our Everyday Essentials**," invites us to reflect on the fundamental rights that enable individuals and societies to realise their potential: the right to life, to meaningful participation, to security, to truth, to health, to education, to decent work, to freedom of movement and migration, and to live free from fear and oppression. These rights are not optional. They are obligations that states, communities, and institutions must consistently uphold.

Across our continent, the urgency of safeguarding these essentials is deeply felt. Recent political developments in **Africa and Madagascar** have laid bare how fragile human rights become when democratic institutions meant to protect human dignity are weakened or manipulated.

Transitions of government in several countries have raised hopes for renewal yet have also revealed persistent political tensions and the need to safeguard civic space, transparency, and accountability. Elsewhere, **controversial electoral processes, loss of life, voter intimidation, contested results, and entrenched corruption** have raised serious concerns about political integrity and the protection of citizens' basic rights. The **principle of Subsidiarity**, which insists that decision-making respect the voices and participation of local communities, has too often been ignored or deliberately undermined. These crises reflect deeper regional patterns: the erosion of democratic norms, shrinking freedoms of expression and assembly, and the ongoing marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable.

Our Christian faith affirms that every human person is created in the image and likeness of God (*Imago Dei*) and therefore endowed with inviolable dignity. This conviction forms the moral foundation of **Catholic Social Teaching (CST)**, whose principles offer an urgently needed ethical compass for our continent.

As the **Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network Africa (JENA)**, we reaffirm that human rights grounded in the God-given dignity of every person are at the heart of our mission. CST teaches that no political interest, economic ambition, or security concern can justify the widespread violations of fundamental rights that persist across Africa.

The growing disregard for the **Common Good** among many governments must be confronted. We call for governance that genuinely protects and promotes the well-being of all not the enrichment of corrupt and powerful minorities while the majority languish in poverty. We urge **Solidarity** with the marginalised, recognising all people as brothers and sisters,

including refugees and migrants who are increasingly displaced not only by conflict and human rights violations, but also by extreme and unpredictable weather patterns driven by climate change.

On this Human Rights Day, we call on African governments, regional bodies, and the international community to recommit to the protection of human life and dignity; to strengthen and depoliticise democratic institutions; and to build societies rooted in justice, transparency, and accountability. We insist on the **Preferential Option for the Poor**, urging governments to develop policies and political processes that prioritise those who suffer most when rights are denied women, children, migrants, displaced persons, and communities living on the margins.

We urge political leaders to ensure that elections are genuinely free and fair; that civic space is defended; and that state institutions are free from corruption and used in service of the people, not as instruments to impoverish, silence, or repress them.

We also appeal to **religious leaders, faith communities, civil society organisations, and all people of goodwill** to raise their voices, accompany the vulnerable, and hold institutions accountable. As the saying reminds us, *evil flourishes when good people do nothing*. Human rights become real only when ordinary people claim them, defend them, and practise them in their daily lives.

As JENA, we remain steadfast in our mission to promote justice, ecological stewardship, participatory governance, and the protection of human dignity across Africa and Madagascar. We renew our commitment to collaborate with partners, engage constructively with governments, and advocate alongside those whose voices are silenced or ignored.

May this Human Rights Day awaken in us the courage to safeguard what is essential: the dignity of every person, the integrity of creation, and the hope for a more just, peaceful, and humane Africa and Madagascar.