

Human Rights and Don Bosco's Preventive System

Roots of safeguarding

“Goal for our young people is to become responsible citizens and God-orientated persons.”
Don Bosco

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that all people are entitled. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly 1948 right after the experiences of the Second World War and 60 years after the death of Don Bosco.

The preventive system of Don Bosco – who lived from 1815 to 1888 as a priest and pedagogian – is his basic educative method which he used during his entire life. He left this system to all men and women who after his death took care about young people around the world (nowadays in 130 countries).

When we today think about dignity of young people and try to ensure and to implement safeguarding in different realities, it is well worth reflecting on the human rights and Don Bosco preventive system in order to enable safeguarding process for and with young people.

Before we compare the 30 articles of UDHR with ideas of Don Bosco rooting in his prevention system, it is necessary to draw up a few ideas of Don Bosco and his pedagogical concept:

Basis for Don Bosco was that every young person has dignity as a human being because he is made in the image and likeness of God. Main pillars of his system are reason, religion and loving-kindness. Inside that he gained to build a family-spirit with trust, joy and accompaniment, prevention, respect for the individual, and lack of corporal punishment.¹

Prevention in Don Bosco's concept places young people in the impossibility of committing faults, which means growing up in a healthy environment and protecting from situations of risk. This is not by pulling away young people from learning experiences but by accompanying them in their process of growing up.

Don Bosco himself neither invented the preventive system nor wrote an essay on his pedagogical system. It is rather that he lived a great synthesis from which others could learn a lot and write about this approach and the combining various elements and giving them a heart.

¹ See Kuttianimattathil Jose; Don Bosco's Educative Method and the tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; in: Charles Maria, Pallithanam Thomas, Dörrich Hans-Jürgen, Reifeld Helmut; In Defence of the Young; New Delhi 2010

An important last element of this pedagogical system is not to see it today as static, but more important to renew it and give new life to it, because this educative method can never be written down in its fullness, but must be lived.

The following synthesis of the 30 articles of the UDHR compared with the preventive system was compiled by Jose Kuttianimattathil SDB² and we are thankful by permission of the editors to use it.³

Art.	UDHR	Preventive System
1	All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.	“When God created the soul, he breathed on the human being and gave it the spirit of life. This breath is simple and spiritual, made in the image and likeness of God, who is eternal and immortal ... God gave our soul freedom.” ⁴ The preventive system “is based entirely on reason, religion, and above all on kindness...” ⁵
2	Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.	“The love of the Lord has no boundaries, and does not exclude anyone, whatever his age, condition or religion. Among our young, ... we have had and we still have, those who are Jews.” ⁶ “That you are young is enough to make me love you very much” ⁷

² SDB means member of the religious congregation: Salesian of Don Bosco

³ Kuttianimattathil Jose, p. 125 ff

⁴ Maggio, p. 24-25

⁵ The preventive system in the education of the Young, Constitutions, p. 247

⁶ A letter by Don Bosco written to a Jew in 1881, Letter 2247. Epistolario, V, p. 97

⁷ Don Bosco, Il Giovanni Provveduto (turin 1847), p. 7 (OE II,187)

3	Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.	“Concentrate your efforts on the spiritual, physical, and intellectual wellbeing of the boys entrusted to you by Devine Providence.” ⁸
4	No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.	“The repressive system may stop a disorder, but can hardly make the offenders better. Experience teaches that the young do not easily forget the punishments they have received, and for the most part foster bitter feelings, along with the desire to throw of the yoke and even to seek revenge ... In the preventive system, on the contrary, the pupil becomes a friend, and the assistant (teacher), a benefactor who advises him, has his good at heart, and wishes to spare him vexation, punishment, and perhaps dishonour.” ⁹
5	No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.	The preventive system “excludes all violent punishment, and tries to do without even the slightest chastisement.” ¹⁰
6	Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.	
7	All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.	“... public matters demand public legalities, so that no party is at a disadvantage before the law, ...” ¹¹
8	Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.	

⁸ Don Bosco’s Confidential Memoranda to Rectors, The Salesian Rector, p. 25

⁹ The preventive system in the education of the Young, p. 248

¹⁰ The preventive system in the education of the Young, p. 247

¹¹ Letter of 15th April 1850, Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco, 1, 32

9	No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.	
10	Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.	“Hear both sides before making up your mind regarding reports and matters in dispute” ¹²
11	<p>1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.</p> <p>2. No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.</p>	
12	No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.	“hence I recommended all our Rectors that they should be the first to practice fatherly correction in respect to our dear young sons, and his correction be done in private, ... Never directly rebuke anyone in public, except to prevent scandal or to make it good when it has already occurred.” ¹³ If anyone then should remain deaf to all these wise means of amendment, and should prove to be a bad example, or scandalous, then he should be sent away without hope of returning, with the provision however, that as far as it is possible his good name should be protected. ¹⁴

¹² Souvenir of St. John Bosco to the first Missionaries, Constitutions, p. 266

¹³ Concerning the Punishments to be Inflicted in Salesian Houses, no. 1

¹⁴ Concerning the Punishments to be Inflicted in Salesian Houses, no.5

13	<p>1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.</p> <p>2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.</p>	
14	<p>1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.</p> <p>2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.</p>	
15	<p>1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.</p> <p>2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.</p>	
16	<p>1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.</p> <p>2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.</p> <p>3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.</p>	
17	<p>1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.</p> <p>2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.</p>	

18	Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.	
19	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 and regardless of frontiers.	“Students should be allowed to express their thoughts freely, but take care to straighten out and even correct, expressions, words, actions that might not be consonant with Christian education.” ¹⁵
20	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. 2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association. 	Don Bosco from his young age gave importance to 'associations'. He started the 'Society of Joy' in 1832, then religious associations or sodalities ..., the Mutual Help Society. ¹⁶
21	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. 2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country. 3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures. 	

¹⁵ The General Articles of the Regulations for the Houses 1877, no. 3

¹⁶ Braido Pedro, Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience, Rome: LAS, 1989, p. 76,146

22	Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.	
23	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. 2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. 3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. 4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests. 	<p>“As a rule the Oratory boys (1842) included stonecutters, bricklayers, stuccoers, road pavers, plasterers, and others who came from distant villages ... During the week I would go to visit them at their work in factories or workshops. Not only the youngsters were happy to see a friend taking care of them; their employers were pleased, gladly retaining youngsters who were helped during the week, ...”¹⁷</p> <p>“I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to befriend them, to look after them, to assist them on fest days, to help them get work with god employers, to visit them occasionally during the week, these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways.”¹⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Don Bosco started the ‘Mutual Aid Society’, in 1850, the first of its kind for young working boys in Turin. ● Don Bosco made ‘Work Contract’ for bys working in shops, factories, et., ensuring just wages, adequate working conditions, rest, etc. ● Don Bosco started his own workshops from 1853.

¹⁷ Memoirs of the Oratory, p. 197-198

¹⁸ Memoirs of the Oratory, p. 190. Ephasis added

24	Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.	“Let the boys have full liberty to jump, run and make as much noise as they please. ... Let care be taken however that the games, the persons playing them as well as the conversation are not reprehensible.” ¹⁹
25	<p>1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.</p> <p>2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.</p>	“Many boys from Turin and the surrounding country were perfectly prepared to lead un upright, hard working experience, but, when urged to do so, they often replied that they had no food, no clothing and no place where they could stay even temporarily ... Realising that all efforts would be wasted on some children unless one provided shelter for them, I hastily began to rent room after room in boarding houses, often at exorbitant prices.” ²⁰

¹⁹ The Preventive System in the Education of the Young, p. 249

²⁰ Memorie dell' Oratorio, 199-201 (Braido, Pedagogical Experience, 76)

26	<p>1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.</p> <p>2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.</p> <p>3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.</p>	<p>“At St. Francis of Assisi (1841-44), I was already conscious of the need for some kind of school. Some children who are already advanced in years are still completely ignorant of the truths of faith. ... At the refuge and later at the Moretta house, we started a regular Sunday school (besides catechism, children were taught to read, write and work with numbers), and when we came to Valdocco we also started a regular night school.”²¹</p> <p>“These boys must be given free education. Some need to be given free scholastic materials like books, paper and pens, while others also need food and clothing. These private efforts cannot continue without some sort of special subsidy.”²²</p> <p>The goal of Salesian education is to make the pupils “good Christians and honest citizens.”²³</p> <p>- Don Bosco was the first to start an evening school in Turin (1844).</p>
27	<p>1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.</p> <p>2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.</p>	<p>“Gymnastics, music, theatricals and outings are most efficacious means of obtaining discipline and of benefiting spiritual and bodily health.”²⁴</p> <p>An Oratory without music is a body without a soul.”²⁵</p>

²¹ Memoirs of the Oratory, p. 281

²² Letter of 26 August 1872 to the Mayor of Turin, Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco, 2, 224-225

²³ Memoirs of the Oratory, p. 190

²⁴ The Preventive System in the Education of the Young, Constitutions, p. 249

²⁵ Memorie Biographique 5, 347 and 15, 57

28	Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.	
29	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. 2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society. 3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. 	
30	Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.	

Conclusion

After this compilation a few conclusions can be drawn:

First of all Don Bosco's preventive system and the UDHR have the same basic inspiration. UDHR does not speak about religion, but the understanding of conscience would be in religious terminology the 'voice of God'. Secondly the preventive system contains many of the rights declared in the UDHR and is over all open to all the proclaimed rights. The only thing the preventive system is not talking about is the terminology of rights which was not common in Don Boscoss time. And both lines aim together for a transformation of society.

Because of this familiarity of the two concepts each of them strengthens the other one in various areas:

The Preventive system enriches the UDHR by offering a system of teaching people and not only offering a legal system. The UDHR needs to be promoted through prevention, a culture of rights and an atmosphere in which violation becomes difficult. Don Bosco himself described four dimensions of a house in his specific pedagogical style: a school which prepares for life, a home where young people can be, a playground on which young people can be happy and a community which offers the Good News. This four dimensions ensure that the right for education, the participation in cultural life, professing of a religion, choosing a career and the right to association can be realized.

The other way round the UDHR supports the Preventive System by offering a language which is understood today and acceptable to all who acknowledge the bill of rights. By using secular language a real dialogue is possible. A last support by the UDHR to the Preventive System is, that over 150 years after Don Bosco the Human Rights point out for new groups of intervention (i.e. Refugees, Roma...).

For all educators who want to work in the line of Don Bosco it is necessary to promote the Human Rights and to become witnesses to justice and rights and this is what safeguarding is about.

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