

Declaration of the Rights of Man

26 Aug 1789

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.

2. The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, safety, and resistance to oppression.

3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.

4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do anything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.

5. Law can only forbid such actions as are harmful to society. Nothing may be stopped which is not forbidden by law, and no one may be forced to do anything not provided for by law.

6. The law is the expression of the general will. Every citizen has a right to participate personally, or through his representative, in its formation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally eligible to all dignities and to all public positions and occupations, according to their abilities, and without distinction except that of their virtues and talents.

7. No person shall be accused, arrested, or imprisoned except in the cases and according to the forms prescribed by law. Anyone soliciting, transmitting, carrying out, or causing to be carried out, any arbitrary order, shall be punished. But any citizen summoned or arrested under the terms of the law shall submit without delay, as resistance constitutes an offense.

8. The law shall establish punishments only as are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one shall suffer punishment except by a law passed and decreed before the commission of the offense.

9. As all persons are presumed innocent until they shall have been declared guilty, if arrest shall be deemed indispensable, all harshness not essential to the securing of the prisoner's person shall be severely repressed by law.

10. No one shall be disturbed on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.

11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.

12. The security of the rights of man and of the citizen requires a public military force. This force is therefore established for the good of all and not for the personal advantage of those to whom they shall be entrusted.

13. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public force and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens according to their ability to pay.

14. All the citizens have a right to decide, either personally or by their representatives, the necessity of any public tax; to freely consent to it; to know its purpose; and to fix the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of said tax.

15. Society has the right to require of every public agent an account of his administration.

16. A society in which the guarantee of rights is not assured, nor the separation of powers defined, has no constitution at all.

17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived of it except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and fairly compensated.