Chronology of the History of the Rights of Man

Mid 6th c. BC The so-called priestly text, one of the basic sources of the Pentateuch probably written in Babylon, refers to man being created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 27).

539 BC In 1971 the United Nations celebrated the declaration made by Cyrus II, the founder of the Persian Empire, in Babylon in the year 539 BC as the first charter of human rights.

1215 Magna Charta (actually: Magna Charta Libertatum, Latin: “Great Charter of Freedoms”): The Magna Charta was wrung from the English King John I, also known as John Lackland, on 15 June 1215 by the barons and clergy and was reissued in its final version in 1225 under Henry III. Most of the 63 articles deal with feudal law and feudal duties. For the first time and from that time on, property, taxation and the seizure of persons were legally protected rights of subjects against the power of the crown. Over time the Magna Charta was to constitute the most important basis for English constitutional law, the “Bible of the Constitution”.

1222 The Golden Bull (Hungary) was issued by King Andrew II. It established the basic rights of Hungary’s noblemen, including the right to disobey the king if he acted unlawfully. The Bull guaranteed the exemption from taxation of the nobility and the church. Noblemen, unless called to the defence of the country, could not be forced to go to war or required to finance wars. Until 1848 the Golden Bull remained the basis of Hungarian constitutional law.

1514 The Tübingen Treaty was signed in Tübingen, in the Duchy of Württemberg (Southwest Germany). It was a treaty between the town patricians (the upper class families of the towns who were represented in the Landtag i.e. the legislative assembly of the land) and Duke Ulrich I (1487–1550). This treaty obliged the duke to seek the approval of the Landtag to raise taxes and to maintain troops to defend the land. It also guaranteed to all burghers the right to due process in judicial matters.

1525 The Twelve Articles were proclaimed in 1525 in Memmingen (Germany) by rebellious peasants during the Peasants’ War. They are demands by the peasants addressed to the Swabian League (an association of Swabian princes).

1542 Leyes Nuevas (New Laws) enacted by the Spanish King Charles I (Emperor Charles V) based on proposals made by the Dominican monk Bartolomé de las Casas for the protection of South American Indians, prohibiting their enslavement and forced labour. However, these protective laws were, in practice, rarely applied.

1628 Petition of Right (England). The “Petition of Right” was submitted to King Charles I of England, criticizing increases in taxation imposed without the consent of parliament and demanding that the provisions of the Magna Charta be complied with.
1679 Habeas Corpus Amendment Act (England). Charles II, son of Charles I governed like his father in defiance of parliament. With the Habeas Corpus Act parliament sought to curb his despotic rule. The Act decrees that any person detained must be brought before a judge so that judge can examine the lawfulness of the arrest. This made arbitrary arrests more difficult. The protection of personal freedom was guaranteed (“My home is my castle!”).

1689 Bill of Rights (England). This basic document of English constitutional law was drawn up by parliament after the deposition of King James II and was accepted by the new rulers William III of Orange and Mary II (daughter of James II). Its provisions are directed against Catholicism and absolutism, confirm parliamentary freedom of speech, and make the levying of taxes and the maintenance of a standing army dependent on the consent of parliament. The Bill of Rights together with other constitutional laws contributed to the establishment of parliamentary government in Great Britain.

1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights (USA). Declaration of human rights passed on June 12, 1776 by the Virginia Convention of Delegates. It served as a model for the initial sentences of the American Declaration of Independence and formed the basis for the Bill of Rights underpinning the United States Constitution. Virginia was thus the first American state which replaced its colonial statute with a constitution. This constitution guaranteed democratic basic rights, the sovereignty of the people, the separation of powers, free election to all public offices, and the separation of state and church. Virginia became the model for the remaining colonial states in North America in their fight for independence from Great Britain.

1776 Declaration of Independence (United States Declaration of Independence). Statement of independence adopted by the Second Continental Congress of the thirteen British colonies in North America on July 4, 1776, in which they declared the dissolution of their political ties to Great Britain and their right to form a sovereign federation of states. The text, which was largely drawn up by Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, represents the founding document of the United States and is one of the most important documents of political philosophy.

1787 Constitution of the United States (September 17, 1787). The supreme law of the first modern democracy. The Constitution envisaged a federal presidential republic, in which the president was both the head of state and the head of government. The political system is characterized by the separation of powers and a fusion of powers (“checks and balances”), a system of reciprocal controls.

1789 Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen) on August 26, 1789: proclamation of personal freedom, equality before the law and cosmopolitanism – “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité”.

1791 Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne (Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen) drawn up by Olympe de Gouges. Was never included in the constitution.
1791 **American Bill of Rights.** Catalog of fundamental rights, incorporated into the United States Constitution on December 15, 1791 in the form of constitutional amendments 1–10.

1948 Adoption of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10. Its creation was decisively influenced by the violations of human rights during the Second World War. Many states have since included this Declaration in their constitution (basic constitutional law). Since that date, December 10 is celebrated as International Human Rights Day.

1966 Based on this Declaration, the United Nations drew up two human rights covenants on December 19, 1966, which are binding under international law: the “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” (“civil covenant”) and the “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (“social covenant”). Both covenants entered into force in 1976 after they had been ratified by a sufficient number of nations.