

## 1222 – Year of the first African Human Rights Declaration

In history the year 1222 is remembered mainly because of the appearance of the famous Halley comet. But what until recently nobody knew is that in this same year an important event took place unnoticed, at least everywhere in the world except Mali, that is the empire of Mali of the time. In 1222, Soundiata Keita, the ruler of the empire of Mali – also called Mandé - proclaimed the Charter of Mandé - or the Oath of Mandé - at the occasion of his coronation.<sup>1</sup> It was the result of a joint effort by elders, noblemen and associations ("ton") of the country, who had – commissioned by the king - elaborated the principles according to which the empire should be ruled.

The Charter of Mandé opens with an essential statement on the equality of human lives:

"Every human life is a life ... there is no life more 'ancient',  
Or more respectable than another life, as no life is worthier than another life."

For this reason:

"Every life being a life,  
Every damage inflicted on a life needs repair.  
Therefore,  
Nobody may without reason oppose his neighbour,  
Nobody may do his neighbour a wrong,  
Nobody may torment another human being."

The Charter of Mandé also contains some paragraphs addressing two main evils – hunger and slavery:

"Hunger is not a good thing,  
Slavery isn't a good thing either;  
There is no worse calamity than these two things,  
In this world.  
As long as we have quiver and arrow,  
Famine will not kill anybody in Mandé ...  
(and) no village will ever be destroyed  
By wars fought with the aim to capture slaves ...  
As from to-day,  
The very substance of slavery is eradicated ...  
Within the borders of Mandé."

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<sup>1</sup> "La Charte du Mandé et autres traditions du Mali", Albin Michel, 2003;  
also: <http://www.afrik.com/article5949.html>