

The following is a description of our December 10, 2008 program, written by Rosemary Matson.

At our December Meeting we are celebrating, along with many others around the world, the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. HAMBA, for our part, is offering a public screening of an extraordinary film ***ELEANOR: First Lady of the World*** starring Jean Stapleton as Eleanor Roosevelt. The film will be shown on Wednesday, December 10, 2008, 6:45 P.M. at the Monterey Public Library in Monterey,

This outstanding film depicts the pivotal role that Eleanor Roosevelt played in the creation of the powerful international document – no easy task for the newly widowed Eleanor in 1946. Imagine trying to enlist the cooperation of the Chief Prosecutor at Stalin’s Moscow trials of the 1930’s; an Islamic delegate who believes that freedom of worship violates the Koran; as well as your own American Delegation, some of whose members do not have confidence in you – remember John Foster Dulles? – for the purpose of creating a document affirming Human Rights for all people, to which all parties could agree.

Eleanor was a determined leader of the UN Commission of “Humanitarian and Cultural Matters. She worked the commission member’s long hours. One evening many delegates showed up intoxicated. Before the session the Soviet Delegation had invited everyone to a cocktail party where vodka flowed freely. Eleanor, infuriated, promptly adjourned the meeting.

The Soviet delegation wanted to emphasize economic human rights: a decent standard of living for all, universal health care and adequate housing for people of all incomes. Western countries were more intent on political liberties, free speech, protection against arbitrary arrest, and the right to a fair trial.

On December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights passed with no opposing votes. There were eight abstentions, including the Soviet Union and satellite countries.

This Declaration has no standing officially in international law; however, it was a cornerstone document for newly independent nations in the 1950’s and 1960’s as they wrote their national constitutions.

“A Magna Carta for humankind” the UN Secretary U Thant called it. Out of the rubble and tragedy of World War II, this document – and all it stands for – remains a beacon of human hope half a century later.

Eleanor Roosevelt was an eloquent exemplar of values and attitudes, the kind – in recent years – so frequently maligned in American Political and public life.