**Canada’s Human Rights Record:**

People have not always been able to take for granted that they possess certain rights and freedoms simply by virtue of existing. However, over time, the concept that all people, everywhere, are entitled to these rights and freedoms has developed. Within the context of modern Western society, a right is something that all people are entitled to, such as equal treatment under the law. A freedom is the liberty to live as one wants, within the limitation of not infringing on the rights and freedoms of others.

The Magna Carta was the first major step towards recognition of fundamental human rights, although when King John signed it in 1215, the concept of a person having the right to life, liberty, and security of person was limited to certain members of English society.

Similarly, when the American Revolution took place, the founders of the United States made stirring statements about the right of all to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". Ironically, the Declaration's primary author, Thomas Jefferson, was a slave owner.

However, just by voicing that principle, those who wrote the Magna Carta and the Declaration of Independence made it possible for those rights to eventually be extended to all members of society so that today, we take for granted that all people have certain inalienable rights.

Canada's record on human rights has not always been without problems either. Over the centuries, several minority groups including women, Chinese-Canadians, Japanese-Canadians, and Aboriginal Canadians have been denied basic freedoms, including the right to vote.

On more than one occasion before 1945, we have turned away boatloads of prospective immigrants or refugees from our shores because we didn't think that the people were sufficiently "British" to fit in.

In 1914, the ship the Komagata Maru arrived in Vancouver harbour with almost 400 Sikhs from India on board. For two months, the authorities refused to let them come ashore, and in the end, only 24 were allowed to stay.

In 1939, over 900 Jews fleeing Hitler's Germany were denied entry to Canada as well as all other countries in the Americas, and ended up returning to Europe, where many of them died in the concentration camps.

After World War Two, in part as a response to the widespread abuses of human rights during that conflict, the United Nations passed the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It affirmed that all people everywhere had those basic rights first articulated in the Magna Carta.

**Case History: Leilani Muir**

In 1955, a few days before her 10th birthday, Leilani Muir was admitted to the Provincial Training School for Mental Defectives at Red Deer, at the request of her parents. Her mother also signed a form consenting to the sterilization of her daughter, if it was felt to be necessary.

After examination and observation by various medical personnel, it was deemed necessary, as she was felt to be incapable of caring for a child, as well as the concern that she might pass on her perceived mental disability. This was despite the fact that shortly after she was admitted one medical professional noted that her difficulties might be emotional rather than intellectual in nature.

In 1959, the procedure was performed, and in 1965 she was released from the school. She was able to hold down regular employment and was married twice, but was unable to have children as a result of the procedure. In 1996, she was successful in suing the Province of Alberta, receiving a settlement of almost 750,000 dollars for wrongful confinement and sterilization. She was one of 2,832 people who were subjected to this treatment between 1929 and 1972, when the Sexual Sterilization Act was repealed.

Analysis Questions:

1. Refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
2. Which of Leilani Muir's human rights were violated from 1955 to 1965?