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**PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:
INFORMATION AND EDUCATION**

**Study on the follow-up to the United Nations Decade for
Human Rights Education (1995-2004)**

Report of the High Commissioner*

* In accordance with paragraph 8, section B of General Assembly resolution 53/208, the present report is being submitted in February 2003 so as to include as much updated information as possible.

Executive summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 17 of Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/74. In that paragraph, the Commission requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to develop and submit to the Commission at its fifty-ninth session a study on the follow-up to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) including, inter alia, possible means of strengthening human rights education at the national, regional and international levels as well as the elaboration of the concept of a series of intersessional workshops to take place in 2003/2004 to address major current human rights education issues. This report presents the findings of a series of activities organized by the Office of the High Commissioner in this regard.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background information

1. At its fifty-eighth session, the Commission on Human Rights, in paragraph 17 of its resolution 2002/74 of 25 April 2002, requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to develop and submit to the Commission at its fifty-ninth session, in cooperation with all relevant actors and without financial implications, a study on the follow-up to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) including, inter alia, the following issues:

(a) Possible means of strengthening human rights education at the national, regional and international levels; and

(b) Elaboration of the concept of a series of intersessional workshops to take place in 2003/2004 to address major current human rights education issues, inter alia the question of assessing the impact of human rights education activities and criteria for "best practices"; the contribution of human rights education to the mainstreaming of a human rights-based approach into the work of intergovernmental organizations, development agencies, financial institutions and the private sector; and the role of human rights education in combating racism and all forms of discrimination and intolerance, and specifically in promoting religious tolerance.

2. This report presents the findings of a series of activities organized by the Office in this regard, as detailed in section I.B below. A separate report on recent activities undertaken by various actors within the Decade, as requested by paragraph 18 of the resolution mentioned above, is also before the Commission (E/CN.4/2003/100).

3. It is important to stress that the global mid-term evaluation of the Decade, undertaken by the Office in 2000, reviewed the experiences of the first five years of the Decade and made overall recommendations, as well as recommendations for action at the international, regional and national levels, with a view to further human rights education in the remaining years of the Decade. Many of those recommendations, which are contained in the report A/55/360, are also relevant for the follow-up to the Decade, and should be taken into account when formulating policies for the future.

B. Preparation of the report

4. The process of preparation of this report has benefited from the following:

(a) **Correspondence.** In October 2002, the Office sent notes verbales and letters to Governments, national institutions and chairpersons of the treaty bodies; the letter to national institutions was also posted on their international web site, which is sponsored by the Office of the High Commissioner. As of 31 December 2002, seven Governments, one chairperson of a treaty body and three national institutions replied. International and regional intergovernmental organizations were also invited to provide written comments. As of 31 December 2002, one organization had replied;

(b) **Consultative meeting with intergovernmental organizations.** In November 2002, the Office of the High Commissioner organized and hosted a meeting of international and regional intergovernmental organizations, in which 13 organizations were represented. The agenda of the meeting included the follow-up to the Decade at the international level, at the subregional and regional levels and at the national and local levels, as well as ideas to mark the conclusion of the Decade in 2004; and

(c) **Online forum with non-governmental organizations.** From 18 November to 18 December 2002, the Office of the High Commissioner organized and funded the setting up of an online forum within an e-mail network of human rights educators and other interested individuals and institutions (a human rights education listserv, managed by Human Rights Education Associates). The agenda of the forum included follow-up to the Decade at the national and local levels; at the subregional and regional levels; and at the international level.

5. Some of the answers received through this process have conveyed information on past or current activities of the respondents. This information is beyond the scope of this report, and will be included in the next report of the High Commissioner on the Decade to the General Assembly, which focuses on activities undertaken by various actors within the Decade.

II. FOLLOW-UP TO THE DECADE: POSSIBLE ACTION

6. Any consideration concerning the follow-up to the Decade must build necessarily on the achievements and shortcomings of the Decade and lessons learned from it (in terms of structures and legislative frameworks developed, the status of its implementation, as well as shortcomings and remaining needs). An analytical treatment of these aspects has been provided in the already mentioned report on the mid-term global evaluation of the Decade (A/55/360); the information collected for preparing this report mostly reiterated the findings highlighted there, and further elaboration of those findings is beyond the capacity of the current exercise.

7. Accordingly, this section only aims at highlighting practical courses of action for the follow-up to the Decade at the international (sect. II.A), subregional and regional levels (sect. II.B) and national and local levels (sect. II.C), as well as some priorities for all levels (sect. II.D) formulated by the Decade's actors on the basis of their related experience and gathered by the Office of the High Commissioner through the process described in Section I.

A. International level

(a) Follow-up initiatives

1. *A second decade for human rights education*

8. The Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) has been mainly described as a useful anchor/umbrella and catalyst mechanism for human rights education. The focus of its last years, for all partners, should be to institutionalize its achievements and share the "good" practices. A final evaluation of the Decade, based on clearly defined indicators, should be conducted, possibly through regional consultations; the evaluation would stress what has been achieved and what is still to be done.

9. The input received by the Office has strongly affirmed the importance to continue the decade framework, considering that human rights education is a long-term process. A second decade would:

- provide a sense of common collective vision, goals and action, as well as an opportunity to increase partnership at all levels;
- provide international support for regional and national programmes created in line with the first Decade, an incentive to continue them and to start new ones;
- represent the commitment of the international community (including the United Nations, Governments and civil society) to continue to pursue human rights education;
- be an acknowledgement of the work that has been accomplished for those who have been supporting the first Decade and provides an opportunity to extend their programmes to other institutions and communities;
- provide Governments which have not given attention to human rights education the opportunity to start programmes based on the experiences of other countries and institutions;
- constitute a contribution to the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2001), given the role of human rights education in preventing discriminatory attitudes and behaviour, combating bias and prejudices and appreciating cultural diversity;
- ensure some focus at the international level on human rights education, including funding for some related activities.

10. A second decade would need to be properly structured, also through the organization of regular periodic events to create momentum and continuity. Adequate resources should be allocated to it. An international Plan of Action should be formulated in realistic terms, with an indication of at least minimum action for each country accompanied by indicators for evaluation of success; consultations at all levels, including regionally, should take place in the elaboration of the plan. A regular reporting system by Governments should be envisaged. Finally, the adoption of a second decade should promote human rights education as a cross-cutting undertaking and not lead to its isolation.

2. *A fund for human rights education*

11. The importance of establishing a fund for human rights education (in particular, for civil society's activities) has been highlighted by many actors, keeping in mind the usefulness of the ACT (Assisting Communities Together) Project, which provides grants to grass-roots human

rights education activities and is administered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Such a project could be expanded to involve other United Nations organizations.

12. The ACT Project and funds administered by the United Nations (such as the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture) could provide guidance and inspiration for the setting up of the fund for human rights education, which should not be necessarily limited to projects in developing countries. Appropriate funding approaches, linked with public information and advocacy strategies, should be developed, for instance in partnership with the United Nations Department for Public Information. Also, if such a fund is established, it would be important to include mechanisms to evaluate and follow up on granted projects.

3. *Other suggestions*

13. Other suggestions included the establishment of an intergovernmental or of a joint governmental/non-governmental committee, including major human rights education actors, to develop both monitoring systems and ongoing assessment of human rights education efforts, as well as the development of a specific normative instrument, i.e. a treaty, focusing on human rights education.

(b) Further use of existing human rights mechanisms

1. *Treaty monitoring bodies*

14. The potential of the treaty monitoring system in advancing human rights education, in particular through the treaty bodies' review of country reports, could be maximized. Non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions, when they exist, should be more involved in this process, and could coordinate their efforts in publishing reports on human rights education as a tool of cooperation with their Governments and with the existing regional and international mechanisms. Treaty bodies could also consider adopting additional general comments concerning various aspects of human rights education, as appropriate.

2. *Extra-conventional mechanisms*

15. The mandate and the activities of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education should fully include human rights education. In addition, all mandate-holders of country or thematic mechanisms could regularly encourage human rights education efforts through their activities and recommendations, in particular in the framework of their field missions, also taking into consideration and highlighting relevant recommendations of treaty monitoring bodies.

(c) Contribution of intergovernmental organizations

16. The contribution of intergovernmental organizations, and in particular of the United Nations system, could be enhanced along the following lines:

- human rights education should be looked at as part of any rights-based programming of United Nations agencies, and could be addressed in that framework;
- training of United Nations staff (both in the field and at Headquarters, in particular those involved in human rights promotion) should include not only human rights education content (i.e. human rights standards and mechanisms) but also human rights education methodologies. Production of materials for human rights training of United Nations staff is a priority, due to limited resources for organizing training courses;
- United Nations Country Teams should work more closely together in assisting national actors in the design, implementation and evaluation of human rights education activities, including the development of a human rights education component within their national human rights plans, as well as, when applicable, a specific national plan of action for human rights education. Such assistance could be offered and enhanced in the framework of respective technical cooperation programmes;
- financial intergovernmental organizations (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), both at their headquarters and at the regional/national level, should be more involved in supporting human rights education programmes; and
- OHCHR should play a clearinghouse role for other actors wishing to develop human rights education and training materials and programmes; it should expand its role as a depository of good practices, methodologies and programmes in human rights education that exist worldwide, including those by Governments, and share them. The Office could also encourage Governments to develop such programmes as well as advise them in their implementation.

B. Subregional and regional levels

17. Some actors have highlighted the importance of devoting adequate resources to human rights education activities at the subregional and regional levels as a means to strengthen capacities at the national level; regional strategies can support national action and the development of consistent approaches for Governments and intergovernmental agencies.

18. Existing frameworks for regional cooperation among various actors offer valuable opportunities to highlight human rights education in policy-making. This would include meetings among intergovernmental organizations (i.e. the Tripartite Meeting between the Office of the High Commissioner, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), among Governments (such as those organized by the UNESCO International Bureau of Education with heads of curriculum development departments or institutes of Member States, or those organized by the Office of the High Commissioner within its technical cooperation programme) as well as among national human rights institutions.

19. Regional and subregional workshops facilitate active cooperation between all actors and the establishment of regional pools of trainers. Workshops on material development can facilitate the adaptation of international materials as well as those from other regions, if appropriate. All these activities, as well as regional campaigns, should thus be encouraged. Workshops could include those actors who work in the non-formal educational system, as well as religious communities.

20. Regional offices or presences of international intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations economic commissions, as well as regional intergovernmental organizations, could be main actors in bringing human rights education to Governments' agendas and in monitoring government compliance with human rights education commitments.

21. Regional institutes for human rights education are being developed on all continents in order to provide training to human rights educators or other actors, such as community leaders, who can then develop human rights education programmes in their communities. Such efforts should be sustained.

C. National and local levels

22. Close cooperation between State and non-State actors should be promoted: solid partnership should be established among government agencies, national human rights institutions and civil society; all these sectors should be involved in planning and strategizing for human rights education, and their staff participating as facilitators and trainees. The development of multi-actors platforms for human rights education was considered the best approach.

23. The Plan of Action of the Decade provides for the establishment, at the initiative of Governments or other relevant institutions, of national committees for human rights education which should include a broad coalition of governmental and non-governmental actors and be responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive, effective and sustainable national plan of action for human rights education. Such plan could constitute a part of the overall national plan of action for human rights, when applicable, and should be complementary to other action plans such as those relating to discrimination and racism, children, indigenous peoples, etc. According to the feedback received, such a course of action is considered useful for the advancement of human rights education at the national level, and should be still strongly encouraged after the Decade is over.

24. As far as the educational system specifically is concerned, human rights education should constitute the basis for the democratization of education systems in the context of national education reforms with a view to integrating the learning and practice of human rights. Human rights education should be included in the "Education for All" plans (Ministries of Education). The International Bureau of Education (UNESCO) could collect and disseminate information and data on these efforts.

25. The importance for Governments to ratify international or regional treaties, which also include human rights education among their provisions, was pointed out. Concerning treaties already ratified, the need was stressed for human rights education specialists at the national

level to work closely with national human rights institutions to support Governments in their reporting obligations concerning human rights education, and to disseminate relevant treaty bodies concluding observations and follow-up on the recommendations.

26. It was also highlighted that States could progressively increase the incorporation of obligations and principles about human rights education in special laws on education and other related laws, as well as the passing of specific laws in this area, with a view to design or reformulate public policies to be implemented by means of national plans and budget allocations. Such a process of progressive enrichment of human rights education could also be undertaken by means of constitutional reforms that facilitate the processes of adjusting national legislation to incorporate international instruments.

27. It was stressed that a useful course of action for planning and evaluating human rights education efforts at the national level could be the organization of public inquiries to find out people's understanding and opinions about human rights. Such surveys would entail a discussion on what constitutes an adequate understanding of human rights for actors and beneficiaries of human rights education.

28. Support for national activities could be sought, when applicable, through the United Nations country teams. Technical cooperation programmes of United Nations agencies could be availed of by Governments in supporting the design, implementation and evaluation of human rights education activities.

29. Specific attention should be paid to the local level, such as municipalities, cities, also through the Advisory Committee of National Associations of Local Authorities. Human rights training of local administrators should be promoted.

D. All levels

30. Some courses of action were repeatedly mentioned as deserving priority attention at all levels; they are briefly summarized below.

- Training of educators and trainers: Training efforts at all levels should aim at reaching primarily those who are (or have a potential to be) responsible for human rights education activities, both as educators (from teachers to trainers of professional groups to members of non-governmental organizations) and as human rights education process managers (officials from Ministries of Education, members of non-governmental organizations, etc.). Their training should be comprehensive, based on their specific function; it should not only include human rights standards and mechanisms of protection but also a range of skills for organizing and delivering educational activities such as needs analysis of the target group (including their broad context), curriculum/lesson/workshop design, active teaching/learning methods, selection of appropriate materials and activities and development of materials;

- Specific target groups: While priorities have to be set depending on local needs, some groups have been repeatedly mentioned by many actors as particularly in need of human rights education, i.e. government officials (in particular those working in education and in the administration of justice), the media and the business community; and

- Evaluation of impact: Many actors have stressed the need to develop quality indicators for measuring impact of human rights education activities and evaluation systems; it was considered essential to support research in this area. In particular, it was considered useful to conduct quality evaluations to examine how effective human rights education programmes have been in the long term: how people's lives or school environments changed, how behaviours have been affected.
