

Final Document of the International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

The Conference, meeting in Madrid from 23 to 25 November, 2001 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief adopted by the General Assembly on 25 November 1981,

- (a) Considering the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world and all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent;
- (b) Recalling the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, which recognize the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief¹ and call for understanding, respect, tolerance and non-discrimination;
- (c) Noting that serious instances of intolerance and discrimination occur in many parts of the world threatening the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief;
- (d) Reaffirming the call of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights upon all governments to take all appropriate measures in compliance with their international obligations and with due regard to their respective legal systems to counter intolerance and related violence based on religion or belief;
- (e) Considering that it is essential to promote the right to freedom of religion or belief and to refrain from using religions or beliefs for purposes incompatible with the Charter of the United Nations and applicable United Nations texts as well as work to ensure respect of the principles and objectives of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief;
- (f) Convinced of the need of a human rights education which condemns and seeks to prevent all forms of violence based on hatred and intolerance, in relation with freedom of religion or belief;
- (g) Conscious of States' responsibility to promote, through education, the purposes

- and principles of the Charter of the United Nations in order to advance international understanding, cooperation and peace as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (h) Noting the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education of 14 December 1960 and its additional 1962 Protocol, the UNESCO Recommendation on education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education on human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted on 19 November 1974 and the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice of 27 November 1978;
- (i) Noting that tolerance involves the acceptance of diversity and the respect for the right to be different, and that education, in particular at school, should contribute in a meaningful way to promote tolerance and respect for the freedom of religion or belief;
- (j) Noting the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance;
- (k) Recalling the article 26.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups;
- (l) Noting the principles regarding the right to education contained in article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and reiterated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- (m) Further noting article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provides that education should be aimed at “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own; the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”;
- (n) Noting the right of parents, families, legal guardians and other legally recognized care givers to choose schools for their children, and to ensure their religious and/or moral education in conformity with their own convictions, and with such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the competent authorities, in a manner consistent with the procedures followed in the State for the application of its legislation and in accordance with the best interest of the child;
- (o) Recalling the Vienna Programme of Action, paragraph 38, and conscious of the need to consider the equality of gender in school education in relation with freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non discrimination, and also concerned about the continuing discrimination against women, while emphasizing the necessity to ensure women their human rights and fundamental freedoms and in particular their right to freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non discrimination;
- (p) Also concerned about the continuing discrimination against, inter alia, children, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers while emphasizing the necessity to ensure their human rights and fundamental freedoms and in particular their right to free-

- dom of religion or belief, tolerance and non discrimination;
- (q) Convinced that education in relation with freedom of religion or belief can also contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice, mutual respect and friendship among peoples and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (r) Convinced also that the education in relation with freedom of religion or belief should contribute to the promotion of freedoms of conscience, opinion, expression, information and research as well as to the acceptance of diversity;
- (s) Recognizing that the media and new information technologies, including Internet, should contribute to education of the youth in the field of tolerance and freedom of religion or belief in a spirit of peace, justice, liberty, mutual respect and understanding in order to promote and protect all human rights, civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural;
- (t) Considering that efforts aiming at promoting, through education, tolerance and protection of freedom of religion or belief require cooperation among States, concerned organizations and institutions, and that parents, groups and communities based on religion or belief have an important role to play in this regard;
- (u) Recalling with appreciation the designation by the General Assembly of the year 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance and the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations adopted by the General Assembly on 9 November 2001, and recalling the UNESCO Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace, of 18 December 1994 and the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, adopted by UNESCO on 16 November 1995;
- (v) Noting the initiatives and actions undertaken in different international organs and organizations of the United Nations system, within which the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights which is implementing the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004), as well as many other human rights education programmes; UNESCO which has led programmes on human rights education and peace and has developed a policy of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, as well as UNICEF which contributes to education and well-being of children in the various regions;
- (w) Noting the recommendations on education, expressed in the different reports of the United Nations conventional organs for the protection of human rights and of relevant Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, particularly the Special Rapporteur on the right to Education, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief;
1. Underlines the urgent need to promote, through education, the protection and the respect for freedom of religion or belief in order to strengthen peace, understanding and tolerance among individuals, groups and nations, and with a view to developing a respect for pluralism;
 2. Deems that every human being has an intrinsic and inviolable dignity and value which includes the right to freedom of religion, conscience or belief that should be respected and safeguarded;
 3. Considers that the young generation should be brought up in a spirit of

- peace, tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for human rights, and especially for the respect of freedom of religion or belief, and that they should be protected against all forms of discrimination and intolerance based on their religion or belief;
4. Deems that each State, at the appropriate level of government, should promote and respect educational policies aimed at strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights, eradicating prejudices and conceptions incompatible with freedom of religion or belief, and ensuring respect for and acceptance of pluralism and diversity in the field of religion or belief as well as the right not to receive religious instruction inconsistent with his or her conviction;
 5. Deems also that each State should take appropriate measures to ensure equal rights to women and men in the field of education and freedom of religion or belief, and in particular reinforce the protection of the right of girls to education, especially for those coming from vulnerable groups;
 6. Condemns all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief including those which promote hatred, racism or xenophobia, and deems that States should take appropriate measures against those which manifest themselves in school curricula, textbooks and teaching methods as well as those disseminated by the media and the new information technologies, including Internet;
 7. Considers favorably the following objectives:
 - (a) The strengthening of a non-discriminatory perspective in education and of knowledge in relation to freedom of religion or belief at the appropriate levels;
 - (b) The encouragement of those engaged in teaching to cultivate respect for religions or beliefs, thereby promoting mutual understanding and tolerance;
 - (c) The awareness of the increasing interdependence between peoples and nations and the promotion of international solidarity;
 - (d) The awareness of gender aspects, with a view to promoting equal chances for men and women;
 8. Recognizes that States, at the appropriate level of government, should promote, both in school education and out-of-school activities organized by educational institutions of any nature, the principles and objectives of the present document, especially that of non-discrimination and tolerance, in view of the fact that attitudes are greatly influenced at the primary and secondary school stage;
 9. Deems that the role of parents, families, legal guardians and other legally recognized care givers is an essential factor in the education of children in the field of religion or belief; and that special attention should be paid to encouraging positive attitudes and, in view of the best interest of the child to supporting parents to exercise their rights and fully play their role in education in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination, noting the relevant provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief;

10. Encourages States, at the appropriate level of government and any other concerned institution or organ, such as the UNESCO system of associated schools, to improve the ways and means of training teachers and other categories of educational personnel to prepare and enable them to play their role in pursuing the objectives of the present document; and to this end recommends that States, at the appropriate level of government and in accordance with their educational systems, favorably consider:
- (a) Developing the motivation of teachers for their action by supporting and encouraging commitment to the human rights values and in particular tolerance and non-discrimination in the field of religion or belief;
 - (b) Preparing teachers to educate children concerning a culture of respect for every human being, tolerance and non-discrimination;
 - (c) Encouraging the study and the dissemination of different experiences in education in relation with freedom of religion or belief, especially innovative experiments carried out all over the world;
 - (d) Where appropriate, providing teachers and students with voluntary opportunities for meetings and exchanges with their counterparts of different religions or beliefs;
 - (e) Encouraging exchanges of teachers and students and facilitating educational study abroad;
 - (f) Encouraging, at the appropriate level, general knowledge and academic research in relation to freedom of religion or belief;
11. Encourages States at the appropriate level of government and other concerned institutions or organizations, where appropriate and possible, to increase their efforts to facilitate the renewal, production, dissemination, translation and exchange of means and materials for education in the field of freedom of religion or belief, giving special consideration to the fact that in many countries students gain knowledge, including in the field of freedom of religion or belief, through the mass media outside educational establishments. To this end, action should be considered on the following:
- (a) Appropriate and constructive use should be made of the entire range of equipment available, from traditional means to the new educational technology, including Internet, as relevant to the field of freedom of religion or belief;
 - (b) Cooperation between States and the relevant international organizations and institutions concerned as well as the media and non governmental organizations to combat the propagation of intolerant and discriminatory stereotypes of religions or beliefs in the media and Internet sites;
 - (c) The inclusion of a component of special mass media education in order to help the students to select and analyze the information conveyed by the mass media in the field of freedom of religion or belief;
 - (d) Better appreciation of diversity and the development of tolerance and the protection and non-discrimination of migrants and refugees and their freedom of religion or belief;

12. Recommends that States as well as concerned institutions and organizations should consider studying, taking advantage of and disseminating best practices on education in relation to freedom of religion or belief, which attach particular importance to tolerance and non-discrimination;
13. Recommends that States should consider promoting international cultural exchanges in the field of education, notably by concluding and implementing agreements relating to the freedom of religion or belief, non-discrimination and tolerance and respect for human rights;
14. Encourages all parts of society, both individually and collectively, to contribute to an education based on human dignity and to respect freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non-discrimination;
15. Encourages States at the appropriate level of government, non-governmental organizations and all members of civil society to join their efforts with a view to taking advantage of the media and other means for self and mutual teaching as well as cultural institutions such as museums and libraries, to provide the individual with relevant knowledge in the field of freedom of religion or belief;
16. Encourages States to promote human dignity, and freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non-discrimination, and thus to combat, through appropriate measures, religious or belief, ethnic, racial, national and cultural stereotypes;
17. Invites organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations to contribute, in accordance with their mandate, to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non-discrimination;
18. Encourages also States, at the appropriate level of government, non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society to take advantage of relevant social and cultural activities of all kinds to promote the objectives of this document;
19. Invites all States, civil society and the international community to promote the principles, objectives and recommendations in the present document on school education in relation with freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non-discrimination.

Note

1. With understanding that freedom of religion or belief includes theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.