

Promotion and Protection of Human Rights: Information and Education

REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER*

The present report is submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2003/70, in which the Commission requested that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), jointly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), consult with all Member States and submit to the Commission at its sixtieth session a report on the achievements and shortcomings of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995–2004, and on the establishment of a voluntary fund for human rights education.

Accordingly, this report presents the findings of consultations with Member States undertaken by OHCHR and UNESCO on the above-mentioned issues. Most responding Governments have reported on their increased human rights education activities, within or outside the Decade's framework. Most mention that human rights education will still remain a priority in their countries, since specific groups or issues have not been dealt with and appropriate coordination mechanisms for human rights education are not yet in place. Finally, the majority of responding Governments supports the proclamation of a second Decade for Human Rights Education (2005–2014), as well as the establishment of a voluntary fund for human rights education; some detailed suggestions in this regard are provided.

Introduction

Background information

1. At its fifty-ninth session, the Commission on Human Rights adopted resolution 2003/70, in which the Commission requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), jointly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to consult with all Member States, and report to the next session of the Commission, on the following two issues:

- (a) The creation of a voluntary fund for human rights education, to be established by the Secretary-General before the end

* The present report is being submitted late so as to include as much updated information as possible. GE.04-11236 (E) 040304.

of the Decade for Human Rights Education (2004) and to be administered by the Office of the High Commissioner in accordance with the financial regulations and rules of the United Nations (para. 19);

- (b) Achievements and shortcomings of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995–2004 (para. 21).

2. Following the 2003 session of the Commission, the issue of the Decade has been raised both by the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and by the General Assembly.

3. In its resolution 2003/5, the Sub-Commission recommended to the sixtieth session of the Commission that it adopt the following draft decision: “The Commission on Human Rights, taking into consideration the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the follow-up to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995–2004 (E/CN.4/2003/101), as well as the recommendations contained in the report of the High Commissioner on the midterm evaluation of the Decade (A/55/360), decides to recommend to the Economic and Social Council that it recommend to the General Assembly the proclamation of a second Decade for Human Rights Education to begin on 1 January 2005.”

4. At its fifty-eighth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 58/181 entitled “United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995–2004”, in which the Assembly decided to dedicate a plenary meeting during its fifty-ninth session on the occasion of Human Rights Day on 10 December 2004 to review the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995–2004, and to discuss possible future activities for the enhancement of human rights education (para. 17).

Preparation of the report

5. In order to fulfil Commission resolution 2003/70, OHCHR and UNESCO jointly developed a questionnaire to seek the views of Member States and observers to the United Nations on the achievements and shortcomings of the Decade and on possible future United Nations activities in the area of human rights education after the Decade’s end, including the establishment of a voluntary fund. On 3 November 2003, the Director-General of UNESCO and the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights sent a letter to all heads of Governments, forwarding the questionnaires and encouraging replies; the letters were copied to National Commissions for UNESCO, national institutions for the promotion and the protection of human rights, as well as OHCHR and UNESCO field offices.

6. As of 14 January 2004, OHCHR and UNESCO received questionnaires that were completed, entirely or partially, by:

- (a) Governmental bodies (28 countries);
- (b) National Commissions for UNESCO (2 countries); and
- (c) Other entities—such as human rights institutes, university faculties, etc. (5 countries).

7. For the purpose of this report, only 29 responses prepared by governmental bodies and National Commissions for UNESCO will be analysed (at the time of the drafting of this report, one response, in Russian, is still awaiting translation). The list of respondents is attached at annex. Also, this report does not name countries but focuses on a comparative analysis of the information gathered.

Related United Nations documents

8. The information contained in this report should be supplemented by the following two

previous reports prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner in 2000 and 2003, respectively:

- (a) The report of the global midterm evaluation of the Decade (A/55/360), undertaken in the year 2000 by the Office of the High Commissioner in cooperation with UNESCO. The evaluation 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 furthering human rights education in the remaining years of the Decade. Those recommendations are still relevant and should be taken into account when formulating policies for the future;
- (b) The study on possible follow-up initiatives to the Decade including, *inter alia*, means of strengthening human rights education at the national, regional and international levels (E/CN.4/2003/101), undertaken in 2003 by the Office of the High Commissioner at the request of the Commission. The study presents the findings of a series of activities organized by the Office in that regard and includes views of Governments, national institutions, United Nations bodies, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

I. Achievements and Shortcomings of the Decade

9. This section focuses on reported human rights education initiatives undertaken by Governments within the Decade for Human Rights Education, as well as remaining challenges.

A. Achievements

10. All the 29 respondents completed this part of the questionnaire, which enquires about perceived accomplishments during the Decade,

related coordination frameworks and entities (focal points, committees, national plans, etc.) and main activities undertaken. Most replies provided a description of human rights education, training and public information activities which took place in the respective countries during the Decade.

11. The five responses that touched upon the significance of the Decade's framework are formulated in positive terms. According to the respondents, the Decade has "put human rights education on the agenda", helped to increase awareness of the need for human rights education and provided a framework for international cooperation in this area. It has facilitated the human rights education work of those already engaged in relevant activities and encouraged others to develop them.

12. Concerning the establishment of national focal points for human rights education with the purpose of coordinating, implementing and monitoring related activities, the responses highlighted a variety of approaches. While five countries created specially constituted committees, in most cases those tasks were performed by existing national bodies such as national human rights institutions, human rights departments of various ministries, judicial and academic institutions, National Commissions for UNESCO and parliamentary committees. In most cases, the replies indicated that these institutions work in cooperation with NGOs.

13. In only two cases, Governments reported on the elaboration and development of specific plans of action for human rights education. In a few more cases, Governments adopted overall plans of action for human rights with an educational component or infused human rights education in sectorial plans such as those focusing on women's rights, the rights of the child, the education sector as well as various economic, social and cultural rights.

14. Almost all responses highlighted steps undertaken within the school system. They include the adoption of education laws and policies; development and revision of curricula; revision of textbooks to eliminate stereotypes and reflect human rights principles; development of educational materials; organization of extra-curricular activities such as youth camps, competitions, school excursions, exhibitions and celebration of human rights events, as well as the organization of pre-service and in-service teacher training.

15. Also, a number of Governments reported activities undertaken at the higher education level, such as the development of specific human rights courses and master's degrees, the setting up of human rights chairs and institutes, the development of research programmes and the organization of lectures and seminars.

16. Many responding Governments stated that during the Decade, they focused on the pre-service and in-service human rights training of administration of justice officials (police, legal professionals and more rarely prison staff); less frequently, responses mention the organization of courses for local government officials, journalists, armed forces and employers/employees. Public awareness campaigns were carried out mostly through the media and occasionally using the Internet.

17. It is worth highlighting that, in a number of cases, reported activities had a specific focus on anti-discrimination and intercultural education.

18. On some occasions, United Nations agencies (i.e., UNESCO, OHCHR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme) and other organizations (the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Council of Europe) supported the above-mentioned

work. One Government reported extensively on its bilateral cooperation programmes in the area of human rights education and training established within its region. Some responses acknowledged increased regional and international cooperation during the Decade.

19. Very few responses included an assessment of the educational programmes described. One Government, which had put in place major educational efforts with police and armed forces, reported a decrease in human rights violations committed by those agencies; throughout the years, the number of complaints against them diminished, and periodic surveys showed an increasingly positive perception of those agencies among the citizens. In another country, the Government highlighted that, thanks to educational efforts, people were more and more aware of their rights and of relevant national protection mechanisms. Therefore, from 1996 to 2002 the number of complaints received by the national human rights institution had tripled. Finally, various replies stressed that human rights education activities contributed generally to the further development of a human rights climate and to the democratization process and also strengthened cooperation between Governments and civil society.

B. Shortcomings and remaining challenges

20. Only 20 respondents, of the 29 replies analysed, completed this section of the questionnaire, which focuses on issues not sufficiently addressed during the Decade, remaining challenges, as well as possible cooperation and assistance needed from the United Nations.

21. Some Governments pointed out that international and national political contexts make human rights education a priority and long-term need which cannot be met in only one Decade.

22. For instance, one reply pointed out that there is a need to foster "greater knowledge of

and respect for different cultures and civilizations, in order to better understand their cultural, religious and other distinctive features. In human rights education, this is a precondition to foster mutual understanding and peace among and between people on the one hand, and to reject any type of fundamentalism and extremism. Paradoxically, the globalization process has often led to disbelief and distrust, which are fertile ground on which terrorism and intolerance can thrive”.

23. In the same context, other responses stressed the continuous role of human rights education in promoting dialogue and international solidarity, as well as social integration in multicultural societies characterized by important migration flows. The Government of a country in a post-conflict situation highlighted the fact that discrimination and human rights violations are still taking place in the country, and that confidence-building and reconciliation efforts require long-term educational measures. The Government of a country in a situation of internal conflict reported educational challenges, noting that human rights are manipulated by the parties to the conflict instead of being considered means to peaceful coexistence and democracy.

24. Among the issues not adequately covered during the Decade, in terms of contents of human rights education activities, the responses mentioned in particular economic, social and cultural rights or their inadequate consideration as part of the indivisible set of human rights; the issue of corresponding responsibilities; the environment; and women’s human rights. Among groups particularly in need of human rights education, Governments highlighted disabled persons, migrants, minorities, people infected with HIV/AIDS, the elderly, the poor and other vulnerable groups. Three responses also stressed that, in the countries concerned, urban populations have benefited from human rights education more than rural populations.

25. One challenging area that needs further development is the issue of appropriate methodologies for human rights education, and in particular how to develop human rights learning starting from the daily life of people. This is also stressed in relation to the school system, since in some countries formal education is traditionally knowledge based, and this approach alone is not conducive to attitudinal changes which are the objective of human rights education efforts. Accordingly, some Governments highlighted the need for research on educational methodologies as well as evaluation tools and impact assessment.

26. Another area not adequately addressed during the Decade is the development of effective coordination mechanisms and frameworks for human rights education at all levels. Various responses highlighted that this aspect was overlooked during the Decade. For instance, they pointed out the lamentable lack of synergy between jurists and pedagogists, as well as the lack of coordination between Governments and NGOs. One Government regrets not having developed a national plan of action for human rights education. According to the replies, a more effective coordination system for the Decade should also have been put in place at the international level, including regional or international gatherings of national focal points.

27. Finally, various responses expressed regret at the lack of human and financial resources to implement human rights education programmes, donors’ inconsistency in supporting programmes, as well as lack of political will on the part of the responsible authorities.

28. Almost all responses highlighted the need for assistance from the United Nations in various areas, including technical assistance in assessing needs and developing a national plan of action for human rights education and in the human rights training of trainers, as well as financial assistance. Most replies mentioned three

areas in which support is particularly needed from the United Nations:

- (a) The collection and dissemination of good practices in various sectors;
- (b) The support for national and regional networking of experts and practitioners and the organization of study tours; and
- (c) The development, adaptation or translation of educational materials.

II. Future initiatives

29. This section of the questionnaire focuses on possible activities which the United Nations could envisage in order to promote human rights education worldwide after the end of the Decade, including:

- (a) The proclamation of a second Decade for Human Rights Education, as recommended by the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights;
- (b) The establishment of a Voluntary Fund for Human Rights Education, as envisaged in the Plan of Action for the Decade and in a number of resolutions of United Nations bodies; and
- (c) Other initiatives.

A. Proclamation of a second Decade for Human Rights Education (2005–2014)

30. Of the 29 replies, 21 Governments completed this section of the questionnaire. The vast majority of those responses indicated strong support for such an initiative; three respondents did not support it and one mentioned that an analysis of achievements and shortcoming of the first Decade is necessary in order to decide on this or other United Nations initiatives.

31. Those in favour of a second Decade indicated that it would provide an opportunity to strengthen national, regional and international programmes developed during the first Decade and start new ones, in particular in those

countries where no action was taken. It could encourage relevant actors to consolidate achievements and systematize initial efforts, to continue related activities and tackle issues and groups in society not yet addressed. A second Decade would also represent the commitment of the international community to continue to pursue human rights education worldwide as a contribution to setting up and maintaining democratic processes and institutions in line with international human rights standards, and as a response to urgent human rights problems such as discrimination, poverty, conflict and social exclusion.

32. Most respondents mentioned that a second Decade should build on the achievements and shortcomings of the first one and remaining challenges (see section II of the present report). It should also build on good national practices and comparative evaluation of experiences, as well as closer cooperation among actors working on similar issues in various countries. The coordination role of the United Nations should be strengthened, including the provision of technical support and regular contacts/feedback; a second Decade should be advocated and supported more comprehensively by the entire United Nations system, and greater participation and firmer commitment should be sought from all Member States.

33. The three Governments that did not support the proclamation of a second Decade presented various arguments, such as the fact that the launch of such decade would be perceived as a sign of failure of the previous one; that the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) would partially provide a framework for continuing human rights education activities; and that the proliferation of international decades, years or days devalue the concept itself and go against the idea of streamlining and revitalizing the United Nations agenda. One Government also pointed out the limited interest and participation of

Member States in the first Decade; for another, a second Decade would not be a priority for its country since human rights education is already institutionalized in schools.

B. Establishment of a voluntary fund for human rights education

34. Of the 29 replies, 19 Governments completed this section of the questionnaire. Fifteen responses indicated support for such initiative, two respondents did not support it and two others did not formulate an opinion.

35. Those in favour mentioned that such a fund could help countries in the implementation of their goals, since lack of (or short-term) programming is often due to the lack of appropriate resources. One Government mentioned that a fund could build on the experience of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

36. The two countries which did not support it would rather consider a priority the dissemination of human rights education materials, in particular through the Internet, or the mainstreaming of human rights education into national education plans.

C. Other initiatives

37. Of the 29 replies, 19 respondents completed this section of the questionnaire.

38. One area of activities mentioned in various responses is the facilitation of exchanges of experiences, materials and expertise, in particular at the regional and subregional level, including the setting up of regional centres for this purpose, as well as further advocacy and networking among relevant actors including through the Internet.

39. Various responses highlighted the need to place more focus on the higher education

system. Universities could contribute to the development of appropriate and targeted human rights education methodologies, including by promoting research in this area and by setting up human rights education postgraduate programmes. Other initiatives mentioned are the support of human rights training of trainers and educators and the strengthening of civil society.

40. Finally, one Government suggested that the international community should provide more support to human rights education by strengthening the operations and financing of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and its presence and work in the field.

III. Conclusion

41. The sixtieth session of the Commission on Human Rights will be crucial in terms of setting possible follow-up initiatives to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004), due to end in December 2004.

42. To support relevant discussions at the Commission, this report analyses 29 replies to the relevant questionnaire sent by OHCHR and UNESCO to all Governments. Most responding Governments have reported on their increased human rights education activities, within or outside the Decade's framework; however, most of them mention that human rights education still remains a priority in their countries, since specific groups or issues have not been dealt with and appropriate coordination mechanisms for human rights education are not yet in place. Finally, the majority of responding Governments supports both the proclamation of a second Decade for Human Rights Education (2005–2014) and the establishment of a voluntary fund for human rights education; some detailed suggestions in this regard are provided.

43. This report should be complemented with the information and analysis available in report on the midterm global evaluation of the Decade (A/55/360) and in the study on the follow-up to the Decade (E/CN.4/2003/101) undertaken by OHCHR in 2000 and 2003, respectively.

44. It is strongly hoped that the Commission on Human Rights would consider and adopt decisive measures to promote the development of human rights education across the globe. The Commission may wish to reflect on the desirability of an international convention on human rights education.

ANNEX

List of RESPONDENTS to the questionnaire (as of 14 January 2004)

A. Governments

Australia
Bahrain
Belize
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Colombia
Cyprus
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Dominica
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Georgia
Hungary
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Latvia

Lithuania
Luxembourg
Mauritius
Norway
Romania
Saint Lucia
San Marino
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Turkey
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Palestine

B. National Commissions for UNESCO

Indonesia
Poland