

Human Rights Education in Asian Schools

Volume Twelve

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Contents

Preface	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
COUNTRY EXPERIENCES	
Human Rights Education in Afghan School System	3
<i>Ahmad Nader Nadery</i>	
The National Center for Human Rights and Human Rights Education in Jordan	11
<i>Riyad Al-Subuh</i>	
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka: Human Rights Education in Schools Mandate	17
<i>Shirani Rajapaksa</i>	
Philippine Commission on Human Rights: More than Two Decades of Promoting Human Rights in Schools	27
<i>Ana Elzy E. Ofreneo</i>	
City Montessori School and Human Rights Education	51
<i>Jagdish Gandhi</i>	
Working for Women and Children and their Human Rights	61
<i>Woman & Child Welfare Society</i>	
Child Social and Financial Education	67
<i>Aflatoun</i>	
Crystallization of Good Practices and Lessons Learned on the Promotion of Human Rights Education in Thailand	81
<i>Nitithorn Thongthirakul</i>	
Learning About an Identity: Schools and Buraku Youth	87
<i>Christopher Bondy</i>	

Human Rights Education Initiatives in Osaka	99
<i>HURIGHTS OSAKA</i>	
TRAINING AND SURVEYS	
Education of Children with Disabilities in Azerbaijan: Barriers and Opportunities	107
<i>Ulviyya Mikailova, Almaz Ismayilova, Yulia Karimova,</i>	
<i>Ulkar Isazade, Ramiz Behbudov, Yusif Agayev, Nigar Aliyevaa</i>	
Teaching Genocide in Cambodia: Challenges, Analyses, and Recommendations	129
<i>Khamboly Dy</i>	
Challenges to Learning and Teaching Human Rights	149
<i>Jefferson R. Plantilla</i>	
APPENDICES	
Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan	165
<i>Youth Human Rights Group</i>	
Asia-Pacific Regional Meetings on Human Rights Education (1995-2007).	185
<i>Jefferson R. Plantilla</i>	
THE AUTHORS	195

Preface

Twelve years ago, when this publication came out for the first time, there was no expectation that it would continue to come out year after year. Despite the hardships, however, more volumes came out in subsequent years. In the process, we collected and published reports on many human rights education experiences from many countries in Asia.

Undoubtedly, there are many more experiences awaiting documentation and publication. We will certainly work to collect and publish those experiences as much as we can.

We are happy that through this publication we learn about people and institutions that run programs and projects on human rights education in the school system despite various restrictions. We also learn that their hardships bring good results no matter how small.

It is in the spirit of learning from the experiences of others that we will be expanding the scope of this publication. Starting with the 2010 publication, we will cover formal, informal and non-formal educational programs and activities in Asia and the Pacific. We will cover various programs including classroom teaching, training activities at community level, innovative rights awareness campaigns, and education programs for members of the police and the military.

But before that, we sincerely thank all the contributors in this volume. We thank them for their kind cooperation as well as patience in working with us in preparing this final volume of the publication.

We look forward to their contribution in the future as we earnestly continue the same mission, with a broader scope.

OSAMU SHIRAIISHI
Director
HURIGHTS OSAKA

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Introduction

As the first phase plan of action of the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE) entered its fifth and final year in 2009, a few developments in Asia unfolded that have a bearing on human rights education in the region.

In April 2009, the People's Republic of China adopted its National Human Rights Action Plan (2009-2010) that contains a chapter on "Education in Human Rights." A paragraph on the formal education system provides:¹

Gradually increasing the content of the law and human rights in courses of secondary and elementary schools... [b]y making good use of the courses [on] Ideological and Moral Standards, China will foster students' awareness of the obligations and rights of citizens, tutoring them in the ideas of democracy, rule of law, freedom, equality, fairness and justice, as well as a healthy concept about interpersonal relations, collectivism, nation and society.

This is the first formal document of the Chinese government that explicitly provides for human rights education in the Chinese primary and secondary schools. Though having a short two-year duration, it is expected that this will be the initial first step of the Chinese government in making human rights education an essential component of the Chinese formal education system. There is a good reason for the Chinese government to learn from the positive and negative experiences of other countries in

Asia that have adopted national action plans on human rights education or human rights in general.

The ASEAN Charter, adopted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in late 2007, provides for the establishment of an ASEAN human rights body in line with its (ASEAN Charter) "purposes and principles... relating to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms." In July 2009, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers approved the Terms of Reference of this human rights body. The Terms of Reference provide for a strong emphasis on human rights promotion through the following mandate and functions:²

- 4.1. To develop strategies for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms to complement the building of the ASEAN Community;
- 4.3. To enhance public awareness of human rights among the peoples of ASEAN through education, research and dissemination of information;
- 4.4. To promote capacity building for the effective implementation of international human

rights treaty obligations undertaken by ASEAN Member States;

4.6. To promote the full implementation of ASEAN instruments related to human rights;

4.9. To consult, as may be appropriate, with other national, regional and international institutions and entities concerned with the promotion and protection of human rights;

4.10. To obtain information from ASEAN Member States on the promotion and protection of human rights;

4.12. To prepare studies on thematic issues of human rights in ASEAN.

The 42nd Meeting of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers agreed to name this body as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR).

In both cases of the People's Republic of China and the ASEAN, it is important that they are reminded of the need to develop the content and process of learning and teaching human rights with explicit reference to the international human rights standards.

The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Education Bureau and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights supported a project on national assessment of the state of human rights education in the school systems of four countries in Southeast Asia. This project was in line with the first phase plan of action (2005-2009) of the WPHRE. The project covered Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Thailand.

The project was implemented through the Ministries of Education in the four countries. A national team on human rights education (NTHRE) was created in each of the four countries to undertake the national assessment exercise. The NTHRE was meant to have representatives of non-governmental organizations and national human rights commission (if applicable). The NTHREs created in Cambodia, Indonesia and Lao PDR were composed of representatives of different agencies within the

respective Ministries of Education. The Thai NTHRE had representatives from the academe and the civil society.

A report³ compiled the results of the national assessment exercise with a summary of their highlights. The four countries have ratified the following international human rights instruments:

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
2. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
3. International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICSECR)
4. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

Their respective Constitutions provide for human-rights-related list of rights, and several laws have been enacted to implement the state obligations under the ratified international human rights instruments.

Their educational policies have both direct and indirect support for human rights education in the formal education system. They are in the form of education about gender, access to education, and social issues. Cambodia has integrated child and women's rights into its formal education curriculum, Lao PDR developed some human rights materials, Indonesia has explicit provision on human rights in its *Standard of Educational Content*, and Thailand has integrated human rights in Social, Religious and Cultural Subject Area, and in teaching methods. Indonesia has a national human rights action plan that supports human rights education.

Special human rights bodies (such as the national human rights institutions in Indonesia and Thailand, and the national commission on women in Indonesia) provide support for human rights education in general. Human rights centers such as the university-based centers in Indonesia also support human rights education

in the school system to some extent.

But there are challenges to face that affect the full implementation of the policies and programs related to human rights education in the school system.

The general problems affecting the formal education system such as large classes, uneven distribution of teachers (particularly for schools in remote areas), lack of teaching-learning materials, and lack of teacher training are also affecting human rights education.

Inconsistent implementation of human-rights-education-related educational policies, and the low priority given to human rights education by governments also constitute serious challenge to human rights education in the formal education system in the four countries. The lack of national assessment system that would monitor the implementation of educational policies is another issue.

Surveys in Cambodia and Thailand show the lack of appropriate understanding of human rights among teachers and students.

To some extent, the situation in other Southeast Asian countries is similar to those in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Thailand.

The report likewise contains a section on the best practices in human rights education in the formal education systems in Asia. Though still not fully comprehensive, the best practices section presents the variety of initiatives relating to curriculums, teaching and learning materials, teacher training materials, pedagogies, and educational structures that directly support human rights education in the formal education systems in Asia.

In South Asia, HURIGHTS OSAKA developed with South Asian educators a teacher training resource material on human rights education.⁴ The resource material presents the basic elements that should constitute human rights education in the formal education system such as the following:

- Human Rights: Concepts, Mechanisms and Issues
- Human Rights in South Asian Context
- The School System and Human Rights Education
- Human Rights Education
- Human Rights Education Pedagogy
- Teachers and Human Rights Education
- School Ethos and Human Rights Education
- Community Participation.

The resource material is a “handy, user-friendly resource material that situates the understanding of human rights and human rights education in the context of South Asia, and utilizes the existing materials in the South Asian subregion to illustrate the practice of human rights education in the school system.”⁵

Similar to the Southeast Asian WPHRE project report, the South Asian resource material shows the diverse materials existing in the region that should be utilized by educators both as trainers and as classroom teachers.

This publication has covered many initiatives on human rights education in the formal education system that do not get support from governments or their educational policies. Some initiatives have been undertaken to counter what are considered to be lapses in government educational policies as well as existing educational materials.

Compliance by states with their obligations regarding promotion of human rights is a necessity. Being human rights duty-bearers, States (through their governments) have to consistently (and progressively) take appropriate measures that ensure that human rights are taught and learned in the formal education system. So far, there is much ground to cover for governments to fully comply with their human rights education obligations.

Nevertheless, there are human rights education initiatives among individual schools, non-

governmental organizations, national human rights institutions, and human rights centers that provide significant contribution to the teaching and learning of human rights in the formal education system.

Governments and the other institutions have to work together to maximize the impact of their initiatives on human rights education in the formal education system. There are enough resources within the formal education system to work with on human rights education. There are also sufficient experiences within many countries in the region that can be utilized in mainstreaming human rights education in the formal education system.

Human rights education should be allowed to benefit the students, as much as the society as a whole.

Finally, the year commencing from December 2008 has been declared by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as the “International Year of Human Rights Learning.”⁶ The UNGA states that “human rights learning should contribute to the fulfilment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a way of life for people everywhere.” The United Nations agencies, funds and programs, and

the member-states are called upon to develop activities to realize the purposes of this UNGA resolution.

Endnotes

¹ IV. Education in Human Rights, National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009-2010), available in China View, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/13/content_11177126_23.htm

² Visit <http://www.aseansec.org/4919.htm> for the full Terms of Reference of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), as adopted on 20 July 2009 in Phuket, Thailand by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers.

³ See Human Rights Education in the School Systems in Southeast Asia - Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Thailand (Bangkok: Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, 2009).

⁴ South Asian Teachers and Human Rights Education - A Training Resource Material (Delhi: Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, 2009).

⁵ Text from the back cover blurb of the South Asian Teachers and Human Rights Education - A Training Resource Material.

⁶ International Year of Human Rights Learning, UNGA Resolution A/RES/62/171, 20 March 2008.