

# The Unending Task of Human Rights Promotion

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**S**EVENTY-THREE YEARS AGO, a hopeful United Nations General Assembly adopted these texts:

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge...

The pledge in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to promote respect for and common understanding of human rights continues to be in a process of fulfilment after more than seventy years passed.

Questions are still being asked. What do we mean by human rights? Why should we value human rights? How can human rights apply to concrete situations of people? Can human rights help resolve the myriad of issues faced by society today?

While recognition and realization of human rights certainly exist today, there are still people the world over who could not see the need for the “universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.” And despite the numerous international and national measures for the promotion, protection and realization of human rights, a serious misunderstanding of human rights remains. People’s perception of human rights is still shaped by diverse political, religious, social, cultural and even economic perspectives that hinder the achievement of a “common understanding of these rights and freedoms.” Additionally, the current COVID-19 pandemic situation reveals the different opinions on how human rights should be exercised. The “individual versus society” debate on human rights rises once more.

In short, the task of human rights promotion has not ended; it continues. In truth, it must continue.

The continuation of human rights promotion is seen in initiatives that do not have human rights as the noticeable content. These initiatives concentrate on empowering people regarding the development of their communities, the protection of their livelihood, the overcoming of barriers to education, the preservation of natural resources, the creation of new meaning of social harmony and inclusivity in a diversified society, the remembrance of the past, the establishment of systems that address harassment and other issues in the workplace, among others. These initiatives are important parts of human rights promotion because they are vehicles of an understanding of human rights that goes beyond the old “civil-political rights versus economic-social-cultural rights divide.” People see human rights in the context of realities that do not segregate civil, political, economic, social and cultural issues and rights from each other. Human rights promotion takes varied forms and covers diverse issues, communities and institutions.

The discussion below highlights articles in this volume that show the variety of human rights promotion initiatives in Asia and the Pacific. A few other initiatives are likewise mentioned in this article.

### **Continuing with School-based Promotion**

An online international conference organized by the Center for Transformative Education (CTE) of the Philippine Normal University on 21 October 2021 focused on “reconnecting human rights education” to the education community. The conference discussed the apparent retreat of human rights education in the Asia-Pacific region during the last decade. CTE specifically wanted to “reconnect” the school teachers to human rights education.

In a webinar organized by CTE with the theme, “Equality: Reducing Inequalities, Advancing Human Rights” on 9 December 2021, the issue of integrating human rights into the school curriculum was discussed. The idea was to provide the students who were aspiring to become teachers to consider teaching human rights in their respective subjects.

Both online activities reminded the participants about the human rights education experiences that existed in all forms of education (formal, non-formal and informal) in Asia and the Pacific during the 1990s and 2000s.

In the December webinar, the substantial support for human rights education provided by the Department (Ministry) of Education of the

Philippines, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, and other institutions in the 1990s and 2000s was reviewed. The development of teaching materials (lesson plans or teaching exemplars), organizing of teacher training workshops, holding of human rights celebrations (such as Human Rights Consciousness Week, Child Rights Month) by government agencies,<sup>1</sup> adoption of local government human rights initiatives (such as policy on child protection<sup>2</sup>) alongside the constitutional<sup>3</sup> and legal<sup>4</sup> bases for human rights promotion contributed to the relative popularity of human rights education in the Philippines during that period.

The teaching materials developed in the 1990s and 2000s for the Philippine school system focused mainly on social sciences subjects such as social studies and values education.

The constitutional and legal support along with the administrative initiatives<sup>5</sup> remain and yet the popularity of human rights education has seemingly declined in the Philippine school system from late 2000s.

Such decline in popularity seems to have been caused by the decreased support by the two main institutions with the mandate to promote human rights in the school system – Department of Education and the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines.

Could it be that the initiatives in late 1990s and early 2020s were mainly projects rather than programs? As a result, the focus on human rights teaching waned after project completion.

Human rights teaching appears to be a minor part of the school curriculum in the Philippines at present, though extra-curricular activities related to human rights (Human Rights Consciousness Week, Child Rights Month) continue.

There is a need to review the integration of human rights teaching in the school curriculum to find ways of ensuring that it (human rights teaching) does not remain a minor part of the school curriculum in the Philippines.

This problem likely exists in other regions. A study in Africa describes the situation in relation to Global Citizenship Education (GCED):<sup>6</sup>

As for the low priority placed on GCED and related programs within broader education programming, it can be explained by cultural and economic pressures on formal school systems to include more math and science so that school graduates can compete in the high-tech global economy. This phenomenon is often described as the ‘market orientation of education,’ that

favors hard skills instead of promoting the development of soft and social-emotional skills. (notes omitted)

The market orientation of education is seen as a cause for marginalizing the teaching of topics (including human rights) that have been recognized as appropriate for social science subjects. Again, this is not likely limited to Africa.

At the same time, the lessening of interest on teaching human rights-related issues such as conflict resolution in formal education is seen as caused by the need to use teaching hours for more important subjects such as “math and science.” The Hedayah report explains this issue:<sup>7</sup>

In addition, lessons to equip young people with intercultural understanding are sometimes perceived to be taking up classroom time at the expense of other core skills, such as reading and writing. Subjects where EPVE [Education for Preventing Violent Extremism] approaches are easily integrated, such as history or social studies, are also not always prioritized by teachers and parents, and math and science may be seen as more important in a student’s educational process.

Formal education, in this sense, should stress “investing in building students’ competencies that match with global citizenship and employability.”<sup>8</sup>

This raises two questions: 1) Should human rights teaching be limited only to social science subjects?; 2) Are knowledge and skill related to human rights not relevant to the workplace in particular and the business and economy in general?

The 1999 manuscript of Rosemarivic G. Villena, entitled “Integration of Human Rights Issues in the Teaching of Secondary Mathematics,” provides an answer:<sup>9</sup>

The integration of human rights in the mathematics curriculum does not interfere with the mathematics lesson, and more so, it is not a burden. [The integration of human rights] in the lesson [is meant] to provoke thought and to raise issues of human rights awareness in the classroom.

Mathematics curriculum in secondary schools [must be] studied carefully, and topics where the integration of human rights is possible [have to be] identified.

Villena has several sample mathematics lesson plans in her manuscript that discuss human rights.

The December 2021 CTE webinar responded to these questions by emphasizing the many efforts already done in teaching human rights beyond the social science subjects that showed the relevance of human rights to science and mathematics.

Initiatives in the Philippines include development of teaching exemplars for science and mathematics subjects by the Department (Ministry) of Education, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, and other institutions. These teaching exemplars were the product of “write-shops” (writing workshops) where teachers and other educators wrote human rights lesson plans for different subjects in the school curriculum.<sup>10</sup> The teaching exemplars were introduced in teacher training from late 1990s to 2000s.<sup>11</sup>

A similar effort was made by the Australian Human Rights Commission when it produced in 2014 the “Human Rights Examples for the Australian Curriculum.”<sup>12</sup> The examples include lesson plans for mathematics subject such as the “Human Rights Examples for the Australian Curriculum: Secondary Year 7 – Year 10 – Maths.”<sup>13</sup>

In sum, rather than isolate the teaching of human rights to social science subjects, it should be done also in mathematics and natural science subjects. The relevance of human rights to mathematics and natural science subjects and to employment and other life issues should be properly emphasized. The integration of human rights education in the school curriculum means teaching of human rights in all subjects as much as possible.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Reinforcing classroom learning, or in some cases filling up the absence of human rights teaching inside the classroom, is done through extracurricular activities.

For tertiary level students, they need extracurricular activities that maximize their research skill and require them to do field activities on human rights issues. Below are examples of human rights-related extracurricular activities that have been implemented in Asia for several years now.

### Memorializing Historical Events

Visit to museums may either be considered a curricular or extra-curricular activity. Museums that provide thought-provoking and rare or unique exhibits are valuable sources of information that may not be discussed properly in school textbooks or even history books.

In the case of Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh, a visiting college student remarked:<sup>14</sup>

We learned about many unknown histories and realized that we still do not know the actual history and true facts about our Liberation War.

Much of what people would not know are stories coming from local areas about the role played by people in those places in the war for national liberation. The Museum provides such stories to highlight the important role of the local people in the history of the country. The more than 60,000 stories collected through the years by students of Grade VI and higher levels can provide important insights on national history seen through the eyes of local people.

At the same time, the students who participate in collecting the stories are learning history from members of their own family and the local community. With the compilation of the stories exhibited in their schools and localities by the Museum, they (students) and the local people concerned can own the part of national history related to their community.

The localization of historical narratives is a strategic mode of getting local people to participate in understanding and remembering their own histories. In the case of the Museum initiative, the collection of local stories creates synergy between the local school, students and the community.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding of human rights issues or conflicts can be more meaningful through local activities. The local process provides an avenue for local people to express their view about the issues in their own way. This local process of remembering the victims of conflict is seen as part of managing trauma or experience of injustice as stated by Search for Common Ground:<sup>16</sup>

To remember and to grieve our losses is an important aspect of moving beyond trauma, and in Sri Lanka there is a culture of memorialization practiced by all communities living in the country.

Affected people expressed ideas during regional consultations on how to remember the conflict:<sup>17</sup>

At the consultation, participants from the North noted that while intangible practices of remembrance which the Tamil community had been practicing throughout the war years (such as days of fasting, alms-giving, ritual lighting of oil lamps) could still continue, there should also be physical memorials (such as statues, cemeteries and graveyards, bus stops, schools and pre-schools built in memory of the dead) and intangible cultural memorials (such as documentary films, songs about incidents, registers of events, posters and handbills that are from the war). Southern consultations revealed a similar desire for both physical and non-physical memorials. Some participants noted that memorialization can serve different outcomes, with non-physical memorials focusing more on spiritual elements and the process of healing, while physical memorials would ensure that memory lives on.

Local process becomes even more meaningful when linked to other local processes, where people from different local communities share stories to each other.

In the Community Memorialization Project (CMP) of Search for Common Ground, Sri Lanka, youth from different communities participated in an inter-community program. They visit the homes of people belonging to a different ethnic group or religious background and experience a very personal interaction with them. This method is found to be effective in creating positive relationship among people from different communities:<sup>18</sup>

One of the most successful methods promoting deeper engagement was having participants from outside the district staying with a participant from another community for the duration of the district visit. The project provided financial support to the hosts to defray costs, but the level of hospitality shown by the hosts suggests that they did not do it just for the money but because they genuinely wanted to do it.

The home visits are complemented by the collection of stories, in the form of letters, photos, village maps, children maps, video and audio stories from people in different communities. These materials were<sup>19</sup>

uploaded in the digital archive and preserved in dispersed archives. CMP has gone beyond archiving memories to using these memories to promote reconciliation. The series of workshops with project participants began by focusing on one's own memories which acted as a catharsis to open up and feel empathy when in the next stage ... other people's memories of violence are shared.

Participation in the collection of stories and sharing them to a larger audience are important ways of developing a deeper understanding of issues. But it is not an easy process, and can potentially cause problems unless properly managed:<sup>20</sup>

In many cases, when the participants from one community are faced with personal histories and memories of other communities, it requires them to face uncomfortable realities, that their version of "truth" may not be the only truth. For example, inter-district visits compelled them to confront the violence perpetrated on others by their own community. Sinhalese visiting the site of a grenade attack on a church by the Navy or Tamils visiting the site of the massacre of twenty-eight Buddhist monks by the LTTE were forced to revisit their black and white view of the war, with clearly identified "good" and "bad/evil" parties. This muddying of how the war is perceived breaks down some of the mental barriers and increases the openness to hear multiple truths. For many, especially in the south, it may be an important milestone in the journey towards accepting and acknowledging the suffering of others due to the war.

Memorializing the past towards reconciliation and peace becomes a people-driven (as against institution-driven) effort when affected communities are involved and when local histories are given importance and different truths (not one truth) surface to create a more dynamic, complicated view of a nation's history. Students and the youth learn a deeper and insightful meaning of the conflict and the human rights involved in this process.

### **Interns/Volunteers**

Students can likewise learn about human rights as interns or volunteers in organizations that serve people who suffer from human rights violation or abuse.



Transit Workers Count Too (TWC2) in Singapore provides students the opportunity to meet migrant workers from other countries and learn about the problems they face. By helping implement the activities of TWC2, the students are exposed to issues that would hardly be known in school and maybe even in mainstream media. By knowing how the issues might be resolved (through policy change lobby, public awareness activities, online information dissemination), the students learn about the importance of resolving human rights issues.

However, the impact of such experience on the students cannot be guaranteed to result in sustained interest on human rights and the resolution of human rights issues. As stated by TWC2:<sup>21</sup>

Quite a few school and junior college students undertake projects on migrant workers and ask for our assistance. Some may not take much interest in the subject: it can feel as though we're doing work for them that is not appreciated, and will be forgotten as soon as their project is completed. Nevertheless, there are some who ask questions that reflect a fair amount of thought and concern with their subject. Most responses to student information requests are handled by the Public Engagement Team. They work on the basis that it is worthwhile to do whatever we can to have a positive impact on their views towards migrant workers, which will have long term consequences for public attitudes. Perhaps, among the many with whom we are in touch, we would reach a few who may make a stronger commitment to migrant worker rights in years to come. We have, in fact, had volunteers come to us who mention having contacted us years before for information.

The impact of such experience may not indeed be seen in the immediate sense but may arise subsequently in another form such as consciousness of the need to protect the rights of those who are disadvantaged in making decisions as officials of government and business institutions.

### **AICHR Initiative: Youth Debate**

The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) organized in 2013 the first AICHR Youth Debate on Human Rights that became a regular platform for direct engagement and education on human

rights issues. The Youth Debate and other initiatives and programs to educate students and people on human rights issues are included in the work of the AICHR for the next five years under the new 2021-2025 Work Plan.<sup>22</sup>

The 2021-2025 Work Plan's Focus Area 5: Capacity building and public awareness has the following components for students and youth:

Priority Areas	Indicative Activities	Expected Outputs
PA 5.1 Enhance public awareness and encourage dialogues on human rights cooperation and remedies in ASEAN	4. Initiatives to raise awareness among students and youth of human rights promotion and protection in the region and of the work of the AICHR, including through debates, essay competitions, lectures and training	Improve awareness and engagement of students and youth in the promotion and protection of human rights

The Youth Debate provides a platform for young people in ASEAN member-states (AMS) to express their views on human rights and interact with experts/academics on human rights issues within the subregion. It aims to nurture critical thinking, public speaking, leadership skills, as well as promote solidarity, empathy and camaraderie among the young people of AMS.<sup>23</sup>

The Youth Debate concludes with awards given to five best speakers.<sup>24</sup> Below is a discussion on how the Youth Debate has been evolving through the years.

AICHR launched the first ASEAN Youth Debate on Human Rights on 4-5 April 2013 at the Ateneo Professional Schools in Rockwell, Makati City, Philippines.<sup>25</sup>

University students from the ten AMS participated in the two-day event bearing the theme, "Mainstreaming Human Rights in ASEAN Community-Building." The event aimed to raise greater awareness and appreciation of human rights, as well as to promote camaraderie among the students and youth of ASEAN.

Ambassador Rosario G. Manalo, then Philippine Representative to the AICHR, opened the event, stating that "It is truly an honor for the Philippines to host the ASEAN Youth Debate on Human Rights." She emphasized that "human rights and the participation of the youth play important roles in shaping a people-centered and responsive ASEAN Community."

The Malaysian Representative to the AICHR at that time, H.E. Dato' Sri Dr. Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, the Representative of Lao People's Democratic Republic to the AICHR, H.E. Phoukhong Sisoulath, and H.E. Ambassador Rosario G. Manalo led the panel discussion on the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) by sharing their insights with the student-participants on the development of the AHRD; Ateneo Human Rights Center Executive Director Atty. Ray Paolo Santiago presented the AHRD's main provisions.

Members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of government agencies involved in human rights in the Philippines, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, members of the academe and students from Philippine universities attended the panel discussion.

The youth debaters later participated in a workshop on moot court competition focusing on fictional human rights case studies involving practical application of the AHRD and other international human rights instruments.

"We hope that the ASEAN Youth Debate on Human Rights organized by the Philippines and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights can serve as a model for human rights education in the region and become a yearly event," said Ambassador Manalo.

She added,

All of us are part of the same human family and respect human dignity. In this spirit, ASEAN's evolving human rights discourse and outreach to the youth should be welcomed and supported.

The second ASEAN Youth Debate on Human Rights was held on 5-6 September 2015 in Singapore. The debates were held at Tembusu College, National University of Singapore.<sup>26</sup>

Thirty university students from the ten AMS participated in the debates. Over one hundred students and interested parties from the local universities, polytechnics and junior colleges were also in attendance. The debates aimed to promote greater awareness of human rights among ASEAN youth, and facilitate an active exchange of ideas and perspectives on various human rights issues.

The program was divided into two segments. On the first day, students participated in a debate master class where they honed their presentation

skills before the debates on the second day. This was followed by a site visit to the Toa Payoh Housing Estate and a guided tour of Singapore's newly-opened Community Rehabilitation Centre.

The debates were conducted on the second day. Ambassador-at-Large Professor Chan Heng Chee, Representative of Singapore to AICHR, opened the session by emphasizing the importance of ASEAN youth in shaping the future of the region. This was followed by a panel discussion on "Youth and Human Rights in ASEAN" with four of the eight AICHR Representatives in attendance. Five debate sessions were held and the student-participants debated on topics revolving around good governance, the AHRD, the role of youth vis-à-vis human rights, and the death penalty. There were also spirited exchanges of views and ideas among debaters and the audience.

Dr Noeleen Heyzer, former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Max Everest-Phillips, Director of the UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence, and Associate Professor Eleanor Wong attended the event as guest judges. The award ceremony was also graced by the event's guest of honor, Ambassador-at-Large Professor Tommy Koh, who presented the awards to the student-participants.

The third Youth Debate on Human Rights themed "Realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Context of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration 2012" was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 22-23 September 2016.<sup>27</sup>

In his welcome remarks, His Excellency Edmund Bon Tai Soon said that while the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) appear to focus on the achievements of communities and countries, they really arise from the concern for the rights, dignity and well-being of each human individual which in turn are clearly spelled out in the AHRD. The AICHR, being the overarching ASEAN human rights institution, must view the SDGs through the human rights lens and ensure that human rights principles are integrated in the ASEAN process of achieving the SDGs.

Since the AHRD is a historic agreement between the ten AMS to respect, protect and fulfil minimum standards of human rights in the region, His Excellency urged the promotion and use of the AHRD to the fullest extent possible in advocacy efforts. In this regard, he issued a "General Observation No. 1/2016: Interpretation of Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration 2012" to elaborate on three provisions of the AHRD.<sup>28</sup> These provisions pertain to (i) duties and responsibilities, (ii) application of human

rights in regional and national contexts, and (iii) legal limitations of human rights.

The fourth Youth Debate on Human Rights was held on 4-6 September 2017 in Bangkok.<sup>29</sup> About forty university students from the ten AMS attended the event.

The issues debated revolved around the establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights Court; the challenges of balancing economic growth and human rights in meeting ASEAN development goals; the promotion of women's rights, a quota system for women representation; the right to work in all member-states; and Environmental Damage as Human Rights Violation. These topics encouraged the participants to focus on the complementarity and intersectionality of political stability, economic prosperity, inclusiveness and human rights in ASEAN. The event also focused on the long-term sustainability of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the SDGs.

A Special Talk on "Migrant Workers in Thailand: A Move Toward Inclusivity" and panel discussions on the "50th Anniversary of ASEAN: Forging Ahead Together toward a Sustainable Community," as well as on the "ASEAN and Human Rights: Toward Sustainable Decades," were held at Thammasat University and Chulalongkorn University. The sessions generated a lively discussion between the youth and the resource persons on the evolution of human rights in ASEAN, as well as the challenges faced within the subregion.

Over the course of the three-day event, the student-participants visited the Grand Palace to pay their respects to the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and to the Central Women's Correctional Institution where they had the opportunity to learn about Thailand's application of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules). The 2017 Youth Debate is one of the AICHR's commemorative activities to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN.

The fifth Youth Debate on Human Rights was held on 8-10 September 2018 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Thirty undergraduate students from the AMS participated in the Youth Debate. Officials of ASEAN organs, relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, Entities Associated with ASEAN, United Nations' Agencies, and prominent human rights experts as well as other pertinent stakeholders also took part in enriching the debaters on the intersection of education with human rights, relevant international commitments and

instruments on right to education, ways and means to overcome digital disruption, as well as various innovations in education.<sup>30</sup>

The issues debated revolved around human rights education; children of migrant workers and their right to education; privacy of celebrities; air pollution; and the gravity of rape as to whether it amounts to a capital crime. Throughout the debate, the young debaters displayed their research and understanding on the wider issues of human rights, as well as on the right to education and its complementarity and inter-sectionality with political stability, economic prosperity, inclusivity and human rights guarantee in ASEAN.

The event also provided an opportunity for the student-participants of the Youth Debate to visit the Tuol Sleng Museum which documented “the darkest human history in Cambodia” when genocide was committed by the Khmer Rouge. While firmly pronouncing the “Never Again” statement, a student-participant expressed her expectation that the visit would continue to remind the future generations that such breaches of international law have no place in a dignified society.

The sixth Youth Debate on Human Rights was held on 18-20 September 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. Themed “Advancing Partnership for Sustainability” which was synced with the theme of ASEAN Chairmanship of Thailand, the event gathered approximately thirty university students as well as representatives from the Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY), AICHR, Entities Associated with ASEAN, and the ASEAN Secretariat. Selected secondary school students and teachers from Thailand participated in the debate as observers, widening the outreach of youth in ASEAN on human rights issues.<sup>31</sup>

Panel discussions on the theme of “development and sustainability” conducted on the first day provided an overview on how development impacts the people within the region and the importance of human rights-based approach to sustainable development. Through the debate motions, students showed their understanding and voiced their aspirations on the various thematic issues on human rights such as the enforceability of carbon tax (environmental rights), juvenile justice (child rights), and government supervision of internet use (freedom of speech). Site visits to the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) and the Asia Pacific Center on Disability (APCD) were also organized for the student-participants to better understand the

link of economic development and sustainability and between sustainable development and the rights of persons with disabilities, respectively.

The Youth Debate of AICHR helps improve the “awareness and engagement of students and youth in the promotion and protection of human rights” in Southeast Asia. It should continue to involve more students and youth in the subregion in this task.

### **Support for Teachers**

In addition to getting teaching exemplars, teachers need other support measures such as training either as formal training program or the non-formal counterpart. The program of the Japan Teachers’ Union (JTU) provides an example of such non-formal training for teachers. This organization provides opportunity for its members<sup>32</sup>

to learn about ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (1997) that ensure significant roles for teachers’ unions to play. Also, they have opportunities to join trainings and seminars on what rights are stipulated by national laws and local government ordinances. Now that citizenship education is regarded as necessary, it is also important for educators to know their own rights.

JTU holds gatherings to learn about human rights, namely, National Conference on Educational Research (NCER) and National Assembly on Education on Human Rights.

JTU also issued the *Human Rights Education Guidance toward Non-discrimination and Inclusive Schools and Society* (Guidance) in 2007<sup>33</sup> to help its members teach human rights in relation to issues faced by their students and existing in their respective communities.

As seen in the activities of JTU,<sup>34</sup> conferences can be used as venue for discussing the school curriculum and the teaching of human rights. Teacher-members can share their experiences in teaching human rights in the conferences and learn better teaching ways. At the same time, guides on teaching of human rights issues are useful in facilitating learning of these issues inside the classroom.

## Promoting Human Rights to Specific Sectors

Human rights education for specific sectors of society complements that which is done in the school system (including the tertiary level). The specific sectors referred to include youth, migrant workers, community workers, and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers.

Justice Without Borders (JWB) runs capacity-building programs aimed at equipping union caseworkers with the knowledge and know-how needed to help migrant workers. It offers a year-long learning, practice and coaching by experts in the field. In partnership with the Federation of Asian Domestic Worker Unions (FADWU), JWB trains worker-members to become members of a “pool of expert case managers who can identify potential legal issues and act on them rapidly.”<sup>35</sup> They are trained on how to interview clients as well as how to accompany them to “Labour Department meetings or conciliation meetings at the Equal Opportunities Commission.”<sup>36</sup> This means that they need to have the “paralegal abilities” in obtaining relevant information (or evidences) from the migrant workers and in discussing issues in meeting officials of relevant government agencies.

The Asian Justice and Rights (AJAR) provides a “space for learning and reflection among grassroots communities and leaders on issues relevant to human rights and transitional justice.” The people being trained comprise of “community members, leaders, educators, academics, non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, researchers, lawyers, and individuals from governmental and non-governmental sectors” who “share their knowledge and experience on human rights issues with the goal of improving their communities for those who are marginalized and at risk of facing human rights violations.”<sup>37</sup>

AJAR also provides a Training of Trainers to empower “victims of violence in societies in transition through the combination of legal, psycho-social, and human rights-based perspectives.”<sup>38</sup> The “participants gain knowledge of human rights and transitional justice in Asia, network with others, interact with experts in the fields of human rights and transitional justice and develop skills in participatory action research” that they can use to “help victims of violence in their own communities have a voice for peace and justice.”<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, the Institute of Development Studies and Practices (IDSP) offers a course that “aims at creating a group of young community leaders



who are capable of critically understanding, analyzing and effectively approaching developmental challenges while applying holistic strategies and leadership skills.”<sup>40</sup>

The course participants are mainly youth from rural communities in Pakistan who are being trained to “engage in the critical inquiry and observation of diverse socio-political and economic contexts and generate community-based discussions and discourses.”<sup>41</sup>

The Raise It! project of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) is “designed specifically in recognition that many workers and managers find it difficult to have conversations about the ‘hard topics’ like sexual harassment and requests for pregnancy leave and flexible work.” The project’s “focus on changing behaviour and building confidence to have conversations was based on the well-established evidence that the primary drivers of sexual harassment and violence against women include attitudes and structures that entrench gender inequality, low rates of reporting of discrimination and sexual harassment, and poor responses by organisations.”<sup>42</sup>

The JWB, AJAR, IDSP and VEOHRC programs are designed to empower specific sectors to take action on issues affecting their respective groups or communities.

### **Diverse Mediums of Learning**

In view of the current COVID-19 pandemic, other means of undertaking educational activities are employed. JWB uses webinars in collaboration with partner “nGO, HELP for Domestic Workers,” and publishes infographics in its website on the rights for “workers subjected to unfair or ill-treatment during COVID-19 pandemic.”

VEOHRC uses three online chatbots:<sup>43</sup>

1. **A flexible work request planner**, with different pathways for employees and managers (users can access either or both). The chatbot provides users with a conversational guide to flexible work rights, entitlements and duties. It also enables an employee to plan, prepare and practice a well-considered flexible work request conversation with their manager; and provides helpful prompts for a manager to plan a conversation with a staff

member who is requesting flexible work (including information about how to process a request).

2. **A parental leave and pregnancy planner** with different pathways for employees and managers (users can access either or both). This toolkit provides users with information about pregnancy, parental leave and return to work rights, entitlements and duties. It also enables an employee to practise a conversation about pregnancy adjustments, or (for all parents) parental leave and return to work; and provides helpful prompts for a manager to plan a supportive conversation with a staff member about these issues (including information about how to process a request).

3. **A sexual harassment support and response tool** with separate pathways for individuals who may have experienced sexual harassment from a client or colleague, individuals who may have witnessed it, or individuals to whom a colleague has disclosed an incident. The chatbot helps people identify behaviours that constitute sexual harassment and options to raise a concern or seek help, including support pathways and simple ways to call behaviour out or reporting culture issues in the workplace in a way that protects victims of harassment.

Raise It! project also has a “multimedia Conversation Starter Kit for managers, HR (Human Resource) Staff and champions, made up of posters, challenge or ‘conversation starter’ cards, a planner for participants to note their use and distribution of toolkit materials, and an email newsletter on the Raise topics that participants can sign up for.”

Chatbots and multimedia kits are new online tools and would likely become very convenient and useful once people become familiar in using them.

The CMP likewise uses the online information and communication technology to extend “dialogues and conversations about memory, memorialization and their connections to reconciliation and transitional justice.” Its website ([memorymap.lk](http://memorymap.lk)) presents<sup>44</sup>

320 village histories and life stories of individuals and groups, collected and archived to memorialize the experiences of violence and conflict in three Sri Lankan districts. Using the archive, the project creates opportunities for dialogue within and between communities on our country’s past, and the future we as citizens want to create [for the present and] the next generation of Sri Lankans.

Similarly, the Liberation War Museum makes available online the more than 60,000 local stories collected by students from different parts of Bangladesh on the role of people in local communities in the liberation war in the 1970s.<sup>45</sup>

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, training and other educational activities are held online. Virtual conferences, webinars and other online activities are being used to implement education programs.

## Evaluation

As in any education program, evaluation is always an important component for program improvement or development.

The evaluation of Raise It! project as pilot initiative shows achievement of the aims of “a) rais[ing] awareness of sexual harassment and discrimination associated with pregnancy, parental leave and requests for flexible and part-time work, and b) build[ing] confidence and competence amongst managers and staff to have conversations about these issues.”<sup>46</sup>

But what is most significant in the evaluation results is the identification of specific items for improvement as shown in the table below:<sup>47</sup>

What can be improved	Evidence	Program Improvements
Focus, clarity and the benefits of the education modules.	The SVA endline survey revealed that some participants found the <b>full complement of content overwhelming</b> .	We will separate the full program into <b>heavily customised and specific modules</b> , and confirm workplace contacts have implemented communications regarding purpose, objectives, leadership commitment and benefits.
Sustaining the education program and benefits, while minimising the impost on workplaces.	SVA endline survey and interview participants reported <b>insufficient time to apply their new skills</b> in the pilot period. Some SVA interview participants also reported that the ‘block’ style education sessions created an impost.	We will <b>deliver the education program iteratively</b> over a longer period of time, in <b>shorter, blended modes</b> , with repeated practice using the toolkits.
Increased capability amongst <b>middle managers</b>	SVA interview participants reported reticence to exercise new skills due to uncertainty as to how their immediate manager would react.	We will tailor and target the education program towards middle managers to <b>build their skills as role models, influencers and culture builders</b> .

Avoiding overwhelming the participants with the content of the training program, allowing them enough time to apply skills learned, and addressing the doubt or uncertainty in the mind of the participants regarding the real environment where their learnings have to apply are some of the important points to consider in further improving training programs. Flexibility in training program implementation can help ensure that the programs are suitable to the capacity and context of the participants. It is also necessary to consider a longer period of training to allow participants time to “digest” new knowledge and skill.

Regarding the memorialization of conflict initiative, the CMP, an evaluation exercise resulted in finding out lessons learned and recommendations for community-based activities such as the following:<sup>48</sup>

- To promote deeper connections, people-to-people interactions should happen over a period of time (at least several days) and be based around activities such as games, role plays, visits to places of interest and so on;
- Participants need to be encouraged to have a positive mindset about other communities before they engage with each other very closely, such as hosting a person from another community;
- Sharing memories is cathartic and also provides a base to connect across divisions;
- Envisioning the future as a value-based society and what that should look like, helps to bring out the commonality across divisions;
- It is not enough only to talk about memories, or only to show places where events have occurred. Both elements are necessary in order to make the memories “real” for outsiders, which will help them to understand and change their attitudes;
- Skills development for youth should be provided through hands-on experience of engaging with conflict, especially on social media;
- Youth should be supported to learn how to engage positively in conflicts between adults, and they should be trained in aspects of Do-No-Harm as well;
- More needs to be done after workshops end, to promote networking and development of structures of mutual support between participating youth;

- More initiatives are needed to encourage people-to-people engagement across divisions under suitable conditions, as interactions that are happening organically can lead to worsening mistrust and tensions;
- Support the “champions” to build their knowledge and conflict resolution skills by engaging with small-scale conflicts in their own communities, before engaging with large-scale conflict at the national level.

The two examples of evaluation results have common features regarding time for people to digest the training content and the much needed post-training support. Knowledge and skill have to continue to grow after the training in order for them to be applied appropriately to specific situations.

### **Education for the General Public**

In a broader sense, human rights education must be available to everyone through all forms of education (formal, non-formal and informal). Reaching out to the general public to gain support for human rights is an absolute necessity.

The objective of the Association for Toyonaka Multicultural Symbiosis (ATOMS) of building a “multicultural society based on respect for human rights and with broad participation of the citizens” requires educational activities for the general public. Thus ATOMS holds seminars, symposiums and other educational activities for the Japanese residents of Toyonaka city to address the issues affecting the non-Japanese residents.

On the other hand, the non-Japanese residents are also given educational opportunities that would benefit the general public. These activities are “meant to empower the non-Japanese residents in engaging the Japanese residents towards ‘Creating a fair and sustainable, multicultural symbiotic society.’”

In its own limited way, “JTU holistically responds to ... issues and engages the children, parents, politicians and citizens in a social dialogue to achieve its political goal of building an inclusive society for the children’s well-being.” Thus, while the teachers are the main beneficiary of its activities, JTU sees the need to reach out to the general public to serve the larger purpose of inclusivity in society.

In a similar way, TWC2 uses a variety of strategies in pursuit of its goals. It uses “advocacy, research, public engagement and direct services” that are “considered ... to be complementary and always treated them as such.” It needs public engagement to “broaden popular awareness of migrant workers and their rights and [encourages public support that] has played a role in bringing about such changes as have occurred, and we think that it has been laying a good foundation for further advances in years to come.”

### Continuing Work

Eleven volumes of this publication attest to the reality that many initiatives supporting the promotion of human rights are being undertaken in different parts of Asia-Pacific. Though some initiatives have ceased to exist, many more programs and projects are being developed and implemented tailored to the specific contexts and issues of people they are meant for.

The current volume alone provides a peek of such initiatives spread out in the whole length and breadth of this vast region. There are many more human rights promotion initiatives that have not been brought to the attention of educators and education policymakers of Asia-Pacific. The search for such initiatives remains.

In the meantime, there are many lessons and ideas about human rights promotion that can be learned from the documented educational initiatives in this volume, and in ten more volumes before it.

### Endnotes

1 The Department of Education has been issuing since late 1990s a number of memorandums on human rights activities such as the following:

- DECS Memorandum No. 467, s. 1998: School-Based Activities to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (November 20, 1998);
- DECS Memorandum Order No. 487, s. 1998: Second National Conference on Peace and Human Rights Education (December 3, 1998);
- DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2003: An Act Declaring December 4 to 10 as National Human Rights Consciousness in the Country and for other Purposes (April 28, 2003);
- DepEd Memorandum No. 303, s. 2003: Fifth Youth Summit on Human Rights (August 21, 2003);
- DepED Memorandum No. 458, s. 2003: National Human Rights Consciousness Week (December 3, 2003).

In addition, it held youth conferences and the Parents, Teachers and Students Forums on human rights.

2 Child-friendly Municipalities and Cities Award (Council for the Welfare of Children), Child Protection Policy of Local Governments (2012).

3 The 1987 Philippine Constitution has two main provisions on human rights education:

- All educational institutions shall include the study of the Constitution as part of the curricula. They shall inculcate ...respect for human rights... (Article XIV, Section 3 (Education, Science and Technology, Arts, Culture and Sports))
- The Commission on Human Rights is given the power to establish a continuing program of research, education, and information to enhance respect for the primacy of human rights. (Article XIII, Section 18)

4 A number of laws have been enacted since the 1990s such as the following: An Act Providing For Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination, and for Other Purposes (1992), Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (1992), The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) (1997), An Act Declaring December 4 to 10 as National Human Rights Consciousness Week in the Country and for Other Purposes (2003), An Act Promoting the Integration of Women as Full and Equal Partners of Men in Development and Nation Building (2009), The Magna Carta of Women (2009).

5 Human Rights Consciousness Week continues to be held by different government agencies.

6 Tina Robiulle Moul, *Promotion and Implementation of Global Citizenship Education in Crisis Situations*, UNESCO, 2017, page 13, [www.gcedclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/252771e.pdf](http://www.gcedclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/252771e.pdf).

7 Hedayah, "Countering Violent Extremism through Education," in this volume, page 248.

8 Hedayah, *ibid.*, page 256.

9 Rosemarievic G. Villena, "Integration of Human Rights Issues in the Teaching of Secondary Mathematics," *Research Series*, No. 43, October 1999, Research Center, Philippine Normal University.

10 The first set of teaching exemplars came out in late 1990s while a revised and expanded version came out in 2000s. Both versions have a number of lesson plans on mathematics, science and technology.

11 Due to lack of information on the training on the human rights teaching exemplars undertaken from late 1990s to 2000s in the Philippines, it is difficult to state exactly how many teachers were given the training.

12 "Human Rights Examples for the Australian Curriculum," Australian Human Rights Commission, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/publications/human-rights-examples-australian-curriculum>.

13 See Human Rights Examples for the Australian Curriculum: Secondary Year 7 – Year 10 – Maths," Australian Human Rights Commission, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/secondary-year-7-year-10-math>.

14 Liberation War Museum, “Liberation War Museum and Human Rights Education,” in this volume, page 193.

15 Liberation War Museum, *ibid.*, page 189.

16 Search for Common Ground, “Community Memorialization Project, Sri Lanka,” in this volume, page 73.

17 Search for Common Ground, *ibid.*

18 Search for Common Ground, *ibid.*, page 104.

19 Visit [memorymap.lk](http://memorymap.lk) for the stories. Search for Common Ground, *ibid.*, page 105.

20 Search for Common Ground, *ibid.*, page 106.

21 Transit Workers Count Too, “Public Outreach for Migrant Workers’ Rights in Singapore,” in this volume, page 18.

22 For the full text of the Five-Year Work Plan of the AICHR 2021-2025, visit <https://aichr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AICHR-FYWP-2021-2025-approved-at-53rd-AMM-web.pdf>.

23 The AICHR Youth Debate was organized each year by the following:

2013 - Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) of the Philippines in collaboration with the Ateneo Human Rights Center (AHRC) and the Ateneo Society of International Law (ASIL).

2015 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway.

2016 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia in collaboration with the University of Malaya, the Malaysian Institute for Debate and Public Speaking (MIDP) and the ASEAN-U.S. Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security (ASEAN-U.S. PROGRESS).

2017 - Dr. Seree Nonthasoot, the Representative of Thailand to the AICHR, in collaboration with various agencies in Thailand, including Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, Faculty of Law, Thammasat University and Chulalongkorn University. The event was supported by ASEAN-U.S. PROGRESS (Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security program).

2018 - AICHR-Cambodia, in collaboration with the Cambodian Human Rights Committee and the Royal University of Phnom Penh, with financial support from the ASEAN-China Cooperation Fund.

2019 - AICHR Thailand in collaboration with various agencies in Thailand, including Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, Chulalongkorn University. The event was supported by ASEAN – USAID PROSPECT.

24 Some of the best speaker awardees are the following:

2016 - Mr Chun Heng Sae Seah (Thailand), Mr Kishen Sivabalan (Malaysia), Ms Jutima Wanitchakarnchai (Thailand), Mr Alfonso Roel Vargas (the Philippines) and Ms Dan Thao Nguyen Do (Vietnam).

2018 - Mr Maneth Nay from Cambodia, Mr Muhammad Aditya Padmanaba from Indonesia, Mr Muqriz bin Mustaffa Kamal from Malaysia,



Ms Colleen Anne Chua and Mr Neal Amandus de la Rosa Gellaco from the Philippines.

2019 - Best Speaker from each debate motion was announced including: Motion 1 “ASEAN Member states should set quotas and schedules for tourists visiting national parks”, Ms Meher Malhotra (Singapore), Motion 2 “Juveniles aged 16 and above who commit a crime should be charged as adults”, Mr Tan Yang Long (Singapore), Motion 3 “Enact an enforceable ASEAN carbon tax”, Mr Hans Xavier W. Wong (Philippines), Motion 4 “Medical marijuana should be legalized in ASEAN”, Ms Sok Sonita (Cambodia), and Motion 5 “The internet now requires government supervision”, Mr Arsyad Asyl bin Romil (Malaysia).

25 Press Release: ASEAN Youth Debates on Human Rights, <https://aichr.org/news/press-release-asean-youth-debates-on-human-rights/>.

26 Press Release: AICHR Youth Debates on Human Rights, 5 – 6 September 2015, Singapore, <https://aichr.org/news/press-release-aichr-youth-debates-on-human-rights-5-6-september-2015-singapore/>.

27 Press Release: AICHR Youth Debate on Human Rights 2016, 22 – 23 September 2016, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, <https://aichr.org/news/press-release-aichr-youth-debate-on-human-rights-2016-22-23-september-2016-kuala-lumpur-malaysia/>.

28 The full text of “Interpreting Articles 6, 7 & 8 of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration 2012” by Edmund Bon is found in AmerBon blog, [www.amerbon.com/blawg/interpreting-articles-6-7-8-of-the-ahrd-2012](http://www.amerbon.com/blawg/interpreting-articles-6-7-8-of-the-ahrd-2012).

29 Press Release: AICHR Youth Debate on Human Rights 2017, 4-6 September 2017, Bangkok, Thailand, <https://aichr.org/news/press-release-aichr-youth-debate-on-human-rights-2017-4-6-september-2017-bangkok-thailand/>.

30 ASEAN Students Join AICHR Youth Debate on Human Rights, September 17, 2018, <https://asean.org/asean-students-join-aichr-youth-debate-on-human-rights/>.

31 AICHR Youth Debate on Human Rights 2019: Partnership for Sustainability, 18-20 September 2019, Bangkok, Thailand, <https://aichr.org/news/aichr-youth-debate-on-human-rights-2019-partnership-for-sustainability-18-20-september-2019-bangkok-thailand/>.

32 Japan Teachers Union, “JTu: Working towards Non-discrimination and Inclusion in School and Society,” in this volume, page 204.

33 The full document, in Japanese language, is available at [www.jtu-net.or.jp/wp/wp-content/themes/jtu/doc/booklet.pdf](http://www.jtu-net.or.jp/wp/wp-content/themes/jtu/doc/booklet.pdf).

34 See Japan Teachers Union, *op. cit.*, pages 201-206.

35 Justice Without Borders, “Making Justice as Mobile as Migrant Workers,” in this volume, page 167.

36 JWB, *ibid.*, page 168.

37 Asia Justice and Rights, “Education for Peaceful Transformation: The AJAR Learning Centre at Kampung Damai,” in this volume, page 153.

38 Asia Justice and Rights, *ibid.*, page 155.

39 Asia Justice and Rights, *ibid.*

40 Institute of Development Studies and Practices, “Learning from People: IDSP Experience,” in this volume, page 117.

- 41 Institute of Development Studies and Practices, *ibid.*
- 42 Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (Our Watch, 2015) 6, 8.
- 43 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *this volume*, page 220.
- 44 See [memorymap.lk](http://memorymap.lk).
- 45 See Liberation War Museum, <http://www.liberationwarmuseumbd.org/oral-history/>.
- 46 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *op. cit.*, page 218.
- 47 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *ibid.*, page 234.
- 48 Search for Common Ground, *op. cit.*, pages 105, 107, 110 and 112.