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Editorial

UN After Vienna : The Asia-Pacific Scene

The World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, Austria two years ago was hailed as a milestone in recognizing women's human rights, reaffirming the universality and indivisibility of human rights, emphasizing the importance of human rights education, calling for the creation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, among other achievements. There was a declaration of commitment on the part of governments to realize the resolutions of the conference through the implementation of national plans of action. There was also a huge parallel gathering of non-governmental organization representatives whose work greatly helped keep significant human rights issues on top of the conference agenda.

Since then, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has been created, the Decade for Human Rights Education has been declared, three world conferences have been held that dealt with human rights issues (population conference in Cairo, social development conference in Copenhagen, and the women's conference in Beijing), and some states in Asia-Pacific are already considering the creation of national human rights institutions.

Despite these developments, however, the sad truth about the state of human rights in Asia-Pacific remains. Widespread violation of human rights continues unabated.

There are lingering questions: how can human rights violations be minimized? how can all human rights in different socio-economic-political and cultural contexts be realized?

With renewed mandate from the recent world conferences and with renewed enthusiasm on the realization of human rights, what is there in the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific?

This is basically the issue raised in the recently concluded experts meeting organized by HURIGHTS OSAKA.

There is a strong call for reforms within the United Nations system so that it can effectively respond to the widening needs of States for technical assistance, as well as effectively monitor the compliance of States on their obligations under international human rights instruments. Likewise, there is a strong call for the establishment of regional and national human rights institutions in the Asia-Pacific to address human rights problems.

Asia-Pacific is the most populous region in the world, with the most diverse socio-cultural, economic and political regimes, with vast geographical boundaries, and with the most promising regional economy of all. Majority of its States have not ratified most of the international human rights instruments. There is hardly any reason that can prevent a stronger United Nations role in promoting human rights in this region.

The United Nations' role is as valid as the role of national institutions (government or otherwise) in realizing human rights. One of the United Nations' important tasks therefore is to facilitate the promotion and realization of human rights at the national level. To do this, it must be within reach of the general public who are the holders of human rights - especially those whose rights are either violated or have no chance of being enjoyed in real and meaningful sense. The United Nations has to provide the means to make its services much more felt by marginalized communities in the region. Then and only then will the United Nations be able to serve the interest of the people in whose name it was established.

UN and the Realization of Human Rights in Asia-Pacific

For three days in late July 1995, around forty people involved in various levels of human rights work gathered to reflect on the role of the United Nations in the Asia-Pacific. The meeting was organized by HURIGHTS OSAKA as a fitting contribution to the 50th anniversary celebration of the founding of the United Nations as well as the first anniversary celebration of the founding of HURIGHTS OSAKA.

The meeting was attended by high officials of the United Nations (namely, Mr. John Pace of the Center for Human Rights and Mr. Philip Alston of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), representatives of regional non-governmental organizations (Mr. D.J. Ravindran of Forum Asia, Mr. Basil Fernando of Asian Human Rights Commission, Ms. Mieko Fujioka of IMADR and Mr. Kamalinne Pinitpuvidol of Child Rights Asianet), professors of law in Korea and Japan (Professors Paik Choon-hyun, Koshi Yamazaki, and Kohki Abe), and representatives of Japanese human rights groups. Professors Kinhide Mushakoji and Dong-hoon Kim of HURIGHTS OSAKA were also present.

There was a rich sharing of ideas and experiences on the main topic of United Nations and its human rights work as well as on issues relating to women's rights and human rights workers. The conclusions and recommenda-

tions of the meeting are presented separately in the next article.

One interesting point raised is on the "schism" that broke up the human rights concept into two parts: civil and political rights on one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other. This occurred when respective covenants were drawn up for each set of rights in the early 50's. For some time, the work of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations have focused almost exclusively on civil and political rights. This later on brought the criticism by some governments that human rights (being centered generally on civil and political rights) are mainly Western ideas. The Vienna conference in 1993 ended this schism and declared that human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The United Nations is thus called upon to promote all human rights.

On the otherhand, there is some uncertainty on human rights discussions in the post-Cold War United Nations. Without a clear alignment of countries into two contending camps, decisions on human rights are unpredictable. Member-states exercise greater leeway as dictated by their respective interests. This is a hindrance in the process of deciding on proposals to realize human rights.

The question of

human rights violations was also addressed to the United Nations itself as far as its peacekeeping work is concerned. It was stressed that human rights violations in peacekeeping activities occur and should be monitored by separate United Nations human rights body.

While the creation of the Office of High Commission for Human Rights is lauded, there was a strong appeal for the provision of appropriate financial and human resources in order that coordination of United Nations agencies and response to actual human rights problems will be possible.

The United Nations was likewise called upon to increase its involvement on human rights issues in the Asia-Pacific region. It has enough facilities in the region which can be used to promote human rights or even facilitate the establishment of regional and national human rights mechanisms.

Due to the slow response of governments in Asia-Pacific to the call for the establishment of a regional human rights mechanism, a practical option of continuing inter-governmental dialogue on this issue is seen feasible. To this end, both government and non-governmental organizations are asked to help organize these dialogues.

On the side of the human



The experts meeting in Osaka

rights organizations, it was pointed out that they need to establish closer relationship with grassroots communities. Human rights work must be able to address the root causes of human rights violations - a task that requires more sophisticated skills and programs. This likewise relates to the integrated view of human rights by which human rights defenders are redefined as those working for civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

The discussions on women's rights present the problem of human rights work. It shows the perennial problem of establishing good networking system among women's groups, and between women at the grassroots level and the women's international movement. The case of women's movement in Japan is an example of this problem. Despite availability of some resources, there is still a difficulty of coordination and engaging in joint action. This situation however is certainly not limited to the women's movement - considered to be one of the strongest human rights movements at present. Many other sectors have not, in fact, reached the same level of organization as the women's movement.

The meeting was thus a refreshing exercise that brought to the fore major tasks for the United Nations and other human rights institutions/organizations to fulfill in order to realize human rights. It set out an agenda that will move one step forward the achievements in today's human rights work.

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Experts Meeting

**July 26-28, 1995
Osaka, Japan**

I. Universality and indivisibility of human rights

1. All human rights are universal, indivisible, and interdependent and interrelated. The Asia-Pacific community must treat all human rights in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. Respect for and implementation of human rights provides the basis for peaceful and harmonious coexistence among peoples with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. This diversity of cultures and religions enriches the universal meaning of human rights at the national and regional levels.

3. A holistic approach should always be adopted in the implementation of human rights programmes. Equal attention should be given to civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

II. United Nations activities

4. Activities for the promotion and protection of human rights have been excessively compartmentalized within the United Nations

system. Major development, financial and humanitarian agencies have not shown much interest in the human rights implications of their activities. All UN agencies, including those directly responsible for implementing human rights programmes, should take full account of international human rights law in all their activities and coordinate their policies and programmes in line with human rights norms. They should be held accountable for their actions in this regard.

5. The United Nations should continue setting human rights standards designed to further promote, protect and realize the rights of the socially disadvantaged such as indigenous people and minorities.

6. The existing UN mechanisms and procedures for the promotion and protection of human rights should be further strengthened and made more effective.

7. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should be provided with sufficient funding and staff to enable the High Commissioner to comply effectively with his mandate including the ability to respond effectively to human rights challenges and coordinate UN activities related to human rights. Governments should recognize the importance of the Office of the High Commissioner and extend all possible

cooperation to the High Commissioner.

III. United Nations' role in the region

8. The United Nations should consider holding some of its human rights meetings in the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, some of the sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Commission and human rights treaty bodies should be held in the region. Such meetings should be substantive rather than simply ceremonial, ensure full involvement of local and regional NGOs and should be a means for facilitating a better understanding of the region for members and agencies involved in such meetings.

9. The High Commissioner should consider submitting to the United Nations General Assembly a plan of action for undertaking programmes in the region and include in the plan of action a critical review of human rights activities undertaken by relevant UN agencies in the region. It is recommended that the High Commissioner consult as much as possible the human rights organizations in the region in preparing the plan of action.

10. The United Nations should consider establishing a regional office in the Asia-Pacific region to represent the High Commissioner. The High Commissioner should consider the possibility of establishing an expert body, consisting mostly of experts from the region, to provide assistance to the programmes conducted in the region.

11. The High Commissioner should expand and coordinate extensive technical cooperation programmes

designed to strengthen domestic laws and structures that will promote human rights in Asia-Pacific countries. Technical cooperation programmes should provide for participation of relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of these programmes.

12. NGOs in the region should be provided with training, employing participatory methodologies, on the effective use of UN mechanisms and the means of implementing human rights instruments. Regional organizations such as the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (HURIGHTS OSAKA) as well as universities and research centres in the region should facilitate such training. Technical assistance should be provided by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for this purpose.

IV. Regional mechanisms

13. Asia-Pacific is yet to establish a regional inter-governmental institution for the promotion and protection of human rights. Any discussion concerning the feasibility of establishing a regional mechanism should take into account serious violations of human rights that still occur in many countries in the region, the low level of ratification of human rights treaties, the non-observance of treaty-obligations after ratification, and the tendency of some prominent individuals in some states to advocate a cultural relativist position on human rights as opposed to universality of human rights.

14. Despite a number of UN-sponsored workshops on regional

human rights mechanism for Asia-Pacific, states in the region have so far failed to reach a consensus on such a mechanism. Cultural, linguistic and religious heterogeneity, and the lack of agreement on the geographical definition of the region are cited by States as obstacles to such a consensus. The human rights community in the region is of the view that heterogeneity of language and religion is not an impediment to the establishment of such regional mechanism.

15. Respect for and observance of the principles of existing human rights instruments and recognition of the universality and indivisibility of human rights should be the foundation stone upon which any regional mechanism is established. Such a mechanism must not in anyway restrict full access by individuals from the region to the United Nations human rights mechanisms.

16. A two-step strategy should be pursued to establish a regional inter-governmental organization for promotion and protection of human rights. The first step would be the establishment of a regular inter-governmental forum to facilitate discussion and debate among governments on the establishment of a regional mechanism. The second step would be the establishment of a regional or sub-regional inter-governmental bodies for the promotion and protection of human rights.

17. Considering the lack of consensus among governments in the region, establishment of human rights mechanisms in different sub-regions may be more feasible and should be pursued with the

objective of eventually establishing a single mechanism for the whole region.

18. The United Nations and its Specialized Agencies should coordinate their efforts to facilitate creation of a regional mechanism for promotion and protection of human rights. Similarly, regional and sub-regional non-governmental organizations and issue-based networks should also work toward persuading the governments in the region to help establish a regional mechanism.

19. Discussion forums for representatives of governments on this issue should be encouraged. The United Nations University and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan should be congratulated for organizing a seminar on regional human rights issues recently in Tokyo and encouraged to follow-up on their joint efforts.

20. The Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (HURIGHTS OSAKA) and other regional organizations in Asia-Pacific are encouraged to interact and form a network to enhance the promotional and educational activities that emphasize the importance of a regional human rights mechanism.

V. Governments in the region

21. It is now fully accepted by all member-states of the United Nations that human rights are universal and indivisible. In order to give operational effect to this agreement, it is urged that those governments which have not ratified major international human rights instruments should do so. It is a matter of international concern that many states in the Asia-Pacific region have not yet

ratified the International Covenants on Human Rights.

22. Following the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action as well as declarations and programmes of action of other UN world conferences, all governments should formulate national plans of action for realizing human rights at the domestic level. The implementation of such plans should be monitored by the United Nations, national institutions and NGOs.

23. Following the practice on civil and political rights questions, governments should make a clear commitment to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights at the national level. That commitment should be cast in terms of human rights terminology which is inherently empowering. The commitment of governments should include time-bound plans to realize those rights.

24. In accordance with the Copenhagen Declaration, governments should promote social development (comprehensive human development) rather than mere economic growth by ensuring that all human rights are respected and promoted through their economic policies.

25. Official Development Assistance (ODA) should be so rendered as to promote civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights by encouraging and assisting recipient governments to develop a plan of action for the realization of these rights.

VI. Human rights defenders

26. The Asia-Pacific human rights community has not sufficiently addressed the existing inequalities in

society and their human rights implications. There is a need to strengthen its links to disadvantaged communities and to develop the latter's capability to deal with more sophisticated human rights issues affecting them in a more sophisticated manner. Adequate knowledge and skills in using multi-disciplinary approaches in addressing the underlying causes of human rights violations should be developed.

27. The human rights community in all regions of the world face challenges in ensuring an adequate response to sociocultural practices such as discrimination against women. The Asia-Pacific human rights community must take up this challenge.

28. The category of human rights defenders should encompass all those who are working for civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Special efforts should be made to protect them at regional and international levels.

29. Initiatives by the human rights community in formulating human rights principles in the form of people's charters, declarations and other statements are effective means of educating people on human rights. These efforts should be encouraged and supported.

30. The human rights community should develop more creative human rights education and training programmes to help communities make use of human rights norms as effective tools. They should conduct programmes to develop capabilities at the community level of effectively monitoring human rights violations and contributing to the development of remedies. Training, for instance, on

monitoring violations of economic, social and cultural rights and finding the means to redress them should be held.

31. The human rights community should take necessary steps to ensure that all relevant UN agencies are held accountable for their policies and programmes relating to human rights. The human rights community should realize the potential benefit of the High Commissioner's role in responding to human rights issues in the region. They should be prepared to provide assistance to the High Commissioner whenever necessary.

VII. Issues

32. Training programmes should be further developed to enable women and their organizations articulate the demand for gender sensitivity in all areas of national and international structures and institutions. Teachers at all levels of educational systems and decision-makers in government should be particularly involved in these training programmes.

33. Both women and men should develop strategies for creating a gender sensitive society. Social structures which cause gender discrimination must be given special attention. Monitoring the implementation of the Plan of Action of the Beijing conference is one opportunity for realizing this objective.

34. Networking among women's groups, particularly on thematic issues, should be further encouraged and provided with full resource support. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is urged to provide support through its technical assistance programme for the advancement

of the human rights of women.

35. In many countries in the region, judicial and administrative structures do not provide sufficient safeguard against human rights abuses by governments at all levels and by other actors. This applies in particular to the denial of human rights as a result of the acts and omissions of public authorities. Human rights discourse in the region has focused principally on setting norms and not on implementation and enforcement of those norms. The weakness of the rule of law and absence of independent judiciary, for instance, have not been sufficiently addressed by the human rights community.

36. National jurisprudence should take into full account the international human rights norms and standards. The United Nations should assist in developing or strengthening national judicial and administrative structures that will enforce human rights norms and standards. Regional and national experts may be asked to assist in this regard.

37. The public should be made aware of these norms and standards as well as the mechanisms for their implementation. Facilities and institutions should be created for this purpose.

38. The media should be considered as having an important responsibility for promoting and protecting human rights. At the same time, media persons should be protected against human rights abuses. NGOs should give this matter special attention and undertake programmes designed to inform and train media persons on human rights issues.

Prospects and Problems Of Human Rights Education

In a symposium held by HURIGHTS OSAKA on July 29, 1995 in Osaka city's Creo Osaka West auditorium, enlightening presentations on various experiences on human rights education were made. The experiences range from the level of the United Nations to the level of community and issue-based education work. The symposium was participated by the Director of the United Nations Center for Human Rights, Mr. John Pace, and a panel of human rights educators namely Mr. Yasumasa Hirasawa, Mr. Mori Minoru, Ms. Junko Kuninobu and Mr. Jefferson R. Plantilla. Almost two hundred people from non-governmental organizations, schools, and other private organizations were in attendance.

Mr. Pace, in a keynote speech, made a comprehensive presentation on the events that form United Nations' efforts in promoting human rights. He cited the fact that there is now a clear recognition of the importance of preventive human rights work which is basically what human rights education is all about. He stressed the various mention of human rights education in major human rights instruments notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child,



The symposium in Osaka

and the Vienna Declaration. He further explained the main features of the United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education which calls for the coordinative role of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the drawing up of national action plans by governments. He highlighted the requirement of setting up human rights education resource centers in each country to support continuing work on teaching people about their human rights. He repeated the plea of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Jose Ayala Lasso, for everyone to be involved in accomplishing the tasks of human rights education.

Translating human rights into day-to-day reality, creating a universal culture of human rights and making human rights the common language of humanity are catch-phrases in the United Nations' drive for the global human rights education movement. They will hopefully be key areas of accomplishments of human rights education by the end of the decade.

There is a huge task lying ahead for human rights education in the next ten years that can create a significant difference in the situation of human rights in this world.

The panel discussion that followed the keynote speech focused on specific issues of human rights education work. Mr. Mori

spoke of the experience in DOWA education. In Japan, an educational program on the issue of discrimination against fellow Japanese who happen to be labeled as Burakumin (descendants of groups of Japanese people who were politically outcast during the feudal era) is called DOWA education. It evolved due to the demands made by the Buraku groups on the government to take steps to stop discrimination against them. Mr. Mori pointed out that DOWA education tries to make people labeled as Buraku to understand their situation well and find out the means of resolving the problem. It is likewise directed at non-Buraku Japanese for them to understand the Buraku problem and eradicate discriminatory behavior and thinking toward Buraku people. He pointed out the problem of getting the non-Buraku Japanese to respond to this call for greater understanding and acceptance of the equal rights of Buraku people. He emphasized the value of understanding one's situation as a starting point in human rights education. He likewise pointed out that DOWA education can apply to issues regarding women, the disabled, and other minority groups.

Mr. Mori mentioned in his presentation the idea of developing self-esteem and asserting one's self without hurting others. He likewise pointed out the highly hierarchical relationships and the idea of homogenous community in the Japanese society that

cause discrimination against those seen as inferior or different. This should be considered in creating human rights education programs. The hierarchical social and cultural practices, and the non-acceptance of people with different culture and other attributes need to be changed through human rights education. He also mentioned developing a pedagogy of the oppressor, that is, human rights education program that focus on people whose use of power or authority has been violating human rights. Government personnel, for example, would fall under this category.

Along the same line, Ms. Kuninobu expressed the need to have a fuller understanding of the discriminated situation of women. She summarized the problem of women discrimination as basically the domination of the weak by the strong. Discrimination comes in due to a social construct that treats women as the weaker members of society. To remedy this situation, the dominant group (men) should recognize the inherent equality of women and men. This is reflected in the type and value given to women's labor. This is also seen in the way society assigns lesser role to women on matters affecting the society as a whole. Women are mainly relegated to reproductive role - bearing and rearing children at home in addition to serving the men in the family. She thus recommends the adoption of education programs that present the proper gender roles of women and men. It must likewise lead to empowerment of women. At present, the education system does not incorporate

subjects on gender sensitivity. Instead, there is a hidden curriculum (use of language and promotion of traditional ideas by the teachers) in educational institutions that sustain the common notion of inferiority of women. This hidden curriculum is actually in the form of social and cultural practices that reflect this conservative view on women. Any education program on this issue will cover both women and men. And the educational approach will have to consider their respective different experiences.

At the regional level, human rights education activities are varied. They not only cover issues about discrimination but also a whole range of human rights issues including related subjects on development, environment, health, peace among others. In majority of cases, human rights education activities are called by different names. What is common is the main idea of analyzing the present problematic situation of people and devising ways of addressing them. This whole exercise comprises the education process. At times, what may be lacking is a deeper adaptation of the human rights perspective in the education program. Such perspective must not only refer to the substance of the education activities but to the very process being used as well. Thus having human rights law subject must be coupled with participatory systems of learning human rights concepts and mechanisms. In many countries in the region, most human rights education activities are mainly done in the informal and non-formal education

systems. There are very few initiatives in incorporating human rights education in the formal education system. To promote human rights education regionally, there must be more information sharing among the groups involved; the formal education system must be given equal attention; key/influential groups must be targetted for education such as government personnel and members of the media; and evaluation of the present programs and systems must be made to pave the way for further development. All these will help promote the UN Decade for Human Rights Education. This is the gist of the presentation made by Mr. Plantilla.

At the open forum, a participant raised the important issue of inadequate attention given to the rights of the disabled. He stressed the lack of government efforts in Japan to promote the rights of the disabled. Unclear government policies and withdrawal of special education for the disabled are examples. It was likewise pointed out that women's reproductive rights affect the birth of a disabled person since women can decide not to give birth to a baby detected as being disabled.

Another issue was raised regarding the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education. It was clarified that the UN Decade can help a lot in creating a positive environment for human rights education in Asia-Pacific. As a UN initiative, it can persuade governments to adopt human rights education programs. Regional institutions such as HURIGHTS OSAKA can help

promote the UN Decade. Greater networking among the various groups in the region is an effective way of doing this.

In his summation of the panel discussion, Mr. Hirasawa pointed out that human rights education to be effective has to address specific human rights issues; develop self-esteem and assertiveness among the people; create program for those who violate human rights (such as government personnel) to increase their understanding of the importance and relevance of human rights in their work. He stressed the importance of creating national action plans to implement the Plan of Action of the UN Decade. He cited the task of human rights educators in developing the universal human rights culture. One area, he said, that needs attention is human rights education program for people working in private corporations.

The Chairperson of HURIGHTS OSAKA, Professor Kinhide Mushakoji, in his welcome remarks pointed out that the people should have the right to human rights education which includes participating in activities such as this symposium. The Director of HURIGHTS OSAKA, Professor Dong-hoon Kim, in his closing remarks stated the commitment of the organization to help realize the goals of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education and take into account the plight of the disabled, among others.

HURIGHTS OSAKA held this symposium on human rights education on the occasion of its first anniversary and of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.

The Significance of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education: Its Background and Future*

by John Pace

Director, United Nations Center for Human Rights

The goal of the United Nations is to translate international human rights norms into national day-to-day reality. Sadly, United Nations efforts in realizing this goal have been slow.

Recent developments show that United Nations has shifted from drafting to implementation of international human rights norms. In 1987, the United Nations set up the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights. By permitting voluntary contributions to be made toward the emerging program of technical cooperation, the United Nations boosted preventive action in the field of human rights, a form of activity that was essentially new at that time. In 1988, the World Public Information Campaign for Human Rights was launched. It has five major types of action:

1. production, dissemination of printed information and reference materials;
2. workshops, seminars and training courses;
3. fellowships and internships;
4. special Human Rights observances;
5. media and promotional activities.

This campaign aims to facilitate the assimilation of international norms into the State administrative process in order to make the process of implementa-

tion a matter of course.

The decision in 1989 to convene the World Conference on Human Rights is another development in support of realizing human rights. These developments led to the proclamation of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education in December 1994.

The United Nations' program for implementing international human rights norms now has three parts: protection, promotion and preventive action. Promotional and preventive action were added to the protection mechanism that had been worked out in the earlier years in the conventional and extra-conventional fields. The addition of the two latter parts is due to a realization that awareness and education is a prior condition for any meaningful implementation of human rights standards.

The United Nations is seeking to build a universal culture of human rights based on its charter and the international bill of human rights. As phrased by the United Nations Secretary General, human rights should become the "common language of humanity". Human rights education is the means to attain this.

In the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, where so much acrimony and polarization of views charac-

terized the process of drafting the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, human rights education received the greatest concurrence by governments. The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action contains a significant number of statements on human rights education. They all call on States to initiate and support human rights education. It also calls for the proclamation of the Decade for Human Rights Education.

The Decade for Human Rights Education has a Plan of Action that sets out a complete strategy for education activities. It has the following objectives:

1. to assess the needs and formulate effective strategies for the furtherance of human rights education at the international, regional, national and local levels;
2. to build and strengthen programs and capacities for human rights education at these levels;
3. to coordinate the development of effective human rights education materials;
4. to strengthen the role and capacity of mass media in the furtherance of human rights education;
5. to disseminate globally the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the maximum number of languages, and in other forms appropriate for various levels of literacy and for disabled.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, with the support of the United Nations Center for Human Rights, will promote and coordinate the implementation of the Plan of Action. Governments, national human rights institutions, national NGOs,



Mr. John Pace during the keynote speech at the symposium in Osaka

various United Nations agencies and other international organizations working on human rights will be involved.

The Plan of Action aims to bring the objectives of the Decade to as wide an audience as possible through both formal and non-formal education, and encourages an approach which is designed to build permanent capacity, including the training of trainers.

Activities will provide special attention to women, children, the aged, minorities, refugees, indigenous peoples, persons in extreme poverty and other vulnerable sectors as well as to police, prison officials, lawyers, judges, teachers and curriculum developers, the armed forces, international civil servants, development officers and peacekeepers, NGOs, the media, government officials, parliamentarians, and other groups which are in a position to effect the realization of human rights.

Educational establishments and programs, and appropriate institutions in society will be encouraged to incorporate human rights education into the formal and non-formal education systems respectively.

The Plan of Action envisages the designation of national focal points for human rights education in each State which will be charged with identifying national human rights education needs, developing a national plan of action, raising funds, coordinating with regional and international bodies and reporting to the High Commissioner.

Each State is encouraged to establish a national human rights resource and training center capable of engaging in research, training of trainers, etc. Where such centers exist, the plan encourages States to work toward their strengthening.

The concept of human rights education appears in a number of international human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 26), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 13), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 29), and, most recently, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (section D, paragraphs 78-82). Taken together, these instruments provide a clear definition of the concept of human rights education as agreed by the international community.

Human rights education may thus be defined as training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the molding of attitudes which are directed to:

a. the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

b. the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;

c. the promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality, and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples, racial, ethnic and religious groups;

d. the enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society; and

e. the furtherance of the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Translated into teaching lessons, these objectives become lessons for life because they teach the sanctity of life and therefore of human dignity; they provide guide for everyday life; they apply from the first day of life to the last: protecting children, developing the youth, empowering adults and elevating the seniors.

The task of the United Nations is to bring these lessons for life to the world.

(*Note: This is an edited version of the keynote speech of Mr. John Pace in the Symposium on Human Rights Education organized by HURIGHTS OSAKA on July 29, 1995.)

Regional Human Rights Education Initiatives :

Report on a meeting on human rights education in Bangkok

*By Jefferson Plantilla
Researcher of HURIGHTS OSAKA*

Gatherings of regional organizations do not ordinarily occur. This is very much true in the case of groups with regional human rights education initiatives. It is important, though, for regional organizations to come and discuss matters of common concern. That happened in a meeting organized by HURIGHTS OSAKA on September 21, 1995 in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting was attended mainly by regional non-governmental organizations based in Bangkok. Seven regional NGOs (excluding HURIGHTS OSAKA), namely, Asian Coalition on Housing Rights, Child Workers Asia, End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism, Jesuit Refugee Service, Asian Cultural Forum on Development, Asian Forum on Human Rights and Development, and Asian Regional Resource Center for Human Rights Education were represented. A representative of the ASEAN Canada Fund office based in Singapore was also in attendance. Two regional NGOs were not able to send representatives (Child Rights Asianet and Asia-South Pacific Bureau on Adult Education).

The meeting was mainly a sharing session. Each organization made a brief presentation on the activities that relate to human rights education. On the whole,

the presentations show an interesting picture of human rights trainings, workshops and seminars addressing specific sectors and issues.

Child Workers Asia, a regional network of grassroots organizations involved in working children issue, provides a forum for sharing experiences among small organizations. Through field visits, it tries to expand the knowledge base of these organizations on human rights and strengthen their campaign programs. This month-long activity covers groups from Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, India and Nepal. It also holds regional and national seminars and workshops.

Forum Asia, a regional membership organization, had a series of regional and national workshops on fact-finding and documentation as well as on specific issues such as rights of the child and of women. It plans to have trainings on preparation of national human rights report, trial observation, and on specific issues such as child rights. It is collaborating with a Thai university (Mahidol University) in setting up a regional human rights program. It is also helping out another Thai university (Chulalongkorn University) in a peace promotion program where public

discussions involving government officials will be held.

Jesuit Refugee Service, an international organization with an Asia office, engages in human rights education as a component of its direct services to refugee communities. It plans to have a more sustained HRE program to complement intermittent HRE activities along the Thai border. It collaborates with other human rights organizations on human rights education activities.

Asian Coalition on Housing Rights, a broad regional coalition of NGOs, community-based organizations and individuals, promotes exchange of information and experiences on housing conditions and helps develop alternatives to eviction. As part of its training program, workshops on capacity building (focusing on community organizing and surveying of housing rights situation) for members of grassroots communities are held. It also organizes exchange visits for young students such as engineering, medical and law students in order to relate technical science to social realities. It advocates for curriculum change to include the housing rights issue.

Asian Cultural Forum on Development, a membership organization, published a book on human rights education. It tries to bring the human rights component to the programs of development NGOs. It likewise collaborates with other organizations on specific issues such as human rights in difficult circumstances, East Timor and Burma.

End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism, an international

network of organizations, engages in activities that build awareness on child prostitution. It supports the activities of its national contact organizations in 25 countries worldwide through information dissemination. It also has a training program on media for foreign correspondents.

Asian Regional Resource Center for Human Rights Education holds workshops for human rights educators. It focuses on propagation of participant-centered education method to support the programs of national groups in the region. It likewise collects materials on human rights education for use by organizations in the region. It is planning to have a regional training for members of internal security forces.

Each of these organizations are generally engaged in different forms of support activities for national/community organizations. They are basically providing avenues for strengthening programs and skills of organizations doing actual field work. Regional human rights education programs thus become the media for enhancing advocacy, training, documentation and direct service programs of the national/community organizations.

Events in the Region

- The Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) based in the University of New South Wales (Australia) is holding two training sessions (one in French and another in English) for the Pacific NGO workers. The sessions will be held in Fiji on November 6-18, 1995. Another session for Asian NGO workers will be held in Bangkok, Thailand on January 9-February 3, 1996. The Pacific training will be the last sessions that will be attended by current DTP Director, John Scott Murphy. We wish him continued work in the Asia-Pacific scene.
- The Korean Human Rights Network (KORHNET) will be convening an international conference on national security laws. It will be held on November 23-26, 1995 in Seoul, Korea. The conference will examine the role of national security laws in the post-Cold War era and their impact on human rights, and the tasks and strategies needed to meet this problem.
- The Asian Regional Resource Center for Human Rights Education (ARRC) will be holding a South Asian workshop on developing human rights education modules. Participants will be coming from non-governmental organizations. The venue will most likely be in Dhaka, Bangladesh. And the workshop may be held during the first half of 1996.
- The Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) will be holding a forum on human rights and development. The forum entitled "Forum of the Poor" will be held on December 10-15, 1995 in Thailand. The forum is meant to be a sharing of stories of people deprived of rights because of the development paradigm followed by many States in the region.
- The Canadian Human Rights Foundation is planning to launch an Asian regional training program in collaboration with Asian partner organizations. The program will cover specific themes such as: training for security forces, refugees and migration, domestic violence, and the right to work. The program will be accompanied by curriculum development, publications, network support, and feedback into the Summer Course (international human rights training program).
- The Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC) will hold an international meeting and symposium on December 8-10, 1995 in Tokyo, Japan. The meeting will dwell on the theme: "Creating Together Toward a New Partnership: NGO Support Schemes Contributing to People's Self-reliance." The meeting will be attended by regional and national development networks, private funding agencies as well as Official Development Aid agencies of Japan, Canada, USA and Australia.
- The Philippine Commission on Human Rights is convening a regional conference on human rights education by mid-December this year in Manila, Philippines. The conference with the theme "Asian Human Rights Education for Development" will be attended by government representatives from 14 countries in Asia, namely, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Republic of Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. The conference will be a venue for the participating countries to share their views and experiences on human rights education which can then be shared to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.