

Justice and Peace Commission of Thailand

RUNGTHIP IMRUANGRUANG

Thailand is a democracy that recognizes human rights and freedoms. However, most Thais are not familiar with their human rights due to lack of a human rights education program. Basic human rights are taught only in an elective undergraduate subject of certain universities and mentioned in some subjects such as social studies.

As children and youth are unaware of their human rights, they do not know how to protect them. Human rights violations are widespread although not as much as in some countries. Some violations are exposed by the mass media while the less known—violation of the rights of children and workers, and sexual abuse—grow more serious day by day.

Thailand is a party to various international human rights agreements and has adopted a constitution (1997) that enshrines human dignity and the rights and freedoms. Educators should thus help Thais fully understand their human rights and live together peacefully.

Response to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education

The Justice and Peace Commission of Thailand (JPT) was formed in 1977 to help people, especially the marginalized, become aware of social injustice and human rights violations. JPT conducts social analysis and disseminates information to the public in Thailand and abroad.

In response to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004), JPT developed a project on human rights education and published *Handbook on Human Rights and Peace Education* for teachers. The project aims to provide teachers the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable them to transmit human rights awareness to children and youth.

JPT formed the Human Rights Education Project Committee (Committee) to implement this project.

Objectives

The project has the following objectives:

- Promote human rights in Catholic schools.
- Give children and youth in Catholic schools the chance to learn about human rights so they can protect them and respect those of others.
- Develop teaching techniques and methods for human rights education, and a learning process that can take place inside and outside the classroom.
- Use *Handbook on Human Rights and Peace Education* to train teachers to teach children and youth in Catholic schools.

Target Groups

The project focuses on teachers, students, pupils, administrators, and personnel in all Catholic schools. The project organizers are often asked why they focus on Catholic schools. The answer is that public schools do not usually allow nongovernmental organizations to conduct courses or to work closely with teachers and school administrators, which the project organizers must do since this is a pilot project to develop a training module and the handbook.

Activities

Training courses

Intensive training courses on human rights, especially the rights of children and women, are organized for teachers in schools that intend to promote a human rights culture. At the end of the course, the participants prepare a practical lesson plan for their own classes. The handbook is used for teaching.

Each course has no more than 40 participants. Training lasts 3–5 days. Some participants are potential trainers.

Mobile training team

Since a large number of teachers cannot attend the training courses, schools are encouraged to organize their own. The mobile team, consisting of trainers and organizers, provides intensive training (for 1 day or 3–4 days) for interested schools. The team has helped around 20 schools or over 300 teachers.

Publishing *Handbook for Human Rights and Peace Education*

JPT drafted *Handbook on Human Rights and Peace Education* in 1999. It tackles the following:

- definition of human rights;
- how human rights help build a better world;
- people who help promote peace;
- rights of women and children; and
- the Thai Constitution.

Teachers create their own teaching methods or exercises based on the main concepts given in the sample guidelines.

After several training courses, the handbook was revised to include the following:

- religious teaching and human rights;
- definition of human rights;
- history of international human rights;

- human rights in Thailand;
- rights of women;
- child rights;
- human rights in school;
- how to make a lesson plan; and
- questions and answers about human rights.

The new edition will be promoted in Catholic schools and among the public and nongovernmental and governmental organizations. The handbook will be distributed by JPT, Catholic Social Communications of Thailand, and human rights organizations.

The committee also plans to publish a book of lesson plans made by teachers trained under the project.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation help clarify program direction, gather feedback from teachers and schools, and point out mistakes and weak points, thus helping the project become more efficient.

JPT does the following:

School visits

A team of 3–4 trainers visits some schools whose teachers have undergone intensive training. The team updates the school on the outcome of the training, discusses the activity plans with school administrators, and discusses the lesson plans developed during the training with the teachers.

At Montfort College in Chiangmai, the team members met teachers (trained under the project or not) who conduct human rights education. The team discussed their human rights education activities and the results of lesson plan testing.

Teachers also integrate human rights concepts into extracurricular activities such as visits to hill tribes and HIV/AIDS-infected communities.

As a result, the activities achieve the following:

- Teachers gain satisfaction in their work.
- Students become aware of social problems and the situation of the marginalized and thus learn how to respect the rights of others.
- Schools gain satisfaction from the outcome of the activities.

The team identified the following problems:

- Teachers do not fully understand human rights after only one training session.
- The school and home environment do not support the teaching of human rights. For instance, parents do not encourage their children to respect the poor, which makes it difficult to help children integrate respect for human rights into their daily life.

The following suggestions were received:

- Teachers should undergo more advanced training.
- Potential teacher trainers should be trained.
- Parents should be involved in the project.

Committee meetings

The Committee members meet every 2–3 months to monitor the project and see to it that activity plans are executed.

Evaluation

Evaluation has two levels. The first is done during and at the end of training activities to know how to improve the courses, methods,

and approaches to promoting human rights education.

The second level is done after the training activities, using an evaluation form sent to all participants to assess their action plans and how these are being executed, and what difficulties and obstacles teachers face.

Conclusion

The human rights education project is going according to plan. Some schools—Montfort College and Regina Coeli School in Chiang Mai, Mater Dei School and Saint Joseph Thipawan School in Bangkok—are interested in the project. Teachers from these schools use their own lesson plans. School administrators are encouraging the teachers to attend more training and develop more human rights activities in schools such as youth camps, human rights bulletin boards, etc.

The handbook is the concrete result of this project and we hope it will be helpful for those who wish to integrate human rights into their teaching or other activities. The Committee will promote human rights education in schools all over the country.

The introduction of human rights education in schools is timely since education reform emphasizes child-centered learning. A new education policy encourages school officials and teachers to write the curriculum themselves. JPT sees this as an opportunity to help the teachers integrate human rights concepts into the new curriculum.