

# Human Rights Education in Schools and Colleges

JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION, MUMBAI

Considering the existence of human rights violations all around the world, it is ideal to encourage the members of society to get a sense of respect towards others, and to hope that they will not be among those who will violate the rights of others in the future. This is one important aspect of the work we do as human rights educators.

As stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights education develops the human personality and strengthens respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It promotes understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and furthers the activities of the United Nations (UN) for the maintenance of peace.

Human rights education builds on solidarities and social networking among people. The UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) helped facilitate this networking among members of the civil society.

Human rights education programs should provide a forum for sharing individual experiences in the field of human rights training and education, provide an international understanding of human rights and related issues, promote equality in human dignity, and promote intercultural learning and participation. The long-term aim of such program is to establish a culture where human rights are understood, defended and respected. Thus, anyone who works with other people may be said to engage in human rights education if they have this end in mind and take steps to achieve it - no matter how or where they do it.

Human rights education should be intro-

duced in schools to enable students to recognize the importance of human rights and to create a human rights environment within the schools.

The Justice and Peace Commission in Mumbai, India aims to make young people become aware of various issues and inspire them to assist in the defense of human rights.

The general objectives the JPC Mumbai program on human rights education in schools are:

- To strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
- To develop a sense of individual self-respect and respect for others: a value for human dignity
- To develop attitudes and behavior that will lead to respect for the rights of others
- To ensure genuine gender equality and equal opportunities for women in all spheres
- To promote respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, particularly towards different national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and other minorities and communities
- To empower people towards more active citizenship
- To promote democracy, development, social justice, communal harmony, solidarity and

friendship among people and nations

- To further the activities of international institutions aimed at the creation of a culture of peace, based upon universal values of human rights, international understanding, tolerance and non-violence.
- Provide a sharing forum for individual experiences in the field of human rights training and education.

The discussions under this program include the following: understanding of justice, equality, human dignity, non-discrimination, democracy, universality of human rights, citizen's responsibilities, interdependence and solidarity. There is also discussion on the major international instruments, status of ratification by India of these instruments, its reservations and reporting, etc. There are discussions on the different human rights commissions in India, their role and impact; the international human rights monitoring mechanisms, UN interventions and their relevance in India. The subject of discussion is always based on the target participants and their interest. The methodology also depends on the target participants.

JPC Mumbai has been organizing many sessions for the students and teachers of schools and colleges. There is a group called Mumbai Initiative of Human Rights Education (MIHRE), which is actively involved in the human rights education activities at the local level. JPC is an active part of this initiative that started in October 2003 as an outcome of a National Human Rights Education Workshop organized by JPC and the International Human Rights Education Consortium (IHREC) in Mumbai. The JPC and MIHRE organized a series of workshops for different target groups. Some workshops were for teachers who teach human rights at the tertiary level. The discussions mainly were on the current syllabus and its modification and also on campaign to promote human rights education in all educational institutions. There were workshops for the different groups of schoolteachers, and sometimes only

for college teachers, principals, activists and other interested people.

In February-March 2007, JPC held two workshops on human rights education. One was in Mumbai that focused on the rule of law in global society. The target participants were teachers and activists. The topics included human rights instruments, use of human rights standards by the Indian courts, India's foreign policies and their impact on the weaker sections of society, UN mechanisms and their accessibility, India-Pakistan and the peace process, UN peacekeeping and protection of human rights, global war on terror and India, nuclear deals and political economy of oil, etc. There was session on the future strategy and follow-ups.

The other human rights education workshop was held in Kerala, India. It involved only college teachers. The discussions were on the concept and evolution of human rights, international human rights instruments relating to civil, political, and social, economic and cultural rights, role of academic institutions in the promotion of human rights, Dalits, tribals, child rights, right to criminal compensation in Indian legislation, death penalty, religion and human rights, human rights commissions in India, etc. The last part of the workshop was on the establishment of a network on human right education in South India.

Both programs were organized by JPC, IHREC and the local organizations. The key resource persons for both programs were Theodore Orlin, President of IHREC, and a few other local speakers.

JPC also has long and short human rights sessions for school students. The topics for the sessions vary from school to school. Most of the time they are based on different provisions of the UDHR. The methodology is always activity-based. There is always time for open discussion followed by evaluation of the session. From the year 2004 to 2006 JPC organized many human rights awareness programs for school students and teachers. In the recent school program, the activities dealt with the concept of right to

justice, life with dignity, right to equality, right to freedom and also their responsibility. It used group discussion and presentation followed by feedback. The last session was on corruption and discussion on the citizens' responsibility to curtail it. A human rights program for teachers will discuss the new law on women's rights against domestic violence. Recently, JPC has been asked not only to conduct human rights sessions for principals, teachers and students but also to initiate the creation of human rights atmosphere in educational institutions.

On the occasion of International Human Rights Day 2006, JPC organized in collaboration with a local college a roundtable conference regarding the future of human rights education. College teachers, students and activists participated in the conference.

The Chairperson of JPC, Allwyn D'Silva, being a Vice-President of IHREC organizes many discussion sessions on human rights education at various levels and for different groups.