

9th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Unleashing the Full Potential of Civil Society

Summary of Observations and Outcomes

More than 300 people including some 80 speakers from all continents participated in the 9th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION, held in Sydney, Australia, from 26 November to 29 November 2018.

The following Summary of Observations and outcomes has been prepared in consultation with members of the Organising and Advisory Committees, as the basis for continuing conversations regarding the role and contribution of Human Rights Education in furthering peace, democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as human dignity and the promotion of intercultural dialogue, social harmony and justice. It was received and endorsed by participants in the Closing Plenary on Thursday, 29th November 2018, by acclamation.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we have gathered, the Darug, Tharawal, Gandangarra and Wiradjuri Peoples, and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. We appreciate and gather in solidarity with all First Nations people throughout the world.

We express our appreciation to the City of Parramatta, the Government of the State of New South Wales and the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia for their warm hospitality and welcome the generous support provided by Sponsors and Partners.

We commend the Western Sydney University for its ongoing support of the international Human Rights Education movement and for underwriting the success of the Conference. We commend its continued commitment to promote, by example, a culture of respect for human rights.

We continue to draw inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), on the occasion of its 70th anniversary. The UDHR powerfully proclaims the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. We also celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration, which highlights the value of Human Rights Education.

We recall the commitments undertaken by all States Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 13 of which stipulates in part: “1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” In this connection we note General Assembly Resolution 53/243 (A Declaration on a Culture of Peace).

We recall with appreciation the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE) launched in 2005 and its three Plans of Action, also the United Nations General Assembly’s adoption in 2011 of the United Nations Declaration on Human

Rights Education and Training. These initiatives provide a coherent and comprehensive framework for our discussions and represent significant commitments by all United Nations Member States, despite uneven progress in implementation.

We also recall the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which states that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" and acknowledge the 20th Anniversary of the United Nations' Declaration on human rights defenders.

Coming from diverse backgrounds (international organizations, educational institutions, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), employers' federations and trade unions, faith communities, and media), as citizens, the realization of "the Full Potential of Civil Society" by strengthening Human Rights Education for people everywhere is our common goal.

We draw inspiration from the implementation measures enacted by governments to give effect to guiding principles, declarations, and conventions that have been signed and ratified by United Nations Member States in the years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

2. Context

We welcome the commitment of all Member States of the United Nations to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. We welcome the commitment to the dual objectives of addressing inequality (leaving no one behind) and unsustainable development which not only threatens but already is harming our shared environment, depleting natural resources and contributing to climate vulnerability and conflicts.

We celebrate Human Rights Education's increasing prominence on the United Nations' agenda, with dedicated initiatives like the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011).

We note in particular the United Nations General Assembly's inclusion of Human Rights Education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a specific target of Goal 4 on quality education (Target 4.7), its incorporation in United Nations initiatives on preventing and countering violent extremism and in the United Nations Youth Strategy launched by the Secretary General in September 2018.

We affirm the fundamental importance of a rights-based approach in politics, economy and society, noting the universality and indivisibility of human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural - which are interdependent and inter-related.

We are concerned by the human rights implications of insufficient progress in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation, with increasing food and water insecurity, rising sea levels, heightened levels of inter-state and internal conflict leading to even larger numbers of people leaving their homes to seek a better future, also of recent failures to prevent and/or resolve inter and intra state conflict which have had devastating effects on people in communities in many parts of the world, and deal more effectively with signs of escalating tensions and a new arms race among major powers.

We note with concern the significant shrinking of civil society space and the reversal in many places of many of the gains made towards systems of governance that advance the fulfillment of the goals set out in United Nations Charter. We note also the rising tide of corruption, including all forms of trafficking and rising levels of violence in all its forms, in particular gender based violence and violence against children.

These concerns strengthen our conviction that greater and sustained investment in Human Rights Education should be the cornerstone for efforts to achieve the dual objectives of the SDG framework, addressing inequality and sustainability.

3. Human Rights Education for greater civil society engagement

We believe that, whether as rights holders or duty bearers, all citizens have a role to play in promoting human rights culture.

We acknowledge that Human Rights Education actors have a responsibility to uphold and deepen understanding of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to work with other stakeholders to encourage the promotion of and respect for human rights, through strengthened implementation of Human Rights Education, particularly at the national and local levels.

We believe that civil society (including employers' federations and trade unions, academe, professional associations, Non Government Organisations and faith communities) has a very significant role to play in global advocacy and national and local implementation, working alongside public and private sector stakeholders and national human rights institutions to ensure that relevant themes and challenges are addressed in Human Rights Education from pre-school to primary, secondary and tertiary levels and in other training and "learning" contexts.

We acknowledge the role of the media in promoting and contributing to healthy societies in general and to Human Rights Education, including education for peace. Indeed, we contend that the power of the media, locally and globally, should be demonstrated by responsible journalism, courageous investigation, balanced reporting and entertaining programs that educate readers and viewers on the benefits of the realization of human rights for all.

We welcome the progress made in increasing informed, civil society engagement, as a result of Human Rights Education but believe that more needs to be done to develop a culture of human rights and secure rights for all. We note especially

- slow take up by some United Nations Member States to legislate or make other arrangements to assure the implementation of Human Rights Education commitments
- the decline in investment in Human Rights Education, with national and international curricula, pedagogy and best practices in design and delivery falling behind
- the gaps in relation to the protection and advancement of rights for women and children.

We are especially concerned by the lack of support for Human Rights Education for and in relation to disempowered or otherwise marginalized or vulnerable groups (including First Nations and Indigenous peoples, the homeless, the unemployed, the LGBTIQ communities, the elderly, refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons, children, survivors of gender-based violence, discrimination based on medical conditions, and persons with disabilities), recalling the Agenda 2030 commitment to "leave no one behind".

4. Commitment

Given the scale and complexity of challenges facing humanity this century, all participants, regardless of status, place of work or affiliation, commit to more strenuous effort at a personal level, and in partnerships with other stakeholders (public authorities and private sector partners, and civil society actors) to promote Human Rights Education and move the human rights discourse from the margins to center-stage.

We commit to working constructively to advance to the concepts, language and narrative of Human Rights Education. building prosperous and peaceful societies at local and global levels, and paying particular attention to areas where implementation of commitments at national, regional, and international levels has fallen behind.

As the Third Phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education moves into its final year, we commit to working together to promote use of the “Evaluating Human Rights Training Activities: Handbook for Human Rights Educators (2011) and evaluation methodologies designed to assess systemic or transformational change.

5. From words to action

Participants at the 9th International Conference on Human Rights Education constitute a “community of learning”, contributing from diverse roles and responsibilities, commenting from the perspectives of different disciplines, and offering suggestions for cooperation to build on the momentum of previous conferences. Each “Conference” is part of a continuum, drawing on decades of learning and experience, local to global.

We call on United Nations Member States, business and civil society everywhere to renew their commitment to support global processes to ensure the protection of and respect for human rights for all.

Pursuant to Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, and proposed in the World Programme for Human Rights Education, we call for renewed effort to raise awareness among decision and opinion makers, including Parliamentarians and Public Servants, of the important contribution that Human Rights Education makes to support implementation at national and local levels of commitments made in the Universal Declaration and reinforced by international law and national legislation.

We call for increased investment in Human Rights Education, recognizing that, in some contexts where access to quality education (including Human Rights Education) is lacking and civil society is a nascent phenomenon, the education required to build a culture of human rights is insufficient or absent. In other contexts, there is a significant gap between theory and practice, with Human Rights Education integrated in curricula, but poorly implemented.

We recommend that international organizations, national public authorities, national human rights institutions, businesses, educational institutions, relevant professional associations, civil society organizations, faith communities and the media implement creative strategies to increase further intellectual and financial investment in Human Rights Education, to help enrich national and international curricula, further critical pedagogy and promote best practices in design and delivery.

The Human Rights Education Constituency

A possible first step for the Organising and Advisory committees might be to review of the outcomes and recommendations from past conferences, providing evidence of progress made and work yet to be accomplished.

In the context of wide-ranging discussions in plenary and interactive sessions at this conference, the need for constant attention to context and learner-centered Human Rights Education methodologies was emphasized, with examples drawn from different parts of the world, in diverse jurisdictions and in different sectors.

With recent progress in the elaboration of evaluation methodologies to measure changes in attitude and behavior and systemic transformation, we recommend more purposeful investment in information and knowledge exchange, using existing platforms, journals etc and creating opportunities to pool ideas. We propose that consideration be given to creating an “evaluation for transformation” interest group.

We recommend that steps be taken to initiate and support a process of participatory evaluation and assessment processes at national levels during 2019, for purposes of learning and improvement and as a contribution to objective monitoring of human rights education for both rights holders and duty bearers for the World Programme for Human Rights Education Phase 3 final report due in 2020.

Sustained investment in strategic alliances and other partnerships is another area which would be assisted by a consolidation and updating of information available on current networks and new initiatives and financing modalities. In this regard, we recommend that Human Rights Education actors seek opportunities to strengthen individual and organizational advocacy, partnering and collaboration skills in cooperation with partners.

Capacity building to strengthen strategic foresight, critical thinking and problem solving skills is also recommended to enable Human Rights educators to promote “rights-mindedness” to deal with challenges to global security and the fourth industrial revolution.

Engaging with Civil Society

In line with the Conference theme, a number of suggestions were made regarding the opportunities and challenges involved in *unleashing the full potential of civil society*.

For Human Rights Education actors, with the announcement of “youth” as the focus for the next phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, we propose the creation of an ICHRE working group to ensure civil society participation in Phase 4 that is bottom up and gender and age inclusive.

Greater awareness of the opportunities and risks of new forms of communication and new media opportunities, the use of cutting edge science and technology will be especially relevant in engaging children and young adults, given the pervasive influences of advertising and entertainment and social media, forms of human rights abuse on-line and “rights” issues relating to digitalization, enabling Human Rights Education outreach to everyone, everywhere, at any time in their everyday life.

We recommend active engagement with media and media foundations to encourage reporting by promoting positive human rights case histories and by reporting accurately and in context on human rights incidents as lead stories. We also urge strategic alliances with faith communities in support of shared goals.

We call on Duty Bearers to create an enabling environment for civil society actors, to assure their capacity to intervene on behalf of marginalized groups; assure protection; enable the fulfillment of human rights through information and education with local communities; support advocacy initiatives with local, regional and national governments; record and report incidences related to human rights; ensure that human rights language is applied wherever appropriate to development and social challenges, building a strong, articulate and persuasive community of human rights educators online and offline.

We recommend more determined engagement on international, regional and national and municipal levels to urge all stakeholders to mainstream Human Rights Education as a tool for social cohesion towards peaceful coexistence in the spirit of the UNESCO Constitution, from early childhood to schools and universities and at professional levels in ways that call for a “lived awareness” of these principles, coherently and systematically countering toxic narratives.

We look forward to welcoming you to the 10th International Conference on Human rights Education next year.

Dr. Sev Ozdowski AM
On behalf of the Organising and Advisory Committees