



THE ROLE OF DECLARATION OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS IN PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

The history of human rights has been shaped by all major world events and by the struggle for dignity, freedom and equality everywhere. Yet, it was only with the establishment of the United Nations that human rights finally achieved formal, universal recognition.

The turmoil and atrocities of the Second World War and the growing struggle of colonial nations for independence prompted the countries of the world to create a forum to deal with some of the war's consequences and, in particular, to prevent the recurrence of such appalling events. This forum was the United Nations.

When the United Nations was founded in 1945, it reaffirmed the faith in human rights of all the peoples taking part. Human rights were cited in the founding Charter as central to their concerns and have remained so ever since.

One of the first major achievements of the newly formed United Nations was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. This powerful instrument continues to exert an enormous impact on people's lives all over the world.

The Declaration recognizes that the "inherent dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" and is linked to the recognition of the fundamental rights to which every human being aspires, namely the right to life, liberty and security of person; the right to an adequate standard of living; the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution; the right to own property; the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right to education; the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment, among others. These are inherent rights to be enjoyed by all inhabitants of the global village (women, men, children and all groups in society, whether disadvantaged or not) are not "gifts" to be withdrawn, withheld or granted at someone's whim or will.

On the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998, Mary Robinson, Higher Commissioner for Human Rights, called it "one of the great inspirational documents of our human history". It has served as the model for many national constitutions and has truly become the most universal of all instruments, having been translated into more languages than any other.

The Declaration has inspired a large number of subsequent human rights instruments, which together constitute the international law of human rights. These instruments include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), treaties that are legally binding on the States that are parties to them. The Universal Declaration and the two Covenants constitute the International Bill of Rights.

The rights contained in the Declaration and the two Covenants have been further elaborated in other treaties such as an International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

(1966), which declares dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred as being punishable by law, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), prescribing measures to be taken to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life, education, employment, health, marriage and the family.

Of particular importance to anyone involved with schools is the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which lays down guarantees of the child's human rights. Adopted by the General Assembly in 1989, the Convention has been ratified by more countries than any other human rights treaty. In addition to guaranteeing children protection from harm and abuse and making special provision for their survival and welfare through, for example, health care, education, and family life, it accords them the right to participate in society and in decision-making that concerns them. Two Protocols to the Convention have recently been adopted, the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000).

Chart of the Principal United Nations Human Rights Instruments

International Bill of Rights				
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948				
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966			International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966	
Convention relating to the status of refugees, 1951	International convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, 1966	Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, 1979	Convention against torture and other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 1984	Convention on the rights of the child, 1989

PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights have become central to the work of the United Nations. Emphasising the universality of human rights, Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated on the fifteenth anniversary of the Declaration that "Human rights is foreign to no country and native to all nations" and that "without human rights no peace or prosperity will ever last".

Action to build a culture of human rights is also supported by United Nations specialised agencies, programmes and funds as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) and by relevant departments of the United Nations Secretariat such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Other international, regional and national bodies, both governmental and non-governmental, are also working to promote human rights.

At the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, Austria in 1993, 171 countries reiterated the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, and reaffirmed their commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They adopted the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which provides the new "framework of planning, dialogue and cooperation" to facilitate the adoption of a holistic approach to promoting human rights and to involve actors at the local, national and international levels.

THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION (1995-2004)

Not least of these activities to promote human rights is human rights education. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, the General Assembly has called on Member States and all segments of society to disseminate this fundamental document and educate people about its content. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights also reaffirmed the importance of education, training and public information.

In response to the appeal by the World Conference, the General Assembly, in 1994, proclaimed the period 1995 to 2004 the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education. The Assembly affirmed that "human rights education should involve more than the provision of information and should constitute a comprehensive life-long process by which people at all levels in development and in all strata of society learn respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring that respect in all societies".

The Plan of Action for the Decade provides a definition of the concept of human rights education as agreed by the international community, i.e. based on the provisions of international human rights instruments. In accordance with those provisions, human rights education may 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 moulding of attitudes and directed to:

The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity; The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;

The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society; The furtherance of the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace".

The Decade's Plan of Action provides a strategy for furthering human rights education through the assessment of needs and the formulation of effective strategies; the building and strengthening of programmes and capacities at the international, regional, national and local levels; the coordinated development of materials; the strengthening of the role of the mass media; and the global dissemination of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

THE PROCESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

A sustainable (in the long term), comprehensive and effective national strategy for infusing human rights education into educational systems may include various courses of action, such as:

- The incorporation of human rights education in national legislation regulating education in schools;
- The revision of curricula and textbooks;
- Pre-service and in-service training for teachers to include training on human rights and human rights education methodologies;
- The organization of extracurricular activities, both based on schools and reaching out to the family and the community;
- The development of educational materials;
- The establishment of support networks of teachers and other professionals (from human rights groups, teachers' unions, non-governmental organizations or professional associations) and so on.

The concrete way in which this process take place in each country depends on local educational systems which differ widely, not least in the degree of discretion teachers may exercise in setting their own teaching goals and meeting them. The teacher will always be the key person, however, in getting new initiatives to work. The teacher therefore carries a great responsibility for communication of the human rights message. Opportunities to do this may vary: human rights themes may be infused into existing school subjects, such as history, civics, literature, art, geography, languages and scientific subjects, or may have a specific course allocated to them; human rights education may also be pursued through less formal education arenas within and outside schools such as after-school activities, clubs and youth forums.

Ideally, a human rights culture should be built into the whole curriculum (yet in practice, particularly at secondary level, it is usually treated piecemeal, as part of the established curriculum in the social and economic sciences and the humanities).

In the classroom, human rights education should be developed with due attention to the developmental stage of children and their social and cultural contexts in order to make human rights principles meaningful to them. For example, human rights education for younger children could emphasise the development of self-esteem and empathy and a classroom culture supportive of human rights principles. Although young children are able to grasp the underlying principles of basic human rights instruments, the more complex content of human rights documents may be more appropriate to older learners with better developed capacities for concept development and analytical reasoning. The following table reflects a matrix proposing the progressive introduction of children to human rights concepts depending on their age. The proposal is not meant to be prescriptive but only to provide an example, which was developed and discussed by human rights education practitioners gathered in Geneva in 1997.

The core content of human rights education in schools is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These documents—which have received universal recognition, as explained above—provide principles and ideas with which to assess experience and build a school culture that values human rights. The rights they body are universal, meaning that all human beings are entitled to them, on an equal basis; they are indivisible, meaning there is no hierarchy of rights, i.e., no right can be ranked as "non-essential" or "less important" than another. Instead human rights are interdependent, part of a complementary framework. For example, your right to participate in government is directly affected by your right to express yourself, to form associations, to get an education and even to obtain the necessities of life. Each human right is necessary and each is interrelated to all others.

However, even taught with the greatest skill and care, documents and history alone cannot bring human rights to life in the classroom. Nor does working through the Universal Declaration or the Convention on the Rights of the Child, pointing out the rationale for each article, teach the meaning of these articles in people's lives. "Facts" and "fundamentals", even the best-selected ones, are not enough to build a culture of human rights. For these documents to have more than intellectual significance, students need to approach them from the perspective of their real-life experience and grapple with them in terms of their own understanding of justice, freedom and equity.

REFERENCES

1. For the full and simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, See Annex.1.
2. For more information on the Universal Declaration, including the text of the UDHR in more than 330 languages and dialects, see [http:// www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org) or contact the Office of the United National High Commissioner for Human Rights.
3. For a Brief Introduction to International Human rights law terminology, including some words used in this chapter such as "treaty" "Convention", "protocol" and "ratification", see annex3.
4. For the full text and summarized version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child See, Annex2.
5. Including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art.26.2) the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (Art.13.1). the convention on the Rights of the Child (Art.29.1) and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (Sect.D, paras, 78-82)