

Soka Gakkai International Proposal

30 May 2023

Soka Gakkai International¹ thanks the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the opportunity to contribute to the upcoming report seeking stakeholders' views on target sectors, focus areas or thematic human rights issues towards the fifth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which will be presented during the 54th session of the Human Rights Council in September 2023.

- **Theme / focus**

Soka Gakkai international proposes continuing the focus on youth as a target sector for the fifth phase of the World Programme, with a specific emphasis on young people who are from vulnerable or marginalized backgrounds, including but not limited to, refugees, migrants, IDPs, LGBTIQ+, young people with disabilities, young women, youth living in extreme poverty, indigenous youth and young people of the Global South.²

- **Observations from the previous phase**

The midterm progress report issued in October 2022 recognized examples of good practice at multiple levels and in both formal and non-formal educational settings.

However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic just a few months after the start of the fourth phase, the subsequent closure of schools, loss of opportunities for non-formal and informal education and the social restrictions enacted across the globe, meant that young people's opportunities were significantly impacted, as was the capacity for States to engage young people in human rights education.

As a result, youth have been adversely affected in their access to quality education, a situation exacerbated by the resultant ongoing economic crisis facing many countries since the pandemic. Human rights violations occur disproportionately in disconnected and marginalized communities, which are also the most difficult to reach and therefore easily excluded from programs and remedies. During lockdowns for instance, many young people had to leave school and were forced to stay home, often in very challenging situations, confronted with violence and abuse. For young people in poverty, the result has been to endanger their short and long-term opportunities even more, trapping them further into

¹ A community-based Buddhist organization with 12 million members in 192 countries and territories, SGI has been in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council since 1983.

² Our proposal reflects views of the international SGI membership.

cycles of poverty and abuse. During the period 2020-2024, the combination of COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturn, climate crisis and conflict has significantly prevented young people from taking part in human rights education activities and trainings in several parts of the world. Further, at the stage of the midterm progress report, 17 submissions had been made, indicating that further time is needed to implement the fourth phase and refocus it in light of the above challenges.

We believe that this fifth phase, with a specific and continued focus on youth, especially towards marginalized communities, represents an opportunity to rebuild the social fabric towards a more inclusive society. This next phase can ensure youth have safe learning environments and chances to reconnect with peers and society at large around the realization of their own rights and those of others. We further believe that any interruption to the fourth phase caused by COVID-19 can be addressed through extending the focus on young people in the next phase, taking into account for example, issues identified in the midterm progress report such as the risks and opportunities associated with technology and gender disparities, as well as national strategies for evaluation and implementation, in addition to peer-to-peer and teacher training in human rights education.

On several occasions, States and other stakeholders have emphasized the importance of ensuring that the World Programme is aligned with, and contributes to, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Human rights education focusing on young people who are marginalized and vulnerable is an indispensable step to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to leaving no one behind. Engaging with and including young people who are normally disregarded and subjected to discrimination and exclusion through providing them with access to human rights education would help reduce their vulnerability, facilitate their participation in the formulation of laws and policies that concern them, foster equality and help tackle discrimination and xenophobia.³

● **Proposals for the fifth phase**

Concretely we propose:

1. To re-emphasize awareness of the World Programme for Human Rights Education at the national level, ensuring that is understood and implemented in schools and communities, with States taking responsibility for allocating budget, resources and capacity for educators to make human rights education a priority.
2. To ensure that civil society has the adequate space, and capacity to carry out human rights education for youth in marginalized communities. This could also include the

³ United Nations General Assembly. 2018. "Views of States, national human rights institutions and other stakeholders on the target sectors, focus areas or thematic human rights issues for the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education." A/HRC/39/35. Adopted by the General Assembly. June 29.
<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/194/42/PDF/G1819442.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed May 25, 2023).

creation of new physical and virtual spaces for young people to gather, develop their sense of belonging and express their creativity.

3. To develop human rights education and training programs for youth from marginalized communities, ensuring inclusion and awareness of their own and others' human rights.
4. To ensure that young people from marginalized communities have access to and training in engagement with spaces such as for instance the Human Rights Council and other bodies of the United Nations so that their voices and needs are listened to, understood and translated into policies and implemented at every level, in order to build more inclusive societies.
5. To provide training on the situation facing youth from marginalized communities for people working in the field of human rights education at the UN and at the policy level to ensure that their rights and needs are understood, so they can become key advocates for these marginalized youth.
6. To support training of human rights educators and young people in new technologies, bridging the digital divide and increasing understanding of the benefits and challenges of technology in realizing equality and human rights.
7. To promote the use of more wide-ranging and diverse methodologies for formal, non-formal and informal education that are context-appropriate and can speak to young people, such as arts and sports.⁴

⁴ The Article 6 of United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training states: "Human rights education and training should capitalize on and make use of new information and communication technologies, as well as the media, to promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The arts should be encouraged as a means of training and raising awareness in the field of human rights."