

Side event summary report
**'UN support to national human rights education initiatives:
sharing practices'**

Tuesday 25 September 2007, 13:00-15:00

Palais des Nations, Room XXII

On 25 September 2007, OHCHR organized a side event to the 6th session of the Human Rights Council entitled "UN support to national human rights education initiatives: sharing practices" on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Human Rights Education in the School System. Chaired by Mr. Ibrahim Wani, Chief of the Research and Right to Development Branch/OHCHR, the side event, in the form of a two-hour panel discussion, was mainly intended to share experiences and convey practical examples of comprehensive initiatives in the area of human rights education in the school system undertaken by national authorities with the support of the UN system. In addition, the side event provided an opportunity to highlight the challenges and lessons learned linked to the integration of human rights education in the school system.

Panel experts included: Ms Dakmara Georgescu, Programme Coordinator (UNESCO/IBE), Mr. Ben Smith, Senior Programme Officer (ILO), Mr. Matthias Burchard, Head (UNRWA Representative Office Geneva), Ms. Ingeborg Breines, Director (UNESCO Geneva Liaison Office), Ms. Thérèse Bjork, Associate Human Rights Officer (OHCHR).

The side event featured the following presentations:

Integrating Human Rights Education in the curriculum: prerequisites and (possible) solutions

Ms. Dakmara Georgescu (IBE/UNESCO) presented a project aiming at identifying the prerequisites and possible solutions for incorporating human rights education component in the school curriculum of Mauritius. The initiative is part of a comprehensive process of curriculum change initiated by the government of Mauritius in 2006 encompassing the adoption of a competency based approach in primary education and the development of a new curriculum framework for secondary education.

As a first step, an initial assessment was undertaken to evaluate to what extent human rights education was effectively part of the education system. Based on the findings of the assessment, areas of weaknesses (distorted perception of human rights often assimilated to a loss of authority on children by parents/teachers; lack of systematic approaches in the curriculum to promote human rights education; need for proper teacher trainings on human rights education) and strengths (strong political will; support from international and national actors and broad practice of in and out-of schools human rights education activities) were identified. In addition, the assessment highlighted that the prospect of new primary and secondary school curriculum frameworks combined with national actions undertaken in the area of educational policies would provide further opportunities to mainstream human rights education into the curriculum. The results and key findings of the assessment will serve as a basis for the elaboration of guidelines to integrate human rights education into the curriculum by exploring the human rights education potential in existing learning areas and subjects. In addition, over the next months attention will be also given to intensive training of curriculum specialists, head masters and teacher trainers.

Mainstreaming children's rights into the primary school curriculum of El Salvador

Mr. Ben Smith, (ILO) presented a project carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Education of El Salvador aiming at mainstreaming children's rights into the primary school curriculum. The

project's objectives were twofold: a) to modify the workbooks of social studies and sciences for students of grades 4 to 6 in order to strengthen the human rights components of the curriculum with a special focus on child labour; b) to improve the quality of education. Through the study of subjects such as geography and culture, biology and botany, students (and, just as importantly, teachers) received a vast amount of information on the hazards of child labour and human rights in El Salvador.

The project was complemented with the ILO "Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media" (SCREAM) project in El Salvador. The Ministry of Education trained 100 teachers in different provinces on using the SCREAM methodology. SCREAM was subsequently widely used in schools and informal education settings at the municipal level in Sonsonate and San Miguel. Shortly after the introduction of the workbooks and the implementation of SCREAM, the Ministry of Education embarked on a curriculum reform for primary school education. Based on this positive experience, ILO has been asked to design textbooks, workbooks and teacher's guides for use at the national level for grades 1-6 in social studies, which provided a golden opportunity to expand the content and quality of human rights education. This will be complemented by the fact that teacher training colleges in El Salvador include child labour as part of their curriculum, another initiative spearheaded by ILO.

UNRWA's Programme of Human Rights Education

In his presentation, Mr. Matthias Burchard explained that UNRWA views human rights education as one of the primary vehicles for the promotion and achievement of tolerance and peace. He outlined one example of UNRWA extensive curriculum enrichment program which focuses on Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance and is taught by all UNRWA schools. Mr. Burchard explained that UNRWA's concept for Human Rights Education integrated human rights and conflict resolution within the framework of the curricula prescribed by the host countries, rather than making it a stand-alone, isolated program of learning for students. To that effect, 19 human rights key concepts were identified and in 1999 introduced in the Arabic, Religion and Social Studies curricula for pupils in grades 5 to 9 in West Bank and Gaza Strip and to all schools in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan in 2004. The programme and concepts were also used as a vehicle to introduce creative teaching and learning strategies such as role play, theatre, work sheets, student parliaments and conferences, and summer games. Implementation of the programme is overseen by a human rights school supervisor in each of the 5 areas of operation, with the assistance of a Steering Committee created to guide the development and effective implementation of the program and conduct an ongoing evaluation. Each school also has its own human rights committee, in which also students are presented. The impact of this Programme is currently being assessed.

UNESCO collaboration in human rights education in Albania: a long-term commitment

Ms. Ingeborg Breines, (UNESCO) presented an initiative carried out in Albania on "Promoting Quality Education for All: Human Rights and Democracy Education", which is part of an ongoing long-term project aiming at training local teachers and educators in human rights and democracy education. The initiative's specific objectives were to improve the school curriculum with a view to, inter alia, introducing human rights education; designing a strategy for implementing the national in-service training curriculum for human rights education; training teachers of the elementary and high school in using training materials produced during the first phase of the project; piloting in selected schools the newly adopted regulation on the promotion of a democratic climate in all educational establishments; providing the school and the educational directorates with relevant fresh materials on human rights education. Specific activities included: the organization of a national training (November 2006) in Albania on institutional developments and policies; the publication of a teachers manual (expected to be completed in December 2007) together with a training for teachers, which will contain as a sub-activity the compilation of a "commentary on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights", containing commentaries by distinguished Albanian scholars and personalities. A national conference will be held in June 2008 as the culminating event of all project activities. For capacity

building and sustainability, four HRE centers will be set up at the education directorates and selected schools and all materials produced during the project will be used during future activities.

Integrating human rights education into the school curriculum of Angola and Timor Leste

Ms. Thérèse Bjork, OHCHR, presented the experiences of OHCHR field presences in supporting national efforts to integrate human rights education in the school system in Angola and Timor Leste. In the context of the ongoing reform of the education sector in Angola, OHCHR in Angola is since January 2006 collaborating with the Ministry of Education to integrate human rights education and democracy in the school system. To this end various activities have been implemented: a workshop aiming at ensuring a national commitment from a wide range of stakeholders to integrating human rights education in the school system, a training of trainers on interactive teaching approaches for participants from three teacher training colleges as well as work to develop a teacher's manual on human rights.

Similarly, in Timor-Leste, the Human Rights and Transitional Justice Section of the United Nations Integrated Mission (UNMIT) has supported the Ministry of Education in the integration of human rights education in the school system since early 2006. As in Angola, a reform of the education system was already underway and the immediate focus of the activities in which UNMIT became involved was therefore the development of human rights education teaching materials for the primary education sector. UNMIT is drafting a Teachers' Manual for the Primary Education Sector, which will be shared with all key stakeholders and piloted in teacher training in 2008. As the Ministry of Education earlier in 2007 started the revision of curriculum for grades 7-9, efforts are also underway to integrate human rights principles directly into the revised pre-secondary curricula and teacher's guide (syllabi). The experiences of Timor-Leste and Angola highlighted the importance of a strong national commitment and how the UN can play a role in supporting national efforts with substantive expertise. Further, these examples evidenced the importance of seizing opportunities for the UN system to integrate human rights education when the education system is reformed.

The side-event was well attended with approximately 50 participants from the UN, permanent missions and civil society. The questions and answers session reflected the high level of interest of the participants, in particular on issues touching upon the access of vulnerable groups to human rights education. One participant underlined the importance of ensuring that programmes such as UNRWA's programme on tolerance and conflict resolution are expanded to all refugees' camps around the world (e.g. the Balkans). Other comments were linked to the difficulties encountered by some governments in revising school curricula, partly because of distorted perceptions of human rights and civic and ethic education.

Finally, a representative of the Council of Europe, Ms. Yulia Pererva, announced two forthcoming events on human rights education. A regional European meeting on Human Rights Education in the School System will be organized by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 5-6 November 2007, in co-operation with UNESCO, OHCHR and OSCE/ODIHR. Secondly, a Forum for NGOs on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights is foreseen in October 2008. Ms Pererva also informed the participants of the work done by the Council of Europe on assessing the feasibility of a "framework policy document on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education", which could possibly take the shape of a convention, a charter or another policy document.

The meeting ended with the chairperson emphasizing, in the light of the meeting, the importance of a sustained interagency partnership to reinforce national efforts in the area of human rights education undertaken by governments and civil society.
