

Soka Gakkai International's Inputs to the Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) thanks the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the opportunity to contribute inputs in support of the Human Rights 75 Initiative.

Q1: What are the challenges the world is facing now, how will they affect the future of human rights, and what future do you want for human rights?

The world we live in today is one of rapid changes. Breakthroughs in technological advancements and scientific progress in recent decades have contributed to significant changes in society, including to education, food production, healthcare, finance, and the world of work. Additionally, changes to the environmental and climatic conditions of our planet, induced by human activity, has forced reconsideration of the way we live; the increasing number of climate migrants and refugees resulting from conflict over natural resources a distressing indication of the path we are at present walking. Against the backdrop of extreme economic inequality positioning the world's wealthiest leaps and bounds ahead of the world's poorest, alongside deep-rooted, systemic social and political inequalities, experiences of change, when considered from multiple perspectives, is incredibly varied. For instance, for the world's most economically disadvantaged groups, which includes women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and migrants, and children and youth, the lived reality of change in today's world is increasingly a matter of life and death. If we continue in our failing to take seriously the harsh realities of global inequality and don't take urgent steps to rectify this gross injustice, we are condemning a huge majority of our global population to a life of severe hardship, and in the most extreme cases, even to death.

Buddhism recognises the inherent potential that all individual's possess for transforming any situation, even those with the most dire of outcomes, into one of positive value-creation, happiness and individual and collective advancement. In our Buddhist teaching, this inherent potential is called human dignity and forms the basis of the SGI's support for human rights. At present, human dignity has become overshadowed by human greed and the unbridled ambition for power and wealth, particularly by countries and corporations. The current trend of society, 'profit over people', has sacrificed human dignity and rights, and those too of the natural environment, is incompatible with sustainability and threatens our collective future. To rectify this, we must turn the trend towards 'putting people first' and valuing all life on this planet above all else. A key challenge for accomplishing this necessary paradigm shift lies in broadening our understanding of human life and viewing individuals in their full humanity, not merely as citizens of a nation with political rights and obligations. Reaffirming our understanding of human rights as a set of social, economic, cultural, as well as civic and political rights, is essential for appreciating human life and ensuring that the future of human rights can serve as a foundation for a world in which human dignity shines and an imperative for enabling humans to reach their potential.

Q2: What are your recommendations to decision and policymakers, including governments, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations, and others, to advance human rights in the future?

Global society faces myriad interlocking crises. The root of all these problems is our collective failure to consider human rights and dignity as the central and utmost priority and goal in all fields of endeavor. Human Rights Education (HRE) is indispensable for a sustainable future and key to advancing human rights in the future. Specifically, HRE as expressed in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET) (2011), which includes the three dimensions of education *about, for* and *through* human rights, should be included in policies and be implemented at the international, national and local level. This is necessary to ensure that the values and norms expressed in the UDHR are rooted in people's lives. HRE, through which individuals become aware of human rights and empowered to uphold their own rights and protect the rights of others, is a concrete, life-long process through which a culture of human rights is fostered at the grassroots with the respect for the dignity of individuals at the centre.

The UNDHRET and the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE) (2020-2024), which focuses on youth empowerment through human rights, are key frameworks. Both, along with other instruments that protect specific sets of rights, should be utilised to advance human rights in all areas. Specifically, as we are currently in the fourth phase of the WPHRE, governments should implement the Plan of Action which provides concrete strategies at the national level. Among the key provisions included in the Plan of Action, the importance of mainstreaming HRE for, with and by young people in formal and non-formal education, and ensuring adequate resource allocation, including appropriate training of teachers, is crucial. Moreover, when carrying out HRE training, young people should be included in every step, from the needs assessment to the monitoring and evaluation, to ensure that HRE and training are relevant to the specific context and needs of young people.

In addition, international human rights instruments created for, with and by marginalised groups, for instance The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) are crucial for self-determination and must be recognised and upheld when working with specific marginalised groups on the implementation of their rights. Lastly, cooperation and international solidarity among all actors, including governments, regional bodies/organizations, civil society and the UN is crucial to advance human rights at the national and local level.

Q3: What commitments and actions can young people take towards advancing human rights in the future?

Young people have a key role to play in securing the future of human rights. With their passionate words, courage and uncompromising commitment to justice, young people today are challenging the status quo and can usher in a new dawn of hope. The courage of just a single young person committed to justice can spark the courage of countless others and instantly melt the ice-like walls of discrimination that shroud hearts and obstruct the actualisation of human rights. This is why HRE, *for, with* and *by* young people especially, is key. When young people encounter high ideals and lofty goals that align with their sense of

justice, and stand up with a sense of responsibility and purpose to actualise them, then, with their passion, creativity, energy and dynamic spirit, young people can bring about great change. HRE is key to empowering young people as defenders of human rights and unlocking a future where it is possible to secure the human rights of all individuals. In today's globalised world, where it is virtually impossible for any one or country to remain unaffected from challenges faced by humanity, the success of our responses hinges on a renewed partnership among all stakeholders based on a shared understanding and vision for the future. In solidarity with human rights, young people everywhere can unite and together walk the path of respecting the dignity of all life as global citizens and powerful agents of change.