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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Joint written statement* submitted by New Humanity, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Catholic International Education Office, Equitas centre international d'éducation aux droits humains, Globethics.net Foundation, Graduate Women International (GWI), Instituto de Desenvolvimento e Direitos Humanos - IDDH, International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEL), International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development - VIDES, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco, Latter-day Saint Charities, Teresian Association, UPR Info, Women's World Summit Foundation, World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, Soka Gakkai International, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 May 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The 10th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

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1. Human Rights Education and its relevance now

The recognition of the contribution of human rights education to build a culture of human rights has been evolving over the years.

The World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) are key international documents that identify the primary role of human rights education in the efforts to build a culture of human rights.

There is a general consensus that the relevance of human rights education goes beyond the sole knowledge of and about human rights. Rather, human rights education is a transformative process that leads people to become empowered individuals that exercise their rights and act to promote, respect and protect others' rights positively impacting their communities, environment, and society in general.

The outbreak of Covid-19 confronted the world with new challenges. In his Report in 2020, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated that the 'Coronavirus pandemic is the greatest test the world has faced since World war II' and 'a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis.' The pandemic very quickly revealed that systemic discrimination and inequalities are deeply rooted in societies, shedding light on the fact that respect for human rights is undermined, to different degrees and levels, everywhere in the world. In addition, the concomitant rise of racism, xenophobia and discrimination in many parts of the globe has emphasized the urgent need to continue and accelerate human rights education's implementation at the national and local level.

2. The 10th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training.

The year 2021 marks ten years since the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training. The organizations of our NGO Working Group on Human Rights Education and Learning actively worked to support the adoption of the Declaration which describes human rights education as being integral to building an inclusive society: "as long as the promise of universal respect for human rights is undermined by social disparities and distinctions—so long as people continue to be excluded and marginalized—it will remain an empty slogan, never becoming a tangible reality."¹

This milestone gives us the opportunity to reflect on the progress made in the implementation of this landmark instrument that aims to set universal standards for human rights education and at the same time to look at the gaps that still exist between the ideals set in the Declaration and reality.

The Declaration emphasizes, in Article 7 and affirms that States (...) are primarily responsible for HRET.²

Moreover, Article 3 of the Declaration states that 'HRET is a lifelong process. It concerns all parts of society, at all levels, including: 'preschool, primary, secondary and higher education, taking into account academic freedom where applicable, and all forms of education, training and learning, whether in a public or private, formal, informal or non-formal setting.'

¹ Soka Gakkai International (2021) Value Creation in a Time of Crisis.

² UN Declaration on HRET (2011) <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/G11/124/78/PDF/G1112478.pdf?OpenElement>.

In addition, Article 14 urges States to take appropriate measures to ensure the effective implementation and follow up of the Declaration, making the necessary resources available.

3. Plan of Action fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education - implementation

Having entered the second year of the fourth phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education which focuses specifically on young people, we notice that ever more growing number of youth have been significantly affected with respect to their access to education due to Covid-19, intertwined in many cases with ongoing conflicts and environmental challenges.

In this regard, we call on States, as it is they who bear the primary responsibility to ensure a robust implementation of the Plan of Action at the national and local level, engaging meaningfully and inclusively with young people, particularly the most marginalized, and relevant stakeholders. Strong partnership between States and civil society with youth at its center is crucial to bring change and make the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training and the Plan of Action a concrete reality in daily life.

4. Right to education, Human Rights Education and quality education.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in the General Comment n.13 states that ‘education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Education has a vital role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy (...).’³

In the same vein UNESCO states: ‘Education in itself is an empowering right and one of the most powerful tools by which economically and socially marginalized children and adults can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully in society.’⁴

In addition, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)⁵ states that

‘Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.’⁶

With this in view, the right to education and human rights education are indivisible rights and are mutually reinforcing and advancement in each area promotes advancement in the other.

Moreover, Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals aims by 2030 to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education (...),’⁷ which includes ‘not only literacy and numeracy but also wider life skills that empower them to be leaders and change makers.’⁸

5. The role of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

The role of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education as an independent expert, is extremely valuable. In June 2008 the Human Rights Council requested the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, among others to ‘Review the interdependence and interrelatedness of the right to education with other human rights’.

³ Right to Education and human rights

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/SREducation/Pages/EducationAndHR.aspx>.

⁴ Right to Education <https://en.unesco.org/themes/right-to-education>.

⁵ OHCHR (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<https://ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/UDHRIndex.aspx>.

⁶ OHCHR (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<https://ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/UDHRIndex.aspx>.

⁷ Sustainable Development Goals website <https://sdgs.org.au/goal/quality-education/>.

⁸ Plan International website <https://plan-international.org/quality-education>.

The NGO Working Group on Human Rights Education and Learning proposes that the Human Rights Council considers expanding the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, starting for instance by examining human rights education implementation in her forthcoming Reports. Such a step would contribute to promoting, safeguarding and implementing both the right to education and to human rights education for the direct benefit of young people and of society as a whole.

Human Rights Education Youth Network (HREYN) Association pour la Promotion de Droits Humains (APDH) Human Rights Education Associate (HREA) Youth Resource Center on Human Rights/Centre de conseils et d'appui pour les jeunes en matières de droits humains (CODAP), NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.