**Human Rights Education in Brazil: achievements and opportunities**

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**1. Introduction**

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the invitation to take part in this very important initiative. As a State Prosecutor, Law Professor and Human Rights activist, I truly believe that Human Rights Education and Training plays a central role in contributing to the promotion, protection and effectiveness of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Indeed, Human Rights Education has been fostered as one of the main priorities of Brazil’s Secretariat for Human Rights under my leadership.

In this context, my presentation aims to highlight Brazil’s experience regarding Human Rights Education, by reviewing achievements to date and also by examining opportunities for further development. In order to do so, I would like to address the issue focusing on these two guiding questions:

1. How to understand the right to Human Rights Education, concerning its legal framework, scope and extend?
2. Which may be the main features regarding the implementation of United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, in light of Brazil’s experience?

**2. Human Rights Education as a Right**

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education and 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”*. Likewise, Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes that *“education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”*. Other international instruments with similar language include the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Vienna Declaration and its Programme of Action.

Recently, UN members agreed to emphasize the importance of ensuring that education is aimed at strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The outcome of this agreement is the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, adopted by the General Assembly in December 2011. With fourteen articles, the Declaration, although not binding, has settled ruling aspects of this specific legal framework, such as the contents of Human Rights Education (all activities aimed at promoting universal respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms), its principles (equality, dignity, inclusion and non-discrimination), its beneficiaries (all parts of society, of all ages), its actors (public and privates ones, with States bearing the primary responsibility)and the nature of international cooperation regarding the issue (mainly subsidiary).

As a right in itself, Human Rights Education will also play a central role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the General Assembly one year ago, in September 2015. By stating the pledge that no one will be left behind, the 2030 Agenda and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals will necessarily rely on Human Rights Education in order to promote equality and to foster thepeaceful, just and inclusive societies the Agenda seeks to deliver. Besides being a cross-cutting issue to each particular Sustainable Development Goal, Human Rights Education is specifically mentioned in the seventh target related to Goal number 4, which aims to *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”*. This target is set as:

*“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles,* human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development*”.*

In the Plan of Action for the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), released in 1996, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights defined Human Rights Education as training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights, by sharing knowledge and skills and by molding attitudes towards:

(a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

(b) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;

(c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;

(d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society;

(e) The furtherance of UN activities for the maintenance of peace.

Thereby, Human Rights Education shall promote the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of Human Rights. Universality because being a person is the sole and exclusive requirement to be subject of right, as human dignity is the foundation of human rights. Indivisibility and interdependence because the catalogue of civil and political rights is combined with the catalogue of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, from an integral view of human rights, inspired by the 1948 Universal Declaration. Therefore, the right to education is central to the full and effective realization of human rights, enhancing the indivisibility and interdependence of these rights.

It is important to notice that the right to education should observe four dimensions:

1. availability, that is to say that institutions and educational programmes shall be availability in sufficient quantity;
2. accessibility, which refers to three factors: the principle of non-discrimination, physical accessibility and economical accessibility;
3. acceptability, that is to say that form and content of education, including curricula and methodology, must be culturally appropriate and of good quality;
4. adaptability, which means that education should be flexible, capable of being adapted to social changes, responding to the needs of cultural and social diversity.

Education is both a human right itself, as it is an indispensable means to fulfill other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary means by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can fight poverty and fully participate in their communities. Education plays a vital role in women’s empowerment; child protection from sexual and labor exploitation; human rights and democracy promotion; environmental protection and population policies.

Human Rights Education should promote the development of human personality, thus enabling people to participate effectively in a free, fair and democratic society. Human Rights Education is a *sine qua non* condition for the exercise of human rights, democracy and development, being dedicated to the expansion of human capabilities and freedom.

Bearing this in mind, Brazil has sought to reaffirm this right by implementing programmes and projects in Human Rights Education. Let’s review some of them.

**3. Human Rights Education as a Policy**

The debate concerning Human Rights Education in Brazil gained impetus in the late-1980s, benefiting from the country’s democratization process and a number of pioneering projects developed by the civil society. Human Rights Education became a national public policy in 2003 with the creation of the National Committee for Human Rights Education. Composed by experts, this Committee engaged in drawing up a Human Rights Education National Plan, which was launched in December 2003 by the Secretariat for Human Rights, in partnership with the Ministries of Education and Justice.

Brazil’s Human Rights Education National Plan is supported in international documents, especially the *World Programme* for *Human Rights Education*, and serves as a guiding and fostering tool for educational activities in five thematic axes: *(i)* Basic Education; *(ii)* Higher Education; *(iii)* Non-Formal Education; *(iv)* Education for Justice and Law Enforcement Professionals; and *(v)* Education and Media. Each thematic area is comprised by programmes and projects to be developed by both the Government and the civil society, in short, medium and long term actions. Overall, the Plan seeks to contribute to building a culture of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, involving different social segments, the private sector and governmental spheres.

Launched in 2009, the third Brazil’s Human Rights National Plan incorporated Human Rights Education and Culture as one of its six guiding axes. This specific axis on Human Rights Education contains five guidelines and eleven strategic objectives aimed at fighting prejudice, discrimination and violence and also promoting new values of freedom, justice and equality, in line with Brazil’s Human Rights Education National Plan policies.

In 2012, Brazil adopted its National Guidelines for Human Rights Education, regulating the use of knowledge concerning Human Rights Education in Basic and Higher Education curricula. These Guidelines enshrined the following principles: *(i)* Human Dignity; *(ii)* Equality of Rights; *(iii)* Recognition and appreciation of diversity; *(iv)* Secularity of the State; *(v)* Democracy in education; *(vi)* Cross-cutting, experience-based and integral approach; and *(v)*Social and environmental sustainability.

Some projects are especially worth to mention in regard to the implementation of Human Rights Education as a public policy in Brazil. Led mainly by the General Coordination for Human Rights Education, a body within the Secretariat for Human Rights, these projects result from various partnerships among the Government, the private sector and the civil society, in national, regional and local dimensions.

Awareness-raising projects developed within the Secretariat for Human Rights include the *“Human Rights Education National Prize”*, held biennially with the purpose to identify and award educational experiences that promote the culture of human rights. Since 2008, the Prize has been awarded to forty different institutions, such as local educational governmental agencies, schools, universities, and civil society organizations.

An even larger initiative is the *“Human Rights Prize”*, which is held every December to celebrate the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Established in 1995, the *“Human Rights Prize”* is the highest award granted by the Brazilian Government to people and institutions that stand out in the fields of protection, promotion and fight against human rights violations. Over the last 21 years more than 300 people and institutions have been awarded with this Prize after being nominated and selected by an Expert Commission in categories such as Memory and Truth, Prevention of Torture, Eradication of Forced Labor and Inclusion of People with Disabilities, among others.

In the same line, the *“Cinema and Human Rights Film Festival”* is held annually since 2006 and is currently in its 11th edition. Exhibiting – with free admission - a national and international selection of contemporary films, retrospectives and tributes related to Human Rights issues, the Festival has expanded over the last ten years and presently reaches all 27 Brazilian states, in up to 1,000 cultural centers throughout the country.

Training activities in Human Rights Education have also been delivered by the Secretariat for Human Rights, through partnerships with local governments and civil society organizations in 5 different Brazilian states.

Recent innovative initiatives stand alongside these well-established ones. A Cooperation Agreement between the Secretariat for Human Rights and the National Council of Justice - which functions as the supervisory body to the administrative and financial work of the Judiciary in Brazil -is to be signed and launched in the next week. The Agreement seeks to engage partners in strengthening the culture of Human Rights among judges and other professionals in the Judicial System. Concrete measures encompass the support to different kinds of training activities and the share of best practices related to the promotion of Human Rights within the Judiciary, including the creation of a national award to praise emblematic judicial decisions on the issue. Similar partnerships are being developed with other national legal institutions, such as the National Bar Association, the Federal Prosecutors Office and the Office of Public Defense.

Another new project is the *“National Pact with Universities for the Promotion of Respect to Diversity and a Culture of Peace and Human Rights”*, to be launched in October. An initiative of the Secretariat for Human Rights, supported by the Ministry of Education, this Pact aims at combining efforts among strategic institutions and agencies towards the promotion of Human Rights Education in Higher Education. Specifically, the Pact refers to actions such as awareness-raising campaigns among professionals and students, fostering of Human Rights as an academic discipline and field of research, and the dissemination of best practices concerning the promotion and protection of Human Rights within the participating institutions. In November, a national meeting will discuss strategies to foment Human Rights Education in Basic Education curricula, looking to build a similar Pact to the one developed with Universities.

The Cooperation Agreement with the Judiciary and the National Pact with Universities have been deemed as very important opportunities to implement the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, the 2030 Agenda and theNational Guidelines for Human Rights Education in Brazil.Together with some of the previously mentioned achievements, these initiatives intend to advance Human Rights Education in Brazil by evolving this fundamental right into relevant and effective public policies.

**4. Conclusion**

Having recognized and embraced Human Rights Education as a human right in itself, it is imperative to adopt and apply it as a means to empowerment and as a source of inspiration for social change, given the transformative and emancipatory power of Human Rights Education. Efforts towards the realization of this right and the implementation of related public policies are central to ensure the full development of the human personality, in line with the principles supporting the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

After almost seventy years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the persistence of contexts of human rights violations finds an explanation in the existence of cultures of abuse and violence against individuals. The best answer – the actual antidote – is to shift from these cultures of violation to cultures of promotion of rights. In order to do so, the most effective tool is, indeed, Human Rights Education.

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