

**Excerpt from the Report on the Twelfth and Thirteenth Sessions
(E/1996/22 - E/C.12/1995/18), paras. 313-338**

DAY OF GENERAL DISCUSSION

A. Eleventh session, 5 December 1994

**Human rights education and public information activities relating to the
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

1. Introduction

313. At its ninth session, in November 1993, the Committee held a discussion on the issue of human rights education. It took note, inter alia, of a letter addressed to it by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, emphasizing the importance of human rights education and enlisting the Committee's assistance in promoting action in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The Committee also took note of the fact that, at recent international conferences, including the International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy, held at Montreal in 1993, suggestions had been made that the Committee should ensure that its reporting guidelines adequately reflected the importance of human rights education, place greater emphasis in its dialogue with States parties on human rights education, devote a day of general discussion to the issue, and consider preparing a general comment on the subject.

314. Following that debate, the Committee decided to schedule a day of general discussion on human rights education at its eleventh session, on 5 December 1994. The discussion was attended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Other participants included the Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and representatives of the Department of Public Information, UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO, UNHCR and WHO. A representative of OECD also took part in the discussion. Representatives of the following international non-governmental organizations also participated: American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Association of Jurists, International Baccalaureate, International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education, International Service for Human Rights, People's Decade for Human Rights Education, Promotion of Grassroots Enlightenment and Social Security, Rights and Humanity, and World Federation of United Nations Associations.

2. Summary of the discussion: status of human rights education

315. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in stressing the importance of human rights education, assured the Committee that its conclusions on its present deliberations would receive his full attention. Mr. I. Garvalov, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, raised the problem of how to preserve the identity of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities when providing separate education for such persons was perceived to threaten national unity. He suggested that the problem merited the consideration of all the treaty bodies.

316. In their presentations, the representatives of the specialized agencies and United Nations organs informed the Committee of the variety of ways in which they pursued human rights education activities in their respective areas of competence, including the organization of seminars and conferences; the development of human rights programmes and materials to be

used for training or educational purposes; the development of networks of schools to encourage integration of educational curricula based on tolerance, human rights and democratic principles; and support of publicity campaigns and special events.

317. The representative of UNESCO highlighted the activities being undertaken pursuant to the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy. The World Plan of Action drew attention to the concept of human rights education as a human right in itself and served as an important point of reference in the formulation of the recently adopted Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education. The representative also reminded participants of the mechanism established to monitor the implementation of the Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1974. This monitoring mechanism had been instituted as an advisory committee to which States must submit reports every six years on their implementation of the Recommendation. The Advisory Committee had held its first meeting in April 1995.

318. Some representatives of specialized agencies drew attention to the position taken by their agencies that human rights education should impart not only knowledge of the rights themselves, but also knowledge of the substance of those rights. The representative of WHO illustrated this approach in stating that WHO taught members of the medical profession and the general public that health was their right and instructed them as to how they could protect their health, including through good nutrition, regular vaccinations and hygiene. In addition, this representative proposed that thematic educational programmes be introduced during the Decade, for example on the right of health of women, of the elderly and of persons with AIDS.

319. In their statements, non-governmental organizations informed the Committee about their activities, which included public information campaigns, provision of human rights education for educators and development and relief workers, and a number of grass-roots projects. Many of the participants from non-governmental organizations were in agreement that the Committee should revise its reporting guidelines to require States parties to report on their efforts to promote human rights education, and that it should develop questions to put to States parties in this regard during the consideration of their reports.

320. With regard to areas requiring further attention, a participant from one non-governmental organization raised the fact that human rights were often neglected in university, graduate and continuing education programmes, both in scientific and in other professional fields. She stated that scientists were not trained in human rights, despite the fact that adherence to human rights standards such as freedom of expression, the right to privacy, the right to produce and enjoy the product of one's labour and other rights as established in the International Covenants on Human Rights was the basis for scientific investigation.

3. Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995-2004

321. During the general discussion, the members of the Committee had available to them the report of the Secretary-General concerning a proposed decade for human rights education, 3/ which was subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/184 of 23 December 1994. By that resolution, the General Assembly proclaimed the ten-year period beginning on 1 January 1995 the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education and

requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to coordinate its implementation. The General Assembly further requested that the human rights treaty-monitoring bodies, among other entities, support the efforts of the High Commissioner to coordinate the Plan of Action for the Decade, and place emphasis on the implementation by Member States of their international obligation to promote human rights education.

322. The members of the Committee agreed that the provision of human rights education affects the enjoyment of all rights, be they civil, political, economic, social or cultural in nature or directed at the elimination of discrimination against particular groups of persons. They noted that the human rights treaty bodies are specifically requested in the Plan of Action for the Decade to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action in States parties and that no other monitoring mechanism is mentioned in the Plan of Action. In this connection, it was noted that article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights gave the Committee a sui generis role in the implementation of the Plan of Action.

4. Conclusions and decisions on future action

323. Taking into account the points raised during the discussion and in the light of the Plan of Action for the Decade, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopts the following conclusions.

324. Human rights education is itself a human right. According to article 13 of the Covenant, all persons have a right to education and this education must be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. The Committee considers that the exercise of and strengthening of respect for human rights can take place only when there exists awareness of those rights by both the authorities and individuals. The Committee thus affirms the concept that, as a component of the right to education, human rights education is itself a human right.

325. The human rights treaty bodies, particularly the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, have a special responsibility because of their unique situation within the United Nations system to assess and monitor progress in the implementation of the binding obligations of States parties to promote human rights education at the national level. They are the only 3/ A/49/261-E/1994/110/Add.1.systematic monitoring mechanisms on the right to education for all. The Committee is aware that monitoring mechanisms exist in relation to other instruments in the field of education, particularly the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Accordingly, the Committee intends to engage in a regular exchange of information with UNESCO in that regard.

326. In order to maximize its effectiveness, human rights education should be provided through targeted efforts, through the formal and non-formal education systems and through public activities. The Committee believes that wide availability of human rights instruction and materials should be a priority issue when it examines State compliance with article 13 of the Covenant. Efforts should be directed especially towards the most vulnerable sectors of society and those responsible for the protection of their rights. Furthermore, the provision of

human rights instruction through formal and non-formal education imparts knowledge of the concept of rights and implants in young minds the seeds of a culture of peace of which respect for human rights is the foundation. For the general public, the Committee believes that continued public campaigns and wide dissemination of information are effective means of promoting awareness.

327. Activities in the field of human rights education by Governments and other actors, including the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations, should be assessed. While a great number of programmes exist at the international and national levels with varying objectives that contribute to human rights education, it is evident from the discussion that little effort has been made to assess the effectiveness of such programmes. Consequently, little is known about the adequacy of the content of human rights education and the degree to which it is successful in reaching all intended audiences. The Committee believes that evaluation of the activities of States to provide human rights education is necessary in order to determine the extent of their compliance with article 13 of the Covenant.

328. The Committee can play a useful role in introducing the available international technical assistance programmes to States in need of them. As revealed in the presentations made during the general discussion, there exists a large number of international operations and technical assistance programmes for human rights education, many of them directed at specific target groups. In this connection, the Committee notes that, in accordance with the mandate conferred on the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Plan of Action, a comprehensive inventory of the efforts being undertaken in this field throughout the United Nations system should be compiled. On the basis of such an inventory, the Committee could, during its consideration of States parties' reports, make appropriate recommendations for States parties to draw on the technical assistance available throughout the United Nations system.

329. In the light of the above, the Committee decides to undertake the following measures. With regard to the consideration of States' reports:

330. The Committee will consider, under article 13 of the Covenant, the activities of States parties to provide education for all and the extent to which human rights are included in the curriculum content of formal education, in the programme of activities in non-formal education, and in other public information activities. The Committee will report its findings to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

331. The Committee will regularly consider the efforts made by States parties to translate into all local languages the texts of international human rights norms and instruments, general comments and concluding observations by the treaty bodies, and reports of any national institution or government organ entrusted with the promotion and protection of human rights.

332. The Committee, in the light of information made available to it and to the other treaty bodies, will pay special attention to the efforts made by States parties to provide human rights education through programmes for all target groups specified in the Plan of Action, instruction through the formal and informal educational systems, and public campaigns and information for the public as a whole. In its consideration of States parties' reports, the Committee will seek specific information on the progress of States over time with each of these approaches.

333. The Committee will give regular consideration to the status of implementation of the Plan of Action in States parties. It will pay particular attention to whether States are making use of all the resources available from national and international organizations and the specialized agencies, whether national focal points for human rights education are being established and, if so, what their achievements and their present and planned activities are.

334. The Committee will identify areas where States parties may benefit from international technical assistance, including the materials and project assistance offered by, inter alia, the Centre for Human Rights, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR, ILO and WHO, on the basis of information learned during its consideration of States parties' reports and the survey to be conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights with the assistance of the Centre for Human Rights and UNESCO. With regard to its organization of work:

335. The Committee may consider preparing for discussion at one of its future sessions a general comment on the nature of States parties' obligations under article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

336. The Committee requests the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to invite UNESCO to make available to the Committee its assessment of teaching materials, curricula and other relevant information concerning human rights education that are received from Member States, from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and from all relevant organs within the United Nations system. The Committee expresses the hope that relevant country-specific information may be exchanged on a regular basis with the UNESCO Advisory Committee on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy.

337. The Committee decides to bring to the attention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights any possible projects for which the proposed voluntary fund for human rights education might be employed, or for which other technical assistance funds should be made available.

338. The Committee decides to designate one of its members, Mrs. Virginia Bonoan-Dandan, to assume primary responsibility with regard to education issues, in order to build further expertise, advise the Committee on developments, engage in an exchange of information with other concerned agencies and organizations, conduct studies in this area as deemed necessary by the Committee, and present to the Committee proposals of a general and country-specific nature which the Committee may submit to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for consideration.