



UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
NATIONS UNIES
HAUT COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



UNITED NATIONS
EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION
ORGANISATION DES NATIONS UNIES
POUR L'ÉDUCATION, LA SCIENCE ET LA CULTURE



9 January 2006

Sir / Madam,

We have the honour to inform you that, on 10 December 2004, the United Nations General Assembly officially proclaimed (Resolution 59/113A) the World Programme for Human Rights Education to begin on 1 January 2005. The World Programme provides us with a collective framework for action based on human rights education principles agreed upon by the international community, and building on the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004).

On 14 July 2005, the General Assembly adopted (Resolution 59/113B) the Plan of Action for the first phase (2005-2007) of the World Programme, focusing on primary and secondary school systems. The Plan of Action, which is enclosed with this letter, not only recommends the integration of human rights issues in curricula and textbooks, but also emphasises the need to reflect human rights principles in the educational processes and the environment within which education takes place. It also sets out a concrete implementation strategy for the national level, which involves analysing the current situation of human rights education in school systems; setting priorities and developing a national implementation strategy; and implementing, monitoring and assessing activities. The main responsibility for implementation rests with the Ministry of Education in each country.

We are writing to you to engage your continued interest and support in this area, in particular by implementing the attached Plan of Action. Our organisations are, as you will know, strongly committed to the protection and promotion of human rights as a fundamental value of the international community. When proclaiming the World Programme, the international community pointed out that human rights education represents a vital investment towards the realisation of human rights; it contributes significantly to promoting equality, preventing conflict and human rights violations and enhancing participation and democratic processes. We therefore wish to join efforts in order to promote education for human rights and democracy.

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We should like to recall that in the European region, the Council of Europe is actively engaged in the promotion of human rights education through its project "Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights". The Council of Europe's "2005 European Year of Citizenship through Education" can be seen as a European contribution to the initial implementation of the Plan of Action. The Year has created a strong momentum in member states and has opened doors through which we should be able to move towards real sustainability of human rights education and education for democracy. Through its future programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, the Council of Europe is ready to assist the United Nations in monitoring the implementation of the Plan of Action at the European level.

We would be grateful if you could indicate to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights which relevant department or unit in your Ministry would be assigned to coordinate initiatives related to the implementation of the Plan of Action for the first phase (2005-2007) of the World Programme. Our Offices will compile a list of such focal points and will be in touch with them on any follow-up activity. We also look forward to learning about your overall initiatives to implement the Plan of Action. The evaluation of the Council of Europe Year of Citizenship through Education, which will be carried out in the first half of 2006, should make it possible to take stock of what has been done and what should be prioritised in the future.

We invite governments to contact our institutions in order to obtain detailed information on the activities conducted to support and strengthen national capacities related to education for human rights and democracy.

Accept, Sir / Madam, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Louise Arbour
United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights

Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General
United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization

Terry Davis
Secretary General
Council of Europe

Annexes:

1. Plan of Action for the First Phase (2005-2007) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education
2. Recommendation (2002) 12 on education for democratic citizenship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states

Copy to:

1. Permanent Delegations to UNESCO
2. Permanent Representations to the Council of Europe
3. National Commissions for UNESCO
4. National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
5. United Nations Resident Coordinators
6. OHCHR, UNESCO and Council of Europe field presences
7. EDC ("Education for Democratic Citizenship") Coordinators