

INFORMAL SEMINAR: INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION

In its Resolution 6/10 dated 28 September 2007, the Human Rights Council requested the HRC Advisory Committee to “prepare a draft UN declaration on human rights education and training”. At the same time it asked the Advisory Committee to “seek the views and inputs of Member States, relevant international and regional organisations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, national human rights institutions as well as civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisations, on the possible elements of the content of the declaration and to take into account existing relevant instruments”.

DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Following its first session the Advisory Committee established a drafting group on human rights education and training, chaired by Mrs Halima Warzazi, for the purpose of effectively carrying out its programme of activities based on the initial elements of the conceptual framework outlined in the annex to Recommendation 1/1 of the Advisory Committee that was adopted on 14 August 2008. In addition to the already existing documentation, in particular arising within the scope of the *United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education* and the *World Programme for Human Rights Education*, the drafting group prepared a series of questionnaires intended for the various involved players, in particular governments, national institutions, international and regional organisations, and civil society organisations. At the same time, it established contacts with UNESCO as well as within the UN itself.

During its second session, the Advisory Committee adopted Recommendation 2/1 dated 30 January 2009, which constituted the interim report it had been asked to prepare by the Human Rights Council. The Advisory Committee was pleased with the very large number of replies to the questionnaires, and felt that it was important to encourage additional input. It also felt that informal seminars would provide an opportunity for enhancing collective reflection with the participation of human rights education and training practitioners and specialists. Recommendation 2/1 also dealt with fundamental and methodological aspects, and underscored the importance of preparing a brief but substantial declaration containing a strong message that will help bring about change by expounding a variety of coherent and systematic principles or directives for application in different situations and different contexts (cf. § 8).

The Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 10/28 and praised the interim report of the Advisory Committee. It went on to request the latter to submit its draft UN declaration on human rights education and training at its 13th session in March 2010 for “examination”. The Resolution also praised the initiative of the platform for human rights education and training to organise a seminar for experts and specialists, as well as all interested players, calling for the support and know-how of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in order to intensify reflection on the elements to be included in the draft declaration (cf. § 2).

The purpose of this informal seminar is to provide a platform for open collective reflection based on the initial work carried out by the Advisory Committee and its drafting group, notably Recommendations 1/1 and 2/1, and the working paper prepared by the Rapporteur of the drafting group, Mr Emmanuel Decaux (A/HRC/AC/2/CRP.1). At this stage, this concerns an in-depth discussion in which all involved players can participate on an equal footing for the

purpose of furthering the work in progress. It is not intended as a platform for drafting a preliminary project, since this is the responsibility of the Advisory Committee itself, nor is it intended to lead to negotiations between governments, since this is the role of the Human Rights Council. The main purpose of this initial seminar is to trigger debate among experts from a broad variety of fields who have experience in human rights education and training, and in the judicial system of the United Nations.

PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED AT THE SEMINAR WORKSHOPS

The two-day seminar will feature a plenary session that will be held shortly after its official opening. The purpose of this session will be to recall to mind the objectives and focuses of the declaration on human rights education and training, based on Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Numerous binding international instruments exist in this area, especially within the framework of the UN and UNESCO. The added value of the proposed declaration will consist in focusing all its judicial coherence and impacts on the right to human rights education and training, with an emphasis on sustained practical implementation of all its various components. The aim is therefore to reaffirm the universal principles that apply to the international community as a whole, as well as to other involved players, while incorporating a broad range of specific situations and practical experience. One talk will outline the objectives and focuses of the declaration, taking account of the expectations expressed in the various questionnaires. Two subsequent talks will briefly take stock of the current situation, one of which will describe the existing international legal instruments relating to human rights education and training, while the other will focus on the existing international, regional and national implementation mechanisms. Thanks to the lessons learned from the past, with the UN Decade and the World Programme, and through best practice implemented by the States and national institutions, it should be possible to look towards the future via the elements to be introduced in the resulting declaration. Thus the organisation of workshops is in line with the concept outlined by the Advisory Committee.

It has been decided to proceed by holding interactive workshops with a series of 15-minute introductory presentations by experts, so that there will be sufficient time for intensive discussions among all participants. Speeches therefore need to be as precise and concise as possible in order to facilitate the principal task of the workshop rapporteur (i.e. the preparation of a summarised report).

Workshop 1 will deal with the principles and general vision of the declaration. The Advisory Committee has repeatedly insisted on the need for a message that is clear and comprehensible, is addressed to everyone, and will give rise to fresh impetus in the efforts of the international community. This vision should combine three groups of components. Firstly, the affirmation of a comprehensive concept of human rights education and training, which is not just a supplement to the programme but a means of creating unity, both within the education community and in society as a whole. This means recognising the universality and indivisibility of human rights for everyone, without distinction with respect to race, sex, language or religion. Human rights education and training is inseparable from the development of a democratic, pluralist and tolerant society that respects the legally constituted State. But it is also founded on respect for diversity of cultures, religions and civilisations, taking account of the different levels of socioeconomic development. In this respect the role of international co-operation needs to be reaffirmed.

The main purpose of workshop 2 is to specify the obligations that apply to States relating to human rights education and training. States are obliged to respect the right to human rights education without hampering associated initiatives on the part of all members of society, but they are also obliged to protect this right, i.e. to ensure that no obstacles are able to limit its effectiveness, particularly on the part of private players. States are especially obliged to enforce this right through legislation, by establishing educational or vocational programmes, taking action in both the public and the private sectors, supporting initiatives and introducing suitable action plans. One of the principal responsibilities of the State is to guarantee effective respect of the principle of non-discrimination by ensuring equal access to human rights education and training for girls and boys. A particular focus has to be placed on access to education for vulnerable groups, especially national minorities and autochthonous peoples. The question of co-ordination of efforts and evaluation of results is also central: here we have to ask ourselves whether the existing enforcement mechanisms are effective or if we need to consider developing new ones at the national and international levels.

Workshop 3 will deal with the roles of the various involved parties. The State is by no means the only player in human rights education. National institutions for the protection of human rights, e.g. national UNESCO commissions, are increasingly frequently playing a central role in the co-ordination and promotion of human rights education. Their position between the public authorities and civil society organisations, and the continuity of their actions are crucial factors for ensuring that they can perform this essential function as effectively as possible. Furthermore, non-governmental organisations and syndicates, youth and leisure-time movements, as well as the world of clubs and associations, all play a crucial role in human rights education and training in decentralised forms and in close proximity to the various existing problems and realities. In numerous countries, education greatly relies on the private sector, and particularly on cultural players such as publishers, newspapers and the media. And as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us, parents have the right to choose the type of education to give their children. Recent conventions on the rights of the child have gone even further in this regard. So how can we reconcile the respective responsibilities of the State and the family with the rights of the child?

The purpose of workshop 4 will be to evaluate the role played by UN mechanisms in this area. Human rights education and training should become a common denominator, a precondition in all areas of activity of the UN. This concerns not only the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, but probably the whole range of thematic procedures. It also forms the basis for the activities of various convention bodies, even if one has to admit that the number of general observations in this area is still very limited. The Universal Periodic Review offers a new opportunity for a wide-ranging view of the efforts on the part of States in the area of human rights education and training. But is this a priority? In addition to specific monitoring that still has to be defined, would it not be necessary to introduce a more systematic control of convention bodies and related procedures?

The last problem area will be addressed in the form of a round table discussion, since it is impossible to exhaust the topic at this stage. Here the aim will be to assess the diversity of the situations and parameters relating to human rights education and training, whether this concerns different conventional fields of general education (primary, secondary, technical, university, research) or specialised education, e.g. for law enforcement personnel and uniformed officials. But it appears that the needs relating to human rights education and training exceed these frameworks, and also concern vocational and extracurricular education. The information society in which we are immersed gives rise to new challenges, but also to

new opportunities, with sensitisation and remote education tools that need to be fully integrated into the overall analysis.

The final session will provide the members of the drafting group of the Advisory Committee with an opportunity to extract the main substance of the debates and open up new perspectives for the third session of the Advisory Committee which will be held in August 2009.