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HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING - Warsaw, 27th October 2011

Working session III: Fundamental freedoms II - Human rights education

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Fundamental freedoms II: Human rights education.

While the Human Rights Declaration is accepted worldwide as a common set of standards by which Government action should abide, and education on that subject is pursued as a priority, there are some friction points when it comes to its practical implementation.

In particular, and paradoxically, the “prior right of parents to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”, could be jeopardized by human rights education itself, as there exist some interpretations of the UDHR that can be in serious conflict with the parents’ moral convictions.

As an example, we could recall that the UN conferences at El Cairo and Beijing attempted to introduce a concept of health as a human right that would include the access to abortion. In a recent UN report about human rights, Anand Grover links abortion with the human right to physical and psychological health. Needless to say, there are many parents (independently of their religion) who don't share this point of view and don't want their children to be taught like this.

Also, on the grounds of educating against sex discrimination, pupils could be taught some views on sexuality and family, emanating from the gender

perspective, which can openly stand against the parents' beliefs and convictions.

There have already been attempts to introduce such ideologically loaded education programs in Spain, and while the "Education for Citizenship" is not entirely devoted to human rights education, it tries to cover such partisan views under the human rights umbrella.

Ironically, while the former communist regimes in Europe tried to indoctrinate people through the education system, this action was mostly limited to political and economic notions. But nowadays some western democracies are going a step further and try to impose pupils an "emotional education" that seeks to alter the concept of family and affective relationships that has been the basis of Western civilization, and the one that most parents want their children to follow.

Besides that, in some countries -Spain among them- the right to choose the kind of education, theoretically guaranteed by law, is severely hindered by admittance regulations to publicly funded schools (including privately owned ones that receive subsidies), so that in practice parents have very little real choice. The implementation of a system such as the school voucher would provide a means to make freedom of education a reality.

References:

<http://www.hazteoir.org/noticia/41315-onu-crimen-defender-vida>

http://www.hazteoir.org/files/20100602_WHO_FINAL_OMS%20Aborto%20julio%202011.pdf

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reproductive_rights#Cairo_Programme_of_Action

<http://www.hazteoir.org/noticia/41414-funcionario-onu-afirma-que-abortoes-derecho-humano>

Recommendations:

- To explicitly leave out of human rights education controverted topics as emotional/sexual education.
- To provide effective instruments in order to guarantee the right of parents to educate their children according to their convictions.
- To defend parents "prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" as stated in the UDHR, ICCPR, ECHR and multiple other international documents: "...the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religions and philosophical convictions" (ECHR Art. 8, Art. 9, Art. 2 of Protocol 1).
- To monitor legislation, with special attention to so called hate-speech legislation, its content, interpretation, application and its influence in the education system; that such legislation neither impair free speech, debate or disagreement, nor exercise partiality to special interest groups at the expense of others.
- To Defend Freedom of Speech - to include that Christians can teach Christian understanding of the human person, faith and morality.