

SPEECH ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND TRAINING

AMBASSADOR CHRISTIAN STROHAL, ODIHR DIRECTOR

SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING

VIENNA, 25 MARCH 2004

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Human rights education is about more than merely knowledge of a set of rules and principles. It is also about attitude and behaviour, and about change in attitude and behaviour. That is why every target audience must not only be provided with more than a general understanding of what human rights is; everyone must also be shown how human rights are relevant to them and how they can apply human rights in their life and work.

The OSCE as a security organization approaches human rights education from a human security angle. Thus, human rights education can function as an important means to promote and strengthen human security. Human rights education and training enhances knowledge, clarifies values, promotes solidarity, changes attitudes and develops critical thinking and skills contributing to the respect for and enforcement of human rights. This leads to an active commitment and to the defence of such rights and to the building of a holistic, fully comprehensive culture of human rights.

Human rights education and training thereby constitutes a strong instrument for conflict prevention and the prevention of human rights violations. It is a key factor for achieving and securing human security. Human rights education can provide a valuable basis and common vision with regard to norms and standards for sustainable conflict resolution. Strategies of conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation should therefore be built integrally upon strategies of promoting and protecting human rights. Every woman, man, youth and child has the right to know, understand and demand their human rights. This is part of the human dignity of each individual which forms an important dimension of ensuring human security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Most of the activities, programmes and projects of my Office are aimed at educating and training specific categories of people on human rights and democratic values or at transferring “know-how” and sharing experience and best practice, and would thus at least include elements of human rights education.

At the same time we are very much aware of the activities undertaken by other organizations in this field and that our efforts can only be seen as a small part of the overall global effort that is made to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights through education and training. One example is the activities of the United Nations,

who have dedicated the last decade to human rights education, “aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights”.

It is States, however, that have the main responsibility to ensure the promotion of human rights education within public institutions on all levels - executive, legislative and judiciary. It is therefore my hope that this meeting will not only focus on what is being done by international organizations, but just as much on the efforts undertaken by the States themselves and how the international community can support these efforts in a sustainable way.

In the agenda for this meeting we have decided to examine more closely human rights education and training targeting three groups of society: pupils and students; public officials and the general public. In this way we hope to provide a holistic approach to human rights education and training, as no training will be successful if it is not put into a wider context.

We will start by sharing experiences on how to include human rights education in school curricula from an early age. This is a vital step towards ensuring widespread knowledge and the emergence of a culture of human rights. Human rights education is ultimately about action for building human rights cultures in our own communities, leading in particular to tolerance and mutual respect.

Human rights education and training has to be integrated as a life long process of learning in formal education, included, in particular, in the curricula on history, political education and democratic citizenship, non-formal learning at the community level, and informal education for example through cultural means. It has to be culturally sensitive, practical and skills-oriented and adequately address the needs of learners across all sectors of society.

Integrating human rights education into the official education system also helps preventing a situation where human rights education remains subject to the good will of international organizations or local NGOs.

However, teaching human rights in schools cannot be done in a vacuum. If principles of democracy, human rights and tolerance are ill-defined and not understood in popular culture, it will be difficult or even impossible to have any major impact. This is of course particularly relevant when such values are just beginning to be evidenced in social and political practice.

Education and training on human rights for public officials working in the judiciary, law enforcement, prosecutors' offices and also those who are there to implement national laws on a daily basis are of paramount importance. A lot of effort has been invested into working with various representatives of State structures by the international community and civil society. However, the basic rule that should not be forgotten is that such education should be an integral part of their basic professional training. It is a primary responsibility of the OSCE participating States to provide conditions for adequate human

rights education in this context. We hope that this meeting will allow us to discuss best practices in doing this and learn from experiences of each other.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human rights education and training is a tool for peaceful societal transformation with a gender perspective and a framework for social development. It aims at the empowerment and the building of capabilities of women, men, youth and children through critical thinking, understanding, applying and claiming all human rights, including civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development.

Another aspect I hope we will be able to address in this meeting, is the quality of human rights education. It is imperative that human rights education and training be free of gender bias, racial and other stereotypes, be sensitive to particular needs and be based on the principles of non-discrimination and equality in the enjoyment of all human rights. We have made a conscious effort in preparation for this meeting to invite women NGOs who can share their experience on teaching women's rights so that this aspect can be included as an integral part of any human rights training planned in the future.

We have also invited NGOs working with minorities who can share their particular experiences and concerns. Non-governmental and community-based organizations play an important and creative role in the promotion and protection of human rights. As many have human rights education as part of their agenda, they disseminate information and engage in dialogue on human rights, especially at the grass-roots level and in remote and rural communities. I would therefore also like to take this opportunity to encourage participants from the civil society to take floor during this meeting and share your views and experiences with us.

Finally, human rights education and training should seek to enhance effective democratic participation in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. It should be utilized as a means of promoting economic and social progress and people-centred sustainable development. It can thereby contribute to strengthening the rule of law and capacity building for democratic governance, recognized as an important strategy towards democratization, accountability and global governmental stability.