

Session 3: Education

Speaking notes:

Over the past few decades the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination have become a core concern for the international community. The Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001 have provided a new and innovative anti-discrimination agenda. States recognized both in the Declaration and in the Programme of Action, that education at all levels and all ages, including within the family, in particular human rights education, is a key to changing attitudes and behaviour and to promoting tolerance and respect for diversity in societies.

While it is commonplace today that education is an important means of promoting tolerance and respect and for empowering people to defend and promote their rights we ought to remind ourselves that we cannot limit these efforts to international organisations, conferences or to multilateral or bilateral diplomacy. Human rights and anti-racism teaching should be mandatory in the curricula of all primary and secondary schools in Europe. Representatives of the target groups should be involved in the development of such curricula. Those discriminated against must be consulted and must be part of the development of any curriculum.

Children and young people must be prepared for life in a pluralist society founded on human rights and tolerance. Being a life long process, human rights education must also involve teachers, law enforcement officials (including armed and security forces), the judiciary, religious leaders, political party and trade union officials, non-governmental organisations, and officials of Government and public institutions. If people cannot grasp the universal character of human rights, tolerance, and the respect for cultural, religious

and ethnic diversity and their concrete meaning in everyday life we will not be able to change longstanding patterns of prejudice and behaviour.

This is why human rights education figured prominently as a priority theme under Austria's recently concluded Presidency of the Human Security Network. The network, composed of thirteen foreign ministers from around the globe, had tasked some forty international experts, including renowned NGOs such as the People's Movement for Human Rights Education and the Anti-Defamation League, to develop a manual on human rights education. This manual, subsequently adopted by Ministers at their recent meeting in the Austrian city of Graz, was an ambitious attempt to develop a teaching and learning tool designed for global use. To this end, new methodological and didactical approaches had to be explored to ascertain a culturally sensitive perspective based on the universality of human rights.

Its structure deliberately allows for flexible use. Following a general introduction to the international human rights system, there are thirteen modules on selected human rights questions, including of course racism but also other related issues such as the prohibition of torture, freedom from poverty, human rights of women and the rights of the child.

The manual "Understanding Human Rights" stresses not only the relevance of the substantive norms of human rights law, but also international humanitarian law in formal and non-formal education. As we all painfully know, racism and similar phenomena are often at the origin of conflicts as well as the cause of violations of the rules applicable to armed conflicts. Thus the Human Security Network closely cooperated with the ICRC in elaborating the Manual.

Austria is now looking forward to reactions from the ODIHR as to the concrete use of the manual in the field work. (Copies are available in the back of the conference room.)

Thank you for your attention

