

CONFERENCE REPORT

THE CAIRO DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND DISSEMINATION¹

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At the invitation of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, in co-ordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, with the participation of around one hundred human rights experts and defenders from forty human rights groups from 14 Arab states, as well as experts from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe, the **Conference on Human Rights Education and Dissemination: A 21st Century Agenda** was held in Cairo from the 13th to the 16th of October, 2000. At the close of this conference, the delegates adopted the following declaration:

The Conference

Having considered the international human rights instruments, as well as documents, declarations and reports adopted by relevant regional and international conferences, especially the UNESCO's International Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights – Vienna, 1978, International Congress on Human Rights Teaching, Information and Documentation – Malta, 1987, the International

¹ Adopted by the Conference on Human Rights Education and Dissemination: A 21st Century Agenda: The Second International Conference of Human Rights Movement in the Arab World (13-16 October 2000), Cairo.

Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy – Montreal, 1993, the UNESCO Regional Conference on Human Rights Education in Africa – Dakar, 1998, the UNESCO Regional Conference on Human Rights Education in Asia and the Pacific – Pune, 1999, the UNESCO Regional Conference on Human Rights Education in the Arab States – Rabat, 1999, and the First International Conference of the Arab Human Rights Movement – Casablanca, 1999,

Having reviewed the United Nations Plan of Action for the Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), and the progress achieved halfway through the Decade,

Having held extensive deliberations throughout its sessions, taking into consideration the close link between the lack of respect for human rights and the prevalence of poverty and corruption as evidenced by the World Human Development Report and the Report on Corruption in the World, and also noting the increasing concern at the adverse effects of globalisation on the economic level, the abuse of human rights considerations in international relations, and the grave injustices they caused against peoples, especially in the Arab World,

Decides to adopt the following **Cairo Declaration on Human Rights Education and Dissemination.**

Participants reaffirm:

- * Human rights principles are universal; civil, political, economic, social, cultural and collective rights are closely interconnected, interdependent and indivisible; women's rights are an integral part of the human rights system.
- * Human rights values are the fruit of the interaction and communication between civilizations and cultures throughout history, the product of the struggle by all peoples against all forms of injustice and oppression internal and external. In this sense, such values belong to humanity as a whole.
- * Commendable cultural specificity –as a human right- entrenches people's feeling of dignity and equality, promotes their participation in the conduct of public affairs in their countries, and promotes their consciousness and awareness of the common destiny of all humankind. It is not used to justify marginalizing or consolidating the inferior status of women, nor to justify

excluding the other on whatever religious, cultural or political grounds, or to waive commitment to international instruments.

- * Respect for human rights is a prime interest for every person, group, people, and for humanity as a whole. This is considering that the enjoyment of dignity, freedom and equality by all is a crucial factor in the flourishing of the human person, in advancing nations and developing their material and human wealth, and in promoting the sense of citizenship.
- * Human rights education and dissemination is a fundamental human right. This imposes on governments in particular great responsibilities to explicate, propagate and disseminate human rights principles and their protection mechanisms.

First: The Concept of Human Rights Education and Culture

Human rights education is, in essence, a public endeavour to enable people to learn the basic knowledge essential at once for their emancipation from all forms of oppression and suppression and the inculcation of feelings of responsibility and concern as regards the public good. Human rights culture comprises the host of values, mental and behavioural structures, cultural heritage, norms and traditions commensurate with human rights principles, along with methods of socialization that transmit such culture at home, school, intermediary agencies and the media.

Human rights education and dissemination is a continuous and comprehensive process that covers all the aspects of life, a process that should be brought into all kinds of practices whether personal, professional, cultural, social, political, or civic. It is necessary that all professions adhere to codes of practice committed to values that are inspired by the fundamental human rights.

The fundamental purpose of human rights education is to interweave knowledge and practice. Human rights education, inculcating dignity and responsibility along with social and moral responsibility, inevitably leads people to mutual respect, collective support and adaptation to their respective needs and rights. It leads people to accept working together to reach freely suitable and renewable formulas that would ensure the balance of interests and joint work towards the common good, without the need to resort to the sway violence, arbitrary or organized, which does away with the freedom of everybody.

Second: The Objectives of Human Rights Education and Dissemination

1. Developing and flourishing the human personality in its spiritual, intellectual and social dimensions, and entrenching people's sense of dignity, freedom, equality, social justice and democratic practice.
2. Enhancing men and women's awareness of their rights so as to help enable them to transform human rights principles into social, economic and political reality. It would also enhance their ability to defend, maintain and advance human rights on all levels.
3. Consolidating friendship and solidarity among peoples; promoting respect for the rights of others; cherishing cultural pluralism and diversity and encouraging the flourishing of the national cultures of all groups and peoples; enriching the culture of dialogue, mutual tolerance and renouncing violence; promoting non-violence, fighting bigotry, and immunizing the people against the discourse of hatred.
4. Promoting a culture of peace that is based on justice and respect of human rights, foremost of which are the rights to self-determination and to resist occupation; in addition to democratising international relations and institutions so as to reflect the common interests of humanity.

Third: Recommendations

Having studied the obstacles to human rights education and dissemination in the Arab World, the **Conference** makes the following recommendations:

1. Calling upon the Arab governments to:
 - 1.1 Ratify all the international human rights instruments; to drop reservations for those states that have ratified with reservations; to monitor their practical application; to respect all human rights indivisibly; and to not use the manipulation of human rights by some parties in the international community or cultural specificity as a pretext to justify waiving their commitments towards their peoples and citizens.

- 1.2 Eliminate all restrictions to the freedoms of opinion, expression and assembly, and academic freedoms, in conformity with the universally recognized human rights principles, and to the right to own and manage radio and TV stations and print media channels.
- 1.3 Draw up national plans for human rights education. This would be the greatest contribution to the promotion of the sense of belonging and citizenship, considering that raising people's and societies' awareness of human rights is the first line of defence of human rights and nations' rights.

In this regard, special attention should be given to:

- i) Revising educational curricula and media materials to rid them of messages against human rights, and enriching educational curricula with human rights content.
- ii) Including courses on human rights in higher and post-graduate education, and encouraging MA and PhD research in human rights.
- iii) Including human rights in literacy and informal education programs.
- iv) Including human rights courses in programs qualifying teachers, lawyers, judges, physicians, media personnel, religious scholars, police and army officers, civil servants, and those who work in the different fields of art.
- v) Establishing national institutions for human rights education and dissemination; enhancing the role of those already existing in some Arab countries; and coordinating efforts to realize national plans in cooperation with local, regional and Arab human rights organizations.
- vi) Consolidating cooperation with the relevant United Nations bodies and the international human rights education institutions.
- vii) Paying special attention to the role the arts and letters may play in human rights education and dissemination, given their special capacity to address and inspire human consciousness. Special attention should also be given to knowledge of living reality as a starting point, in addition to developing non-traditional educational materials (such as films and plays).

2. Urging the League of Arab States to concern itself with the human rights issues of the Arab peoples and citizens. This requires revising the Arab Charter for Human Rights so as to bring it into conformity with human rights values and principles; establishing a special system for the Permanent Arab Committee on Human Rights in order to activate it; and opening channels of cooperation with Arab non-governmental organizations. Also, the League of Arab States is urged to contribute in activating the plans of the United Nations bodies concerned with human rights education and dissemination.
3. Establishing an Arab regional committee for human rights education and dissemination to include Arab governments that are active in this regard and the relevant Arab non-governmental organization, with a view to develop plans and programs in cooperation with the relevant United Nations bodies.
4. Urging education experts to develop human rights education curricula to address the heart and emotions as well as the mind. Such curricula should not be restricted to conveying information and knowledge; they should seek to develop critical thinking and attitudes. Thus they may help create a cultural environment that safeguards individual and collective rights and furthers the establishment of the state of law and right. It is necessary that such curricula be based on the universal human rights principles while drawing upon the respective people's specific culture and historical experience in resisting all forms of political, social, cultural and religious oppression and foreign occupation.
5. Calling upon the political parties in the Arab World to declare their full commitment to the international human rights instruments; to enhance the human rights content in their platforms and practices on the ground; to follow democratic practices internally; and to attach special importance to human rights culture in their cadre-training programs for the youth.
6. Urging the radio, TV and the print media to consider seriously promoting human rights values, pluralism and diversity, and to avoid all that may instigate racial or religious hatred, deride the opinions of the other, or degrade human dignity. Also, the Arab Press Union, the different press syndicates and civil society institutions are called upon to monitor the media's adherence to professional codes of ethics in this regard. Moreover, human rights institutions, both governmental and non-governmental,

are called upon to adopt special training programs for media personnel.

7. Urging human rights institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, to make the best use of media channels, especially the radio and TV, in disseminating the human rights culture. This may include establishing special platforms, designing special programmes, and making use of modern technology to this end. Human rights organizations are urged to study the components of popular culture that form the consciousness of individuals, with a view to reaching the discourse suitable for the dissemination of human rights.
8. Calling upon the Arab intellectuals, politicians and religious scholars to abstain from entangling religion in a confrontation with human rights, to consider those rights provided by the international human rights law as a minimum to build upon not to be reduced in the name of cultural specificity or any other pretext, and to work towards the entrenchment of human rights values in the Arab cultural traditions.
9. Calling upon academics, researchers and religious scholars to work for highlighting the roots of human rights in the Arab culture, to underscore the contribution of the Islamic and Christian civilizations in establishing human rights values, and to dismantle that artificial contradiction between a number of human rights principles and some obsolete fundamentalist interpretations.
10. Urging the non-governmental human rights institutions in the Arab World to promote local and regional coordination among them, as well as with the relevant local and regional governmental agencies, and with religious institutions concerned with human rights culture. They are also urged to carry out field research to assess the Arab experiences, both governmental and non-governmental, in human rights education, with a view to identifying the obstacles and making recommendations for improvement.
11. Urging the Secretary-General of the United Nations to take special notice of the issue of human rights education and dissemination, and to designate his yearly address on Human Rights Day, December 10th, this year for calling upon governments to enhance their efforts in this regard, particularly in activating the United Nations Decade for

Human Rights Education, including the mobilization of the necessary human and material resources.

12. Urging the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to undertake the necessary doubling of efforts in order to activate the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education in the best possible way, and to extend better support to the governments and non-governmental organizations active in this field.
13. Urging the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UNESCO to consider the translation of all publications related to human rights issues into Arabic and making them widely available for the Arabic reader.