Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding

Asian Regional Resource Center for Human Rights Education

# Human Rights Education in Asia Pacific: Defining Challenges and Strategies

**November 10-12, 2003**

**Chandrakasem Park, Bangkok, Thailand**

## Rationale

The United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) [UN Decade] has provided legitimacy to human rights education work being done in the Asia-Pacific region and non-governmental programs have benefited immensely from international recognition of the value of human rights education. A few governments in the region developed national human rights education action plans, while other government-supported initiatives largely subscribed to the goals of the UN Decade. It is important to note, however, that the primary responsibility for fulfilling the goals of the UN Decade lies with governments and they are therefore expected to play the major role in this regard. Unfortunately, thus far, many have not been providing human rights education with the amount of support it requires. Non-governmental organizations, on the other hand, continue their long history of empowering communities and groups through education about human rights. In the context of the UN Decade, non-governmental organizations play an indispensable role.

In the words of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General,

*"There is a big gap between the promises under the Decade and the resources actually committed. But non-governmental organizations are doing a lot. Clearly governments need to work closely with them and learn from them."*[1]

If there is one task the non-governmental organizations have to address in their relationship with governments, it is the need to lobby the latter for serious commitment of resources to a comprehensive program for human rights education. There are so many areas of human rights education that would benefit from a close, yet critical, cooperation between non-governmental organizations and governments. Human rights education, by and large, is an unending task. However, before proceeding, it is important to take stock of what has been done thus far and new experiences need to be shared, new tools need to be learned, and new perspectives need to be taken into consideration. Bad experiences need to be better understood and the resulting lessons learned well. It is also imperative for us to take stock of our progress and look at where we currently stand in relation to where we would like to go.

The situation has changed since 1995 when the UN Decade began. New institutions have since been formed and are working alongside many new human rights education programs. Human rights education in the region has surely reached a certain level of achievement with the passage

[1] Press release OHCHR during 2000 Human Rights Celebration (December 10, 2000).

of time. A year before the UN Decade ends, a stocktaking exercise among institutions involved in human rights education in Asia-Pacific is necessary and such an exercise should give answers to questions about the direction of human rights education, and the strategies needed for human rights education to reach an even wider audience, touch on more issues, and have a much greater impact.

## The regional conference

The Asia-Pacific Center on Education for International Understanding, **(APCEIU)** and the Asian Regional Resource Center for Human Rights Education **(ARRC)**, with the support of the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center **(HURIGHTS OSAKA)**, are jointly organizing a regional conference on human rights education.

The conference aims to achieve the following goals:

a. Map out the coverage of human rights education programs in the region in terms of educational fields (formal, non-formal, informal), sectors, issues, and geographical spread.

b. Discuss strengths and weaknesses in the growth and development of human rights education programs

c. Identify strategies on how to further develop human rights education programs in light of the goals of the UN Decade.

## Conference agenda

In support of the goals of the conference, the agenda will attempt to answer questions such as the following:

**a. How are human rights education programs responding to issues and concerns in the region (in terms of institutions, programs and activities)?**

**b. Which issues or concerns are being left out by existing human rights education programs?**

**c. What needs are being met and not met?**

These questions will be answered in the first agenda of the conference:

Review of the human rights education programs currently being implemented in the region. The review will cover non-formal and formal education programs, with either regional or national scope, covering either a general or specific theme or sector. Programs of the UN and institutions from other regions are also part of this review.

Another set of questions will be:

**a. What are the weaknesses of the current human rights education programs?**

**b. What are the available opportunities that could support the development of human rights education in the region?**

**c. What feasible ideas or positive experiences can be used to further promote and develop human rights education in the region?**

**d. What resources are available for human rights education?**

These questions will be answered in the second agenda of the conference:

Identification and analysis of opportunities for the growth and development of human rights education in the region.

The final questions are as follows:

**a. Considering the goals of UN Decade and the existing situation in the region, what strategies should be adopted to support the (UN Decade goals) fulfillment?**

**b. Considering limitations of resources and time, what are the primary strategies that can be feasibly undertaken by the institutions in the region?**

**c. Should there be short-term and long-term strategies?**

The final agenda will be:

Identification and adoption of regional and national strategies to support the goals of the UN Decade.

## Participating institutions

In view of the general objectives of the conference to review and strategize about human rights education, groups that are primarily involved in human rights education, or have active human rights education programs will be invited. These groups can share experiences, provide insights, and **will be able to take action on follow-up activities after the conference**. It is also important to make sure that there is proper representation of different issues/concerns and sectors so that the discussions of experiences reflect current human rights issues. The discussions based on these issues/concerns and sectors will influence the type of strategies to be agreed upon.

As a condition for the participation of each the groups, a short report on their respective programs, activities and needs will be required as working documents for the conference. The reports will be sent to the organizers prior to the conference for collation/integration.

The conference will have a total number of around 50 participants covering mostly regional and some national organizations.

### Program

The conference will have a three-day program consisting of the following:

**Day One**
- Preliminary activities - introduction of participants, conference objectives.
- Review of the human rights education programs currently being implemented in the region.

**Day Two**
- Review of the human rights education programs currently being implemented in the region (continued).
- Identification and analysis of opportunities for growth and development of human rights education in the region.

**Day Three**
- Identification and adoption of regional and national strategies to support the goals of the UN Decade.
- Adoption of strategies and planning (optional) for next activities.

There is a possibility of dividing the participants in small groups to maximize the discussion of the issues.
Some participants may be asked to present introductory reports to begin and guide the discussions.

## Date and venue

**The conference will be held on 10-12 November 2003 in Chandrakasem Park, Bangkok, Thailand.**