



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

everyone, everywhere, everyday

World Programme for Human Rights Education

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Australian Human Rights Commission submission
to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human
Rights re possible focus for the second phase of
the World Programme for Human Rights Education

July 2009

1 Introduction

1. Australia's duty to provide human rights education is set out in several international human rights agreements.¹
2. Australia's national human rights institution, the Australian Human Rights Commission, has statutory functions relating to human rights education in Australia. These include promoting understanding and public discussion of human rights, and undertaking research and educational programs for the purpose of promoting human rights.
3. This submission provides the views of the Commission on what the focus should be for the second phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.
4. The Commission is not in a position to comment on what other UN member countries should be doing in relation to human rights education. The following views are to be seen as a priority in the Australian context.
5. In putting forward these views, the Commission draws on over two decades of experience working on the major human rights issues in Australia. It also draws on its extensive experience and strong track record of working with Australia's state and territory education departments, schools, teachers, the media, lawyers, police, government officials and community organisations to promote an understanding of and commitment to human rights education.

2 Background

6. On 10 December 2004, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the World Programme for Human Rights Education to advance the implementation of human rights education programmes in all sectors.
7. The World Programme is structured around an ongoing series of phases, the first phase (2005-2009) focusing on the integration of human rights education into primary and secondary school systems, intended as a comprehensive process touching on policy and legislative measures, teaching and learning processes and tools, the learning environment and the education and professional development of teachers.
8. The first phase was initially scheduled to end in 2007, but was extended by the Human Rights Council until 31 December 2009.

¹ ICESCR, art 13; CRC, art 28; CERD, arts 5, 7; CEDAW, art 10.

3 Focus for the second phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education

9. We urge the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to consider the following when determining the focus for the second phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education:

Developing a human rights culture through human rights education

10. To develop a robust human rights culture, all people need to better understand their human rights and their responsibility to protect the rights of others.
11. The Commission considers that human rights education is fundamental to building a human rights culture where the rights of all people in Australia are understood and respected, and should be incorporated into every level of general education.
12. A broad human rights education program should be aimed at parliamentarians, court officials, public servants, private sector workers, students in both schools and universities and the wider community.
13. It is also important to develop specific human rights education initiatives to address the needs of communities facing particular human rights issues (for example, Indigenous peoples and particular faith-based communities).

Improving human rights education in Australian education systems

14. In Australia, there is no cohesive approach by state and territory education departments to the delivery of human rights education at the primary and secondary levels (despite this being the focus of the first phase of the WPHRE).
15. There is also a lack of professional development and support for educators (across all curriculum areas) who teach human rights content.
16. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has primary responsibility in Australia for reporting on progress in implementing the goals of the WPHRE. DEEWR has identified the Commission's education program and resources in its reports.
17. In order to fulfil the goals of the WPHRE, the Commission has recommended to DEEWR that there be an audit (situational analysis) of all of the human rights education initiatives that currently exist in Australian education systems. This has not occurred to date.
18. This situational analysis should be the precursor to developing a comprehensive National Plan for Human Rights Education.
19. Some of the areas the Commission feels are important to be covered in a National Plan for Human Rights Education include:

- consideration on how best to incorporate human rights education across the school curriculum
- mechanisms to achieve the pre-service and in-service human rights training and professional support for all teachers in Australian schools
- increased production, distribution and promotion of human rights education curriculum materials.

4. Conclusion

20. Considering that a national study on the status of human rights education in the schooling sector in Australia has not been conducted (as asked for in the WPHRE's Plan of Action); professional support for teachers to teach human rights content is very limited; and a comprehensive national implementation strategy re human rights education has not been developed, the Commission considers that these areas should continue to remain the focus and priorities for the second phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education.