



Dear Colleagues,

This morning, Monday, December 19, 2011, the General Assembly of the United Nations officially adopted the UN Declaration of Human Rights Education and Training. This landmark document recognizes the right of every one of the planet's seven billion people to have access to human rights education, a lifelong process involving all ages, all parts of society, and every kind of education, formal and informal.

The Declaration specifies not simply what one should learn about human rights, but also how ("through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners") and also why ("for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others").

For North American educators the Declaration presents a distinct challenge and a great opportunity. It names the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the primary basis for this learning. Yet a national survey conducted in 1997 showed that over 90% of people in the United States had never even heard of this fundamental document. Because you cannot graduate from any high school in this country without a course in US history and government, most North Americans can name many of their Constitutional rights. However, very few would recognize health care, shelter, or a living wage as a right, all of which are guaranteed in the Universal Declaration. The Declaration thus provides an opportunity for North Americans to expand our understanding of fundamental human rights, the building blocks of representative democracy.

The adoption of this new Declaration also offers the educators and policy makers an occasion to reassess state and national policies and priorities in the light of international standards. If as the Declaration states, "human rights education and training is essential for the promotion of universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all," then human rights education is not only the entitlement of every North American, but also a necessity for responsible citizenship, both of the US, Canada and of the world.

Best regards,
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UN Declaration of Human Rights Education and Training

Article 1

1. Everyone has the right to know, seek and receive information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms and should have access to human rights education and training.
2. Human rights education and training is essential for the promotion of universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, in accordance with the principles of the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.
3. The effective enjoyment of all human rights, in particular the right to education and access to information, enables access to human rights education and training.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Pages/UNDHREducationTraining.aspx>