

THE COMMONWEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

A Memorandum by the Commonwealth Secretariat

INTRODUCTION

1. The 1995 Commonwealth Oxford Conference on Human Rights Education made recommendations on matters of importance for Law Ministers.
2. The purpose of this Memorandum is to draw the attention of Ministers to the recommendations of the Oxford Conference, and to seek the guidance of Ministers on these recommendations.
3. Given the legal basis of many human rights, Law Ministers have a key role to play in developing and strengthening programmes of human rights education.
4. The Oxford Declaration on Human Rights Education, the Framework Document for developing a comprehensive programme for human rights education and training and the Agenda for the decade on human rights education and training appear at Annexes A, B and C respectively.

BACKGROUND

5. The Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991 articulated the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth and its integrated approach to democracy, human rights and development. The Heads of Government Meetings in Limassol in 1993 and in Auckland in 1995 reaffirmed the commitment to human rights as an essential ingredient of these fundamental political values. In the Auckland Communiqué, Heads of Government adopted the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme to fulfill more effectively the commitments to fundamental values contained in the Harare Declaration.
6. In the Auckland Communiqué, Heads of Government also confirmed the importance of human rights education by requesting the Secretariat to assist member governments to promote greater awareness, education and training in human rights.

7. The Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat is centrally involved in promoting these fundamental principles and the Unit's main means of doing so is through human rights education.

8. The importance of education in the human rights field has recently been emphasised by the United Nations Declaration of 1995-2005 as the Decade of Human Rights Education. As an early contribution to this Decade, the Human Rights Unit organised the Commonwealth Oxford Conference on Human Rights Education which was attended by representatives from government, educational institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This Conference developed the Oxford Declaration on Human Rights Education and established a Framework and Agenda for human rights education in the Commonwealth for the decade and beyond.

THE OXFORD CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

9. The attention of Law Ministers is drawn to the recommendations of the Oxford Conference.
10. The Oxford Declaration on Human Rights Education (Annex A) recognised human rights education as "an essential requirement for the realisation of the goals of human rights and fundamental freedoms and democracy and development". The Declaration particularly recognises that "effective human rights education is essential to the development and implementation of national human rights laws in Commonwealth countries". In this context, the Declaration calls upon the Commonwealth and its member states to "encourage and assist member governments to take all necessary steps to develop strategies for comprehensive human rights education".
11. The Oxford Conference envisaged a framework within which such strategies for comprehensive human rights education could be developed. The Framework Document (Annex B) proposes three stages of assessment, planning and implementation for a comprehensive programme developed to suit the particular circumstances of each country and region.

12. The Oxford Conference outlined an Agenda for the Decade of Human Rights Education. The Agenda (Annex C) proposes regional and national targets for the Decade.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF IMPORTANCE TO LAW MINISTERS

13. The Oxford Conference recommended an agenda of national and regional action on human rights education with a pan-Commonwealth conference for the purpose of a mid-decade review targeted for the year 2000.

14. At the regional level, the Conference recommended the co-ordination of human rights education by holding regional conferences and developing regional action plans.

15. At the national level, the Conference recommended:

- that national conferences are held to review current human rights activities and to develop strategies for comprehensive human rights education;
- that existing human rights programmes within government and professional institutions are identified and examined;
- that the national conferences develop national action plans to implement human rights education programmes at all levels;
- that national human rights institutions are established and strengthened;
- that human rights resource, research and information centres are established.

CONCLUSION

16. The Ministerial forum has great potential for the Commonwealth in addressing the strategic legal aspects of the Commonwealth Programme for Human Rights Education. The Law Ministers Meeting also provides an opportunity for Ministers to carry forward the Commonwealth's fundamental principles through human rights education.

17. With their responsibilities for policy development and implementation, Law Ministers can play a key role in promoting human rights education at national, regional and pan-Commonwealth levels.

They are uniquely placed to identify how human rights education might most usefully be developed in a legal framework and most effectively implemented at each of these levels.

18. The Secretariat looks to this Meeting for guidance as to the most effective way ahead.

POSSIBLE ACTION BY THE MEETING

19. The Meeting may wish to:

- (a) endorse the Oxford Declaration;
- (b) consider how Law Ministers may contribute to the Commonwealth Programme for Human Rights Education;
- (c) request the Secretariat to provide any necessary assistance;
- (d) remit the matter to the next meeting of Senior Officials of Commonwealth Law Ministries for a review of progress made in the Commonwealth Programme of Human Rights Education.

COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND TRAINING. CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD, 11-14 SEPTEMBER 1995

OXFORD DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Noting the Commonwealth Declaration adopted by the Heads of Government in Harare in 1991 which pledges the Commonwealth and its member states to work with renewed vigour, concentrating especially on:

- the protection and promotion of the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth:
 - * democracy, democratic processes, and institutions which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government;
 - * fundamental human rights, including equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief.

Noting also the Communiqué by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Cyprus in 1993 in which they:

- affirmed the importance of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the June 1993 World Conference on Human Rights; and
- reiterated that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated: and
- stressed that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Noting further the increasing trends towards liberalisation and privatisation within the economies of many Commonwealth countries and the consequent need for human rights education to address the impact of the exercise of increased power by the private sector on the enjoyment of human rights

Recognising that effective human rights education is essential to the development and implementation of national human rights laws in Commonwealth countries

Further recognising the necessity to make human rights education relevant to the needs of local communities

Taking into consideration the equality, universality, indivisibility and inter-dependence of all human rights as reaffirmed in the UNESCO Plan of Action adopted at the Congress of Human Rights in Montreal in March 1993 and the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993

Emphasising that human rights education underpins the realisation of the goals of human rights and fundamental freedoms and helps to promote democracy and development:-

1. The Commonwealth Conference on Human Rights Education and Training committed to ensuring the effective Implementation of the recommendations of this conference, calls upon the Commonwealth and its member States to:
 - take cognisance of the Framework for developing a comprehensive programme for human rights education and training and to develop and implement within the framework, activities to suit the particular circumstances of each country and region;
 - strengthen the Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat; give more prominence to human rights education in Commonwealth Programmes by allocating appropriate resources and making human rights education an integral part of Commonwealth activities;
 - target Commonwealth programmes of human rights education at all groups, including vulnerable groups particularly, women, children, the aged, refugees, people with disabilities, rural communities, the urban poor, minorities and people affected by HIV/AIDS;
 - encourage and assist member governments to take all necessary steps to develop strategies for comprehensive human rights

- education, including the setting up of national human rights institutions;
- develop national plans to implement human rights education programmes;
 - encourage and support Commonwealth governments to implement formal and informal human rights education programmes in collaboration with NGOs involved in human rights education;
 - include human rights education in formal education and training at all levels, including schools, tertiary institutions, vocational training and adult education programmes;
- assist and support NGOs involved in Human Rights Education Programmes in Commonwealth countries.
2. The Conference also calls upon all inter-governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations of the Commonwealth to seize the opportunities and challenges presented by the UN Decade on Human Rights Education to ensure the development of comprehensive and effective programmes on human rights education.
3. The Conference further calls upon Commonwealth Governments, to strengthen the capacity of the Commonwealth to respond to requests from member states for assistance in entrenching human rights education as an essential requirement for the realisation of the goals of human rights and fundamental freedoms and democracy and development.

**COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE ON
HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION & TRAINING
CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD, 11-14
SEPTEMBER 1995**

**FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING A
COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMME FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND
TRAINING**

NATIONAL LEVEL

1. Assessment Stage

- National Conference on developing strategies for human rights education leading to
- Development of a national plan of action including:
 - Determining Legal Framework for the protection of Human Rights
 - Status of member countries regarding International Human Rights Instruments
 - Governments taking the initiative to establish planning committees including representatives from government, NGOs and other experts from civil society
 - Identification of key areas for human rights education
 - Survey of available programmes
 - Identification of available resources/materials
 - Identification of the roles of government and other organs of civil society and how their activities might be coordinated

2. Planning Stage

- Strengthening capacities for training (including training of trainers)
- Establishment and strengthening of National Human Rights Institutions

- Developing programmes and courses for target groups
- Development and production of directory of institutions, resource persons, including their credentials
- Development and production of relevant materials, including formal and informal texts
- Development of appropriate curricula for training of target groups
- Development of resource and research centres
- Making use of the media
- Making use of forums in civil society such as religious, community and village meetings

3. Implementation Stage

- Dissemination of materials
- Holding of training programmes, workshops, talks and establishment of electronic media networks
- Making full use of the media
- Need to review and monitor the implementation programme

REGIONAL LEVEL

- Holding of widely representative regional workshops for relevant target groups
- Development of regional networking, resource and research centres
- Development of programmes to facilitate the electronic transfer of information

ROLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

- Assisting with the preparation and holding of National Conferences

- Coordinating dissemination of materials
- Production and dissemination of Training Manuals
- Receiving and disseminating progress reports by member states when so requested
- Development of an information data base for the Commonwealth
- Liaising with other international human rights organisations in order to facilitate the obtaining of relevant materials for implementing programmes
- Ensuring that human rights education is on the agenda for the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
- Providing training and advisory services during the implementation of programmes including training in information technology
- Strengthening the Human Rights Unit of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division

**COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE ON
HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION & TRAINING
CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD, 11-14
SEPTEMBER 1995**

**AGENDA FOR THE DECADE ON HUMAN
RIGHTS EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

FIRST PHASE

NATIONAL LEVEL

1. Target for end of 1996

- National Conference to Review Activities and Develop and Adopt
- National Plan of Action.

2. Targets for 1996-97

- Determine Legal Framework for the promotion and protection of Human Rights
- Determine status at National level regarding implementation of international instruments
- Identify and examine existing programmes within government and professional institutions
- Identify local NGOs and their areas of coverage
- Compile directory of local NGOs
- Establish National Coordinating Committee to Implement Plan of Action
- Develop cooperation between government and civil society
- Commence work on data base of information
- Where possible, National Human Rights Institutions should be established

3. Targets for 1997-98

- Establishment and strengthening of National Institutions

- Establishment of research, resource and information centres, where necessary

4. Targets for 1998-99

- Implementation of Training programmes for public officials
- Implementation of human rights education programmes in the curricula of formal education and training institutions and in the non-formal sector
- Evaluation

REGIONAL LEVEL

1. Targets for 1996-7

- Regional review of existing activities and data, including identification of regional training programmes

2. Targets for 1997-8 onwards

- Regional Conferences to review on-going activities and coordinate future activities
- Establish regional research and resource centres
- Roster of regional experts
- Setting up of regional training programmes
- Evaluation of regional programmes

ROLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

- Strengthening of the Human Rights Unit
- Reviewing and coordinating pan-Commonwealth activities
- Facilitating the setting up of national/regional research and resource centres
- Assisting with national capacity building for human rights education on request by member countries
- Providing materials, manuals and access to electronic media
- Facilitating a pan-Commonwealth review conference in 2000

SECOND PHASE 2000-2005

Renewed commitment

Commence implementation of activities under revised Framework

YEAR 2005

Commonwealth Conference to review progress and plan future activities for the Commonwealth