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FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL
FREEDOMS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF
WORK OF THE COMMISSION; ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES AND WAYS AND MEANS
WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE
ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Development of public information activities in the
field of human rights

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

INTRODUCTION

The present addendum contains a summary of further replies received from Governments and from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean offering proposals for enhancing the promotional activities of the United Nations in the field of human rights as well as comments on the draft teaching booklet (E/CN.4/1986/20/Add.1, annex).

PROPOSALS FOR ENHANCING PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Canada

Canada, in its reply, refers to its comments submitted to the United Nations in 1984 and 1985 and states that these information activities are continuing. Canada co-operates with United Nations efforts in this area by ensuring the dissemination within Canada of the documents produced by the United Nations information services.

Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia has translated the major international human rights instruments into its local languages. Also these and other human rights documents are being included in the collections of documents for the study of international law and policy and similar publications. The Czechoslovak media popularize the activities of the United Nations and education in that country includes education in human rights. The implementation of human rights is also the domain of the judicial bodies, special interest groups and mass information media.

Qatar

The audio-visual information media in Qatar endeavour each year to broadcast, disseminate and publicize available programmes and other human rights material, as well as films and programmes received from the Office of the United Nations resident co-ordinator in Qatar.

COMMENTS ON DRAFT TEACHING BOOKLET

Bahamas

Bahamas commends the draft teaching booklet which it finds is well prepared and very useful. The concern is expressed, however, that in the countries which need such teaching not all schools would engage in it.

Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic

The Byelorussian SSR states that the draft booklet avoids a number of crucial issues directly related to the process of guaranteeing human rights, such as the need for legislation to prohibit war propaganda and to safeguard the right to life, the right to development, the right of every person to take part in the work of the State machinery of government, the right to protection by the courts of such inalienable human rights as "honour, dignity, personal freedom". The booklet should also mention the need to combat gross and mass violations of human rights and the need for legislation to prohibit discrimination on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, social or property status, domicile or other circumstances.

According to the Byelorussian SSR, the draft booklet also has the following defects: it gives an incorrect legal interpretation of basic international agreements in the field of human rights; it ignores important instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, while exaggerating the role of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it fails to point out that the basis for the enjoyment of all human rights is peace and the protection of the right to life; it provides virtually no recommendations for deciding on internationally recognized instruments essential for study or explaining the importance of educating children and young people in a spirit of peace and respect for the human person; it ignores the fact that a serious obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights is the non-observance of international covenants by a number of States in which there are systematic and mass violations of human rights, and those States' refusal to become parties to these covenants; it does not show the organic relationship between rights and duties, the methodological recommendations and terminology are

based solely on Western sources, a considerable number of expressions and terms require clarification or amendment (pp.5, 33, 34, 36 and 56 of the Russian text) and many of the proposed recommendations are of a questionable nature.

According to the Byelorussian SSR, the present draft of the teaching booklet would require fundamental revision.

Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia suggests that the booklet should give more emphasis to the idea that the most fundamental of human rights is the right to peace and life in peace. It is suggested that education in human rights must deal with questions of national liberation, and with providing information on serious economic, social and cultural problems. It is suggested that a closer link be established between the subject-matter and the history of United Nations activity in the field of human rights. The importance of international co-operation should be stressed.

Finland

Finland commends the teaching book project. It suggests that reference should be made in the book to the activities of UNESCO in this field. Attention should be paid to the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; the recommendations of the UNESCO International Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights (Vienna, 12-16 September 1978) and later follow-up meetings, and the UNESCO Plan for the teaching of human rights. Finland also believes that the book should contain reference to international law and the Geneva principles applicable in armed conflicts.

Holy See

The Holy See states its view that the teaching booklet does not deal with the origin and roots of human rights. It suggests the inclusion of an introduction to the text which would explain that human rights are founded on human dignity, in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The notion of duties corresponding to rights could also be introduced in the text. The Holy See remarks on the absence of the question of religious liberty in the chapter dealing with freedom of expression and belief. A so-called "neutral" attitude towards religion can lead to a negative attitude to religion. The Holy See suggests the inclusion of a chapter on the nature of freedom of religion and another chapter on discrimination for religious motives - millions of people suffer from discrimination based on religion. It was for this reason that the General Assembly in 1981 adopted its Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. This Declaration should be mentioned in the teaching booklet. The suggestion is also made that the teaching games in the book be gathered into a second separate part of the text.

The following textual changes are suggested:

(a) Introduction (pp.1-3)

It should be stated on page 1 that human rights are based on the concept of the dignity of the human person. The fifth paragraph on this page should therefore use the words "of the dignity of the person" rather than the words "of a personal sort".

(b) Chapter One (pp.4-9)

Page 6 refers to "decent values", but another adjective, such as "positive", would be more appropriate.

The Holy See also considers that the fourth paragraph on page 6 relating to the history of the human rights doctrine deals too cursorily with some very complex problems. It is true that this history is "an essential part of human rights teaching". It should therefore be dealt with in greater depth and more attention should be paid to it in the draft.

(c) Chapter Two (pp.10-27)

The Holy See makes the following comments, which are designed to improve the text:

(i) Universal Declaration

Article 1:

Reference should be made to "conscience" and "brotherhood", which are of great significance in human rights teaching.

Article 5:

Torture cannot be equated with "hurt" because a child may legitimately be given a punishment by his parents that hurts him, without his being able to claim that he is a victim of torture.

Article 6:

The plain language version gives the impression of limiting the scope of the original article, which refers to "a person before the law", not to generic protection.

Article 16:

The statement that "As soon as a person is old enough to have children, he or she has the right to marry" should be toned down by including a reference to the provisions of national laws. The statement that religion "should not have any importance" in relation to the right to have a family is also difficult for many believers to accept and is not in keeping with the spirit of the original text.

In accordance with the original wording of the article, moreover, reference should be made to the fundamental role of the family in society.

Article 18:

The wording of this article, which provides that everyone has the right to practise his religion as he wishes, should take account of the rules governing membership of the faithful in their respective religions.

Article 25:

The original text does not state only that a baby is entitled to protection "when it is born", but, rather, refers to special care and assistance for "motherhood and childhood".

Article 29:

The statement that other people "allow you to develop your personality" is too categorical. It might, for example, be stated that: "It is with others that you may harmoniously develop your personality".

Article 30:

In order to remain faithful to the original text, the word "destroy" should be followed by the words ", through a misinterpretation,".

(ii) Declaration of the Rights of the Child

Principle 2:

There are problems in the life of every child and, to some extent, it is healthy that there should be, for they help to build character. In the French text, it would be better to use the word "normale", as in the original text. Reference should also be made to the intellectual, moral and spiritual aspects of personality development.

Principle 4:

In order to follow closely all the salient points of the original text, the words "and to be protected even before birth" should be added to the present text, for this is what the words "pre-natal care" mean, as is, moreover, also affirmed in the third preambular paragraph of the Declaration.

Principle 7:

A paragraph should be added to make it clear that responsibility for the education of children lies in the first place with their parents.

Principle 9:

The words "You have the right not to be harmed" are very vague. The words "and not to be hired for work until old enough" should be explained by the following phrase, which is based on the original text: "or be forced to engage in any employment which would interfere with your physical, mental or moral development".

(d) Chapter Three (pp.28-56)

The Holy See is fully aware of the difficulties involved in dealing with these sensitive issues, which do, however, warrant discussion. The risk is that students may be misled rather than instructed if they are asked to consider issues such as suicide, homicide, war, capital punishment and euthanasia without being given reliable information that will explain the right to life and all its implications. This again raises the problem of the basis for human rights and the text rightly acknowledges that "Where there is no prescribed solution (in religious terms, for example) finding answers may feel like stuffing jellyfish into pigeon-holes. Look for any strong, justifiable argument for treating all human beings in a humane way. That will be human right".

As already noted, this chapter refers to freedom of expression and belief, but it is a matter of regret that it does not also deal with freedom of religion. Moreover, the definition of "charity" is too simplistic and makes this concept meaningless (p.44).

In the section on discrimination (p.47, first paragraph, second line), the words "in dignity" should be added after the words "Essentially we are all equal".

This section should contain a subsection relating to discrimination on religious grounds, as already stated above.

(e) References

The Holy See suggests that the following text should be included: "L'Eglise et les droits de l'homme", which was published by the Pontifical Commission "Justitia et Pax" in 1975 and translated into several languages.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

The USSR, in its reply, says that the booklet's interpretation of the basic international agreements in the human rights field is erroneous from a legal standpoint. The USSR is of the view that the booklet exaggerates the role of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Other documents, the USSR states, are more important and should be mentioned. These include the International Covenants on Human Rights and deal with such rights as the right to work, housing, rest and leisure, free education, medical and social assistance, access to culture, and participation in scientific progress and enjoyment of its benefits. It is suggested that a purpose of the booklet should be to show the importance of implementation of the Covenants by all States. The authors of the booklet have also, it is said, neglected the paramount human right - the right to life. Not only rights but also obligations should be mentioned in the booklet. The USSR believes that the booklet shows a Western bias. A number of the pedagogical games are considered by the USSR to be misleading. The book is also considered to lack appropriate emphasis on educating in a spirit of peace. The USSR also considers that the booklet neglects to deal with a number of acute issues, such as the struggle against gross and massive violations of human rights, legislation to prohibit war propaganda, the right to life, the right to

development, the right of everyone to participate in government, the right to protection by the courts and the prohibition of discrimination. The USSR, therefore, considers the booklet to require fundamental revision.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ECLAC commends the teaching booklet and praises a number of its aspects. It suggests the addition to the booklet of a list of addresses of national and international bodies dealing with human rights which could provide information and material to teachers and students, as well as to the general public. Once a final version of the booklet is obtained, it should be extended in its use to informal education levels.