

## Human Rights and Human Rights Education

The last decade is experiencing the recurrence of the most serious human rights violations caused e.g. by the rise of nationalism, racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance. The safeguard of human rights goes well beyond the protection afforded by the law. No society can guarantee equal rights if the citizens are not fostering it, without at the same time engaging in activities of the citizens. Human rights education (HRE) calls for educational strategies aimed at preventing the outbreak of violent conflicts and the related human rights violations. No society can guarantee human rights without the effort to develop in citizens an awareness of human rights: the knowledge of your own rights, the willingness to accept the same rights for others and to support the defence of the rights of all people according to one's own possibilities.

Human rights are the result of a civil learning process full of conflicts. The gain of this learning process with regard to civilisation consists of legally recoverable rights of the citizen towards the state, as well as mutual moral rights that citizens can ask from each other. Human rights have a legal side and a moral side influencing the standards of the civil society. The task of HRE is to make this learning process comprehensible. Within the national and the international contexts of HRE four typical difficulties of HRE can be identified. We call them the four Big I's of HRE: ignorance, incompetence, indifference and intolerance.

**1. Ignorance:** this means the lack of knowledge about human rights and the institutions of human rights protection, as well as the inadequate understanding of the gain with regard to civilisation, of the idea of freedom and equality of human rights.

**2. Incompetence:** It is easy when it comes to your own rights, but hard to be supportive of the acceptance of the rights of the others. Citizens are lacking the competence for human rights, mainly because they are not willing to accept the same rights for others.

**3. Indifference:** Citizens behave indifferently towards the endangerment or the violation of human rights, because they do not understand what they themselves can do for the defence of human rights.

**4. Intolerance:** Even where human rights of others are accepted in an abstract way, intolerance still exists, very often towards what people actually do with their right to be free.

HRE has to support the following knowledge and competences, to overcome these problems:

**Understanding of Human Rights:** an essential element of HRE is the knowledge of the nationally guaranteed and internationally standardised human rights, as well as their institutions of protection. However HRE should not just mediate knowledge, but has to make the idea behind the rights and the institutions comprehensible. From the point of view of broad human rights understanding, HRE aims at a competence, which can judge actions of the state as well as basing one's own actions on them.

**Willingness to accept:** an interest in one's own rights plays a leading role in human rights awareness. But to consider this perspective is only one side of the coin. Human rights also include as human rights, the same rights of others. This way they show that there is a double dimension to rights and duties, of rights and responsibilities. An essential condition for the human rights awareness, which can think of rights and duties as belonging together is however, to succeed to embody the willingness to accept equal rights. On the basis of this willingness it will be possible to strengthen the idea of freedom and equality of human rights against the ideologies of bondage and inequality of racism and nationalism.

**Involvement:** HRE is an integral part of democracy education, but very often it does not become clear where the connections are. Therefore, HRE has to support the capability of getting citizens involved who are aware of human rights. Human rights are essential for democracy and the

democratic role of the citizen involves participating in the protection of democracy from political and social powers such as racism and extremism, where the ideology is built on the non-acceptance of human rights.

***Competence of tolerance:*** In the broad understanding of the term HRE, tolerance education is already included, and the distressing manifestations of old and new intolerance give high priority to tolerance education. At the same time there is always a need to explain the inner connections between human rights and tolerance for better understanding. It is about the connection between acceptance of equality and accepting difference at the same time. Tolerance as a competence of citizens living and working together as well as next to each other is more urgent than ever. The living conditions of modernisation force the citizens to shape the growing varieties and diversity of their own freedoms and endure the freedoms of others. Tolerance has to be learned. One has to be made capable of tolerance, and it is one of the utmost tasks of tolerance education to promote the elements of this capability.

From the dictum of the indivisibility of human rights we obtain for the HRE the claim for the indivisibility of the HRE. This means, that human rights present an indivisible ensemble and have to be treated as such, opposing the widely spread misunderstandings regarding the defence of one's own rights and the acceptance of the rights of others.

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