



AN COIMISIÚN UM CHEARTA AN DUINE
IRISH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Human Rights Education in Ireland - An Overview

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Address by

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I would like to once again thank you all for coming, and thank the Minister for being here today and for launching this report. I would like to take this opportunity to outline some of the next steps which we propose in this report in order for Ireland to meet the obligations it has signed-up to in relation to human rights education.

Our report indicates human rights education and training in Ireland is most evident in the formal education sector and that it is evolving in the non-formal education sector. However, there are significant gaps in the provision of human rights education and training in the civil and public service. Nevertheless there is a genuine openness to strengthen human rights education and training across in this sector. This was clearly on display at a recent conference organised by the Commission on human rights education and training in conjunction with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, where there was strong engagement by a range of civil and public sector bodies.

Indeed, that Conference was an excellent opportunity to see the range of training and initiatives that are currently ongoing from the Garda Síochána to the Defence Forces, to the probation service and health sector. In fact in every sector that we have engaged with we have met champions of human rights education. Our overview across a range of sectors suggests that there is a need to bring all of this energy together to build on what exists and to fill the gaps with new initiatives that will achieve the ultimate objective of a culture of respect for human rights in our society.

To achieve coherence in the development and delivery of human rights education and training there is a need for a national level policy in this area, led by the relevant Ministers. We very much welcome Minister Quinn's presence today in that regard. There is also a need for greater co-ordination within and between each sector. For this to happen, a National Human Rights Education and Training Action Plan should be developed. Such a plan would also allow for coherency in strategies, sharing of good practice, and maximum use of resources through cross-sectoral engagement.

The OHCHR has set out five steps that States should take towards establishing a National Action Plan for Human Rights Education and Training. On the basis of the analysis in this report and the steps identified by the OHCHR, the Commission considers that the six steps should be taken to establish a National Action Plan in Ireland:

Step one is the establishment of a National Committee for Human Rights Education and Training. In line with the recommendation from the UN, the IHRC considers that a committee on human rights education and training should be formed comprising representatives from across Government Departments, statutory bodies, education and training institutions and civil society under the stewardship of the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Public Sector Reform. This committee should be responsible for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a National Action Plan. We believe given the remit of the Commission in relation to the

promotion of human rights education we can play an important role in any such committee.

Step two identified by the UN is the need to provide an evidence base. It is important that a National Action Plan is based on knowledge of the current state of affairs of human rights education and training in Ireland. Today's report aims to provide information relevant for a baseline assessment of the current provision of human rights education and training, across the formal, non-formal education sectors as well as the civil and public sector and the legal profession.

Step three is setting priorities. Not everything can be done immediately. Priorities in human rights education and training should be established for the short, medium, and long term on the basis of the findings of the baseline study. We have identified some key areas and actions in our report that could be considered for prioritisation. A National Action Plan should not merely be a 'wish list', prioritisation is essential to ensure that a strategic approach is taken, and opportunities capitalised upon and limited resources invested to give the greatest impact.

Step four is developing the action plan. The objectives to be achieved should be set out and the specific actions to be taken specified accompanied by a set of measurable performance indicators. The Plan should also specify who is responsible, the allocation of resources where necessary, and it should set out a timeframe. It should also specify responsibility for monitoring and evaluation. Within an overarching National Action Plan there can be specific sectoral plans to identify the needs of different sectors, and indeed such an approach is recommended by the UN. As Ireland's National Human Rights Institution, the IHRC can play a key role in supporting the development of National Action Plan that can promote human rights education and training with a range of sectors.

Step five is effective implementation, which is essential for the credibility of the National Action Plan. It is vital that the Plan is created in a consultative manner so as to ensure the contribution of all stakeholders is taken into account, and creates a sense of ownership from those who will be responsible for implementing the plan. It is also vital that responsibilities are clearly assigned, that there are set objectives and targets, and clear, realistic timeframes for the achievement of outcomes.

Step six is review and revision. The implementation of a Human Rights Education and Training National Action Plan is an innovative process; it should be flexible enough to ensure that it can be modified as needed. It should be periodically reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure effective responses to the needs identified by the baseline study. In particular, there should be periodic evaluations of the Plan.

I would like to conclude by thanking again all those who contributed to the report and we stand ready to support the State in whatever way possible in advancing human rights education through a national action plan.