



AN COIMISIÚN UM CHEARTA AN DUINE
IRISH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Human Rights Education in Ireland – An Overview

Launch

4 July 2011

**Address by Senator Katherine Zappone
IHRC Commissioner and
Convenor of IHRC Awareness and Education Committee**

Thank you Minister for your remarks and your presence here to launch the Commission's Report on Human Rights Education in Ireland. We take your presence to be a signal of your interest in and commitment to promoting a cohesive approach to human rights education in Ireland, thereby leading us closer towards embedding human rights education within the mainstream education system, and across all sectors where the education of our people takes place. Imagine what kind of Ireland we might have, if that were to be the case.

Etymologically the word education is derived from *educare* (Latin) to "bring up", which is related to *educere* to "bring out", to "bring forth what is within", to "bring out potential" and *ducere*, "to lead". Education *in* human rights and *for* human rights points then to a process of bringing up, bringing out, bringing forth the deep intuitive sense that we all carry as human beings – that we have a fundamental dignity, that we are free to be ourselves, therefore we ought to be able to exercise our voice and to engage in actions that will ensure our own human rights and that will build a culture to protect those same rights for others.

The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and UNESCO tell us that 'a comprehensive education in human rights not only provides knowledge about human rights and the mechanisms that protect them, but also imparts the skills needed to promote, defend and apply human rights in daily life. Human rights education fosters the attitudes and behaviours needed to uphold human rights for all members of society.'

So, today, as the Irish Human Rights Commission puts its report on human rights education into the public domain, with the support of Minister Quinn, we do so with a dream and an ambition that it will lead to the establishment of a process to develop a national human rights education and training action plan for Ireland. Our dream is rooted in not only the immense potential that this holds for our country, especially at this time, but it is also rooted in the evidence of our research over the past couple of years, namely, how educators, civil society actors and public and civil servants have led the development of an extraordinary amount of initiatives, theory-building, curriculum, policies, teaching, training and learning approaches, learning and working environments and continuous professional development that already does bring out and bring forth the application of human rights in daily life. Many of you educators and actors are here with us today and this report is a testament to your leadership and activity in this arena. It makes good business sense, then, to consolidate and build on this tremendous activity and ambition, within the development of a national action plan, in order to maximize the potential that such work holds for the social and economic well-being of Ireland.

The President has already referenced how this report presents a systematic effort to document the rationale for and substantial activity of human rights education being conducted in Ireland today, and as such is the first of its kind. The Commission views it as a baseline study of current activities, needs and

resources for human rights education and offers it as a prime contribution towards a National Action Plan for human rights education and training.

While this work represents a key step towards highlighting in a cohesive way Ireland's current efforts in this arena, the Commission also signals a number of opportunities to progress the integration of human rights education within each sector of activity. Let me take a moment to offer some snapshots of findings and opportunities:

In Primary Education:

There is a general fit between the aims of the primary education curriculum and the aims of human rights education. Within the curriculum the aims and approach to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) make the most explicit contribution to human rights education. The curriculum's emphasis on developing the student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes and reinforcing and contextualizing the subject through the school climate and integration in other subjects resonates with the aims of human rights education. However, from a human rights education perspective the greatest challenges to the implementation of human rights education in SPHE and the wider curriculum in practice are the time allocated to teach SPHE, the human rights education resources available, the integration of human rights in the whole-school approach, the levels of awareness among teachers about human rights and human rights education and the prominence of human rights education in teacher education.

One of our key recommendations is that greater time is allocated to the teaching of SPHE and more time for human rights education within the subject. Further, we note that the promotion of human rights is a growing feature of initial teacher education and this is an important development which should be actively encouraged and supported. We also acknowledge the approach

taken by St Patrick's College Drumcondra where human rights education is integrated across the initial teacher education curriculum and is explored in dedicated courses. This approach benefits from a dedicated Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education. Our report encourages the integration of compulsory human rights education in all initial teacher education courses in all colleges of education with the support of the Department of Education and Skills.

In Post-Primary Education:

We note that the current aims of the CSPE Curriculum, its syllabus, teacher guidelines and methodologies advance human rights education. In particular the syllabus explores human rights and human rights related concepts such as democracy and human dignity. However, we recommend that the conceptual framework would be stronger with a critical discourse on power relations. We also note the challenges related to the low status of the subject in schools, particularly the insufficient time given to the subject. With regard to the learning environment, we welcome efforts already being made such as anti-bullying policies, anti-discrimination policies (most recently guidelines that promote the involvement of LGBT students in policy development) and the application of intercultural education guidelines. However, one of our recommendations suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the development of human rights based school plans, policies and ways of operating.

In Higher Education:

Human rights are a feature within higher education in Ireland and our report documents a number of examples of good practice in human rights education in diverse disciplines. We note the opportunity that exists to further develop networking among academics and researchers working on human rights education in the different institutions, and point to some good examples in this

area. We suggest that ways to increase resources for research on human rights in Ireland should be explored and recommend that there is greater scope for two-way learning between higher education institutions and the community and voluntary sector, particularly in relating human rights standards to daily life and in supporting the use of participatory methodologies which are central to achieving holistic human rights education and the development of human rights defenders.

Our report highlights some excellent initiatives being undertaken by the **Community and Voluntary Sector**, and how this sector has been extremely active in promoting education and training in human rights. Several of our recommendations point to significant opportunities to develop human rights education within this sector, for example, the establishment of a trainer's network through which community and voluntary organisations could pool their resources together to provide human rights education.

The mapping of human rights education activity concludes with a chapter on 'Continuous Professional Development' in the **Civil and Public Service** and the **Legal Profession** in Ireland' and a chapter on the IHRC's Human Rights Education and Training Project. While there are some excellent initiatives being undertaken in human rights education and training in the civil and public service, notably the Garda Síochána as well as in the Defense Forces, we spot an opportunity for a comprehensive policy and commitment to human rights in continuing professional development for this sector. We recommend that a human rights education and training advisory group be established under the auspices of the Minister for Public Sector Reform. We outline the ways in which the Commission is committed to working with civil and public service training bodies to integrate human rights in their training programmes in particular through its human rights and education training project. We further note the significant work of the Committee on Judicial Studies, noting our

desire to be support the committee in any way possible. And we highlight how the Kings Inn and the Law Society of Ireland integrate human rights across their subject, and encourage these bodies to strengthen the explicit human rights content of their educational programmes, again offering our support in this regard.

To conclude, I would like to offer a special word of thanks to those human rights education experts—theorists and practitioners—who have assisted us at various stages of compiling this report. The Commission would like to particularly express its gratitude to Dr Fionnuala Waldron of St Patrick's College Drumcondra and Dr Gerry Jeffers of NUI Maynooth for their very valuable input, inclusive of reviewing earlier drafts. I wish also to acknowledge and thank members of my committee—Commissioners Olive Braiden, Suzanne Egan, Lia O'Hegarty and Helen O'Neill—who offered inter-disciplinary oversight to the advance of this report, and to express my personal appreciation to our staff-- Kirsten Roberts, Fidelma Joyce, and Winnie Donoghue - who dedicated significant expertise and time.

My final word for today is this. As Ireland envisions and formulates the road to national recovery in light of the global and national dynamics, it is the Irish Human Rights Commission's view that human rights education—adequately resourced and efficiently practiced within each sector—is an integral component of the human rights and equality infrastructure needed to ensure the prosperity and well-being of all who reside here.

Thank you.

ENDS.