

Speech by Mr. Pavel Chacuk, OSCE/ODIHR Human Rights Adviser, at the Council of Europe conference “Learning Democracy and Human Rights. Evaluation 2006-2009 and the Way ahead”

In keeping with a request by the chair-moderator for this roundtable, I will touch briefly on three topics: the education-related work done by ODIHR, ODIHR’s experience in working on human rights education, and a few suggestions for the Council of Europe to consider in the next stage of its HRE/EDC work.

ODIHR is increasing its activities in human rights education, so allow me to mention a few education-related projects and the tools that we have developed. In 2007, ODIHR published the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (TGPs), which offer guidelines aimed at ensuring that teaching about religions and beliefs is provided in an environment that is respectful of human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic values. In close co-operation with the Anne Frank House and national experts from ten different OSCE participating States, ODIHR supported the development of teaching materials on anti-Semitism. The focus of the materials is on the history and nature of prejudice against Jews. In co-operation with Yad Vashem, we developed the Guidelines on How and Why to Address Anti-Semitism and the guidelines on Preparing Holocaust Memorial Days – Suggestions for Educators, which highlight best practice modules. The guidelines on Preparing Holocaust Memorial Days are currently available in 13 languages. At the end of last year, together with UNESCO, OHCHR, the Council of Europe and the NGO Human Rights Education Associates (HREA), we published “Human Rights Education in the School Systems of Europe, Central Asia and North America: A Compendium of Good Practice”. This resource, which has been mentioned today already, is a compilation of 101 practices that deal with law and policies, action plans and guidelines, as well as active participation, atmosphere in schools, methodological materials for schools and teacher training and evaluation. Full or partial examples of each of the practices have also been included on CD and on-line versions of the publication. The Compendium will also be translated into French and Russian, and we plan to begin organizing workshops based on this tool this year. ODIHR is also preparing an overview of the enrolment and participation of Roma and Sinti children in early education in the OSCE area, with the aim of identifying obstacles and main challenges, as well as existing positive initiatives. These are only a few examples of our work, which we often have the pleasure of carrying out in co-operation with our partners from the Council of Europe.

Now allow me to share with you some of our experiences working in the HRE area. As has been mentioned, we carry out projects jointly with the leading NGOs in particular fields – I have already mentioned Yad Vashem, Anne Frank House, HREA. This partnership with the civil society is crucial for us; it allows us to use the unique professional potential of these NGOs and guarantees the sustainability of the tools that we develop jointly, even after ODIHR can no longer support the projects. This, then, suggests the direction forward in the next phase of our EDC/HRE programme – relying more on civil society expertise.

Two more brief points about our experiences also point the way forward. Very often, the result of human rights teaching in both formal and non-formal education is a notion of human rights as something abstract, with little relevance to everyday life. We have tried to make education about human rights as practical as possible, based on real problems in communities and necessarily linked to action to promote and defend human rights and prevent their violation. This is the way to connect EDC with HRE. Given this, the decision to make awareness raising about the ECHR and related case law the focus in the next phase of the CoE's work should be praised.

Finally, practice has proved that only work over a long period can deliver solid results and generate changes that can be tracked and evaluated properly. Because of this, we very much appreciate the CoE's commitment and consistency to its work in the area of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

Thank you!