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Learning Equality. Living Dignity.
3rd *Compass* Forum on Human Rights Education
European Youth Centre Budapest, 5-7 October 2016

MESSAGE TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

We, the participants of the 3rd Compass Forum on Human Rights Education, Learning equality, living dignity, organised within the framework of the Estonian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, gathered in Budapest to improve the quality, outreach and impact of citizenship and human rights education in Europe and beyond. We are human rights educators, activists and defenders, representing youth organisations and networks, and we are also national co-ordinators of Education for Democratic Citizenship / Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE).

We are proud of the progress that we have made! Human rights education is being strengthened and reaffirmed as central to our work. The Human Rights Education Youth Programme helps us improve the quality and accessibility of EDC/HRE for young people, notably through training courses and tools, such as *Compass* and *Compasito*.

Human rights education is being mainstreamed across policies and programmes through a rights-based approach to youth work and policy, affirming an understanding of young people as rights-holders. We welcome the recent adoption of the recommendation on Young People's Access to Rights as an important recognition of this; now it needs to be followed by actions.

A rights-based approach allows us to draw on human rights education methodology in policy responses and interventions, such as the Enter! project on access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights, the No Hate Speech Movement campaign to defend human rights online, and the Roma Youth Action Plan.

The Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education recognises the interdependence of formal and non-formal education. It must be promoted and fully implemented by member states; regular reviews of its implementation ought to be carried out. We are committed to supporting its implementation but institutional support is irreplaceable.

Civil society and youth organisations remain fragile in many of our countries. We count on you to support them as essential to participatory democracies and as partners in implementing the right to human rights education with children and young people.

Human rights education and the values underpinning it should be the organising principle for our education systems and the everyday experience of going to school. It should be integrated into formal education through appropriate curricula, learning materials, and teacher training. The experiences and values of non-formal education can inform this process. Students and teachers should be empowered through democratic practices and participatory decision making at school, especially because not all young people participate in, or have access to, youth work and non-formal education, particularly not those from marginalised groups. It is thus also important to empower youth organisations to reach out to ever more young people in co-ordinated multi-stakeholder efforts towards better results.

We draw your attention to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This universal agenda makes human rights education an integral part of quality education and a priority for all governments. The Council of Europe should lead in advocating for human rights education and support countries by sharing policy advice and best practices, and by assessing the implementation of this commitment in Europe based on its Charter on EDC/HRE.

We are proud of our work and the results we have achieved. But the human rights situation in Europe has not improved at the same pace. Indeed, it has worsened. We see an appalling rise in human rights violations and abuse, including the right to human rights education. Young people are particularly exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, including afrophobia, antigypsyism, antisemitism, islamophobia, racism and xenophobia, as well as disablism, homo- and transphobia, sexism and gender-based violence. All of these are amplified through hate speech. We are particularly concerned about the discourse and measures related to migrants and refugees, and ethnic and religious minorities, whose human rights are often denied and violated, sometimes under the guise of security and anti-terrorism measures.

We are alarmed by the persistence of armed conflicts and militarisation in Europe and by their impact on the lives of so many children and young people.

The situation for young people has worsened as member states shy away from their obligations. Youth unemployment remains too high. Precariousness and social exclusion have become key features of being young in Europe today. This is further undermined by austerity measures and cuts in public services, particularly education, which often directly impact young people and their access to quality education. Such developments inhibit the progress made in making human rights education more accessible and in ensuring young people can fully enjoy all human rights. Living dignity must be a conscious refusal of exclusion and discrimination.

Human rights education does not take place in a vacuum. Our work becomes more difficult when governments in Europe fail to uphold and defend human rights at the highest political level; when they question the universal nature of human rights or fail to protect us from discrimination; or when they actively engage in restricting the space in which civil society can function. We are particularly alarmed by the tendency of political leaders to openly undermine and disregard human rights instruments. By failing in their role as duty holders, they reduce human rights to empty rhetoric, furthering the alienation and exclusion of young people across Europe, and putting into jeopardy their present and future.

Human rights have to be promoted and defended at every level and at all times. We expect the Council of Europe and its member states to respond to the increase in violations and threats to human rights by stepping up their defence and promotion, in policies and in practice, at work and in classrooms, at borders and at sea, online and offline. We are committed to doing our part. Are you?

We ask the Council of Europe and its member states to:

1. Increase investment in human rights education, in both formal and non-formal settings, and at local and national levels, ensuring it is accessible to all young people.
2. Prioritise the further development of educational resources and activities for citizenship and human rights education within the Council of Europe, and secure the continuity of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme.
3. Take further steps to integrate human rights education into formal education curricula and teacher training, building on practices and experiences of non-formal education.
4. Implement fully the Charter on EDC/HRE and take a leading role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goal on human rights education.
5. Put in place transparent mechanisms for reviewing and evaluating the Charter with a systematic involvement of youth organisations.
6. Take urgent measures to guarantee the access to rights of *all* young people and reverse the negative impact of austerity measures on them, including the full implementation of the Recommendations on Young People's Access to Rights and on the Access of Young People from Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods to Social Rights.
7. Strengthen the Council of Europe youth sector and its co-management system by increasing investment in rights-based youth work and policy, including youth organisations.

Human rights are our most important asset: learning them is a right; enabling this learning is our shared responsibility.