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**Human Rights Education:  
Fighting ignorance, encouraging tolerance**

Speech

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The best defence for human rights is that we all know what rights we have and how we can complain against injustices.

Education about human rights is central to effective implementation of agreed international standards. It is also an important way of combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

The Council of Europe has been a key actor on human rights education and has developed numerous practical tools. The most well known is Compass, a manual on human rights education with young people. It is currently available in 25 languages, and more versions are being worked on. The Council of Europe has also focused on bringing human rights education into the mainstream of youth work and policy.

The United Nations will soon evaluate the first phase of its *World Programme for Human Rights Education* which focused on primary and secondary education. From next year onwards, the UN will move out of the school to target higher education, teachers, educators, civil servants, law enforcement officials and military personnel.

The focus on key actors in society is crucial. These professionals – teachers, journalists, police officers, health care workers, judicial sector or armed forces staff – must serve as role models for young people. When carrying out their daily work, they must live up to the human rights standards communicated, in particular, when facing stressful situations. By their example, they can help to firmly anchor human rights awareness in society.

Despite the progress achieved, much remains to be done not least to inform and educate against discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

This is sadly evident in the course of my work. On my most recent country visits, I was confronted with examples of verbal and physical attacks on certain vulnerable groups such as LGBT, Roma and other ethnic minorities.

Human rights education is key to the inclusion of vulnerable groups. Thus, it is necessary that teaching methods convey human rights values by encouraging participation and critical analysis and by promoting a learning environment free from discrimination and intolerance. Only when human rights education is integrated into the formal school system at all levels of education, can we begin to replace ignorance with acceptance.

Yes, there have been achievements and I look forward to the outcome of the UN evaluation. Still, too little space is given in the curricula. Methods and materials are not always adapted to convey a real understanding. There should be both, “human rights through education and in education”, creating an atmosphere that enables discussion and reflection and active involvement of children in democratic citizenship.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, this year celebrating its 20th anniversary, can inspire teaching methods and materials and which values to spread.

Children learn by example and through active involvement. They benefit from seeing diversity in schools. This is why including all children – regardless of disability, origin and background - into the regular education system, benefits society at large. Inclusive education gives everybody the possibility to understand each other and this way best fights intolerance.

Furthermore, basic materials also need to be available in relevant languages, teachers and educators should be recruited from minority and disadvantaged groups and attention should be paid that pedagogic methods are culturally adapted.

Human rights education must not fall short due to budgetary cuts in times of economic crisis. I am convinced that the long term costs of such cuts will offset any short-term savings.

In this context, I would like to thank all such governments who despite fighting the economic crisis through huge investments have, nevertheless, refrained from cuts in their "human rights budgets". In spring, I visited the newly opened Wergeland Centre in Norway. Such centres can play a major role in promoting human rights education, not only in Europe, but beyond. Another example is the North-South Centre which engages in global education and youth work.

It is encouraging that the importance of a broad teaching of human rights is acknowledged across different cultures as, for example, in the Arab Charter on Human Rights. I believe that soon human rights education will also find its place within the new ASEAN human rights body. The current work on the UN Declaration on human rights education and training ("Marrakech initiative") again underlines the importance of the topic and the need to work together.

One example of good co-operation is the *Compendium of Good Practice*, published jointly by the OSCE/ODIHR, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. This comprehensive tool for teachers and policymakers alike looks at human rights education in the school systems of Europe, Central Asia and North America and presents 101 exemplary practices.

The Council of Europe is working on a European Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. I hope that this core instrument will be speedily adopted (foreseen in February 2010) and that it will be used as a basis to develop human rights education action plans both in Europe and beyond. The involvement of NGOs is key to the development of effective action plans in every society. Civil society will also need to serve as a monitoring system as the new Charter currently foresees none.

I believe that human rights education is a catalyst to achieve real and sustainable change. I wish you a fruitful dialogue.