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Living, Learning, Acting for Human Rights

Forum on Human Rights Education with Young People

European Youth Centres, Budapest and Strasbourg
14-18 October 2009

Consolidating and developing human rights education with and
by young people within the Council of Europe's mission and
youth policy framework

**MESSAGE
to the Council of Europe**

We, the participants at the Forum on Human Rights Education with and by Young People – *Living, Learning, Acting for Human Rights* – met at the European Youth Centres in Budapest and Strasbourg from 15 to 17 October 2009. We are driven by the motivation to consolidate and develop human rights education by, with and for young people. We wish to associate our voice, and that of the young people we work with or represent, to the celebrations of the 60th Anniversary of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe at 60

After 60 years, the Council of Europe now embraces virtually the whole of Europe: most young people in Europe today grow up and live under the protection of the Council of Europe's human rights system, chiefly the European Convention of Human Rights. More young people grow up in democratic societies today than ever before in European history. The Council of Europe has really become the "Common European House" that was called for after the fall of the Berlin Wall 20 years ago. According to its statute, the Council of Europe was created to "achieve a greater unity among its members"; throughout the years the organisation has undoubtedly contributed to it.

The values that guide the action of the Council of Europe are universal values for all of us and are centred on the inalienable dignity of every human being. They remain essential and fully relevant in today's world. They are more than just inspiration: they are also moral and political commands that apply to the relations between states and people, as much as within states and amongst people.

The pan-European scope of the Council of Europe ultimately gives it the conditions to pursue its mission to the full. This scope also places an obvious and greater responsibility to respond to the needs and expectations placed upon it. The ability to respond to these expectations is essential for its credibility and, above all, for the credibility of the principles and values that it stands for, and which unite committed and concerned young people.

In a world that is being transformed by global challenges and crises, we find it important for the Council of Europe to:

- develop the capacity of its institutions and mechanisms to respond with effectiveness
- further involve citizens and civil society in its actions
- be watchful and uncompromising towards violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by its member states
- work towards a culture of universal human rights through education, together with other international and regional organisations
- support access to justice for marginalised groups and effective sanctioning of all forms of discrimination.

The Council of Europe and Young People

The Council of Europe has an outstanding record of associating young people to the process of European construction and of considering youth policy as an integral part of its work. The Council has promoted an approach to youth policy that aims at supporting young people's participation as citizens and their transition to autonomy. This approach is progressively being recognised and adopted by other national and international actors. The European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, and the European Youth Foundation have championed programmes for the meaningful participation of young people and the consolidation of democracy. The experience of co-management between youth organisations and governmental representatives is a key feature in the Council of Europe youth sector and is at the heart of the success of its programmes.

The experience of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme in the last ten years has also served to consolidate a human rights-based approach to youth interventions and to mainstream human rights education in youth work and youth policy effectively. In this programme, young people play a central role, also as educators and advocates for human rights.

In the Council of Europe member states today, to be young is also to be exposed to situations of precariousness and instability, which seriously hamper equality of opportunities for many young people to play a meaningful part in society. Too many young people look at the future with greater apprehension and fear than confidence. For them, human rights, especially social rights and freedom from discrimination, sound like empty words, if not false promises. Persisting situations of discrimination and social exclusion are not acceptable and cannot be tolerated. The exercise of human rights includes access to vocational training leading to a decent job.

We expect the Council of Europe to:

- dedicate more efforts towards the social inclusion and freedom from discrimination of *all* young people
- develop more effective ways to ensure access to human rights, especially social rights, by *all* young people
- continue to promote human rights-based approaches to youth policy and to monitor their observance
- support the involvement of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people and those with special needs, such as migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, displaced persons, Roma, rural youth, young people with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gender youth
- support the participation of young people and children in all matters that concern them: nothing about young people without young people
- further the recognition, development and sustainability of youth work in Europe
- secure appropriate resources for its youth policy and youth work instruments and foster the engagement of national institutions.

The Council of Europe and Human Rights Education with Young People

Human rights cannot be defended and promoted by legal instruments alone. Human rights education – learning *about*, learning *through* and learning *for* human rights – is essential to make sure that they are understood, upheld and promoted by everyone.

The work undertaken by and for young people through *Compass* – the manual on human rights education with young people, clearly shows that the Council of Europe can rely on the generosity, passion and competence of young people to make human rights education a reality for many other young people. The success of *Compasito* – the manual on human rights education for children, has proven the importance of introducing human rights education at earlier ages. In both cases, the experiences from youth work and non-formal learning have been successfully placed at the service of human rights education projects for all, including the complementarity of formal and non-formal learning.

The Human Rights Education Youth Programme has also revealed serious limitations to this work. Human rights education cannot be the responsibility of NGOs and youth organisations alone. Neither can it be carried out solely by volunteers. The states have a major responsibility to implement human rights education. It needs to be embraced, supported and sustained by them in ways that foresee a role for the formal and non-formal education sectors. Human

rights education must systematically mainstream gender awareness and gender equality perspectives. Additionally, it must include an intercultural learning dimension.

The Council of Europe can and needs to do more in order to make the right to human rights education a reality for all children and young people. Commitments to human rights are also commitments to human rights education. Investments in human rights education secure everyone's future; short-term cuts in education result in long-term losses.

We expect the Council of Europe to:

- further support the development of human rights education as part of its youth policy and in other policy areas
- develop standards for human rights education in the member states, and encourage member states to give on-going support to the development of human rights education with children and young people, while respecting the United Nations standards that they have committed themselves to
- promote human rights education as a fundamental human right, to raise awareness about it and to monitor its implementation by member states
- protect the freedom and security of human rights activists and educators
- mainstream minority issues throughout its human rights education programmes, including gender, ethnicity, religion or belief, ability and sexual-orientation issues
- encourage greater co-operation, networking and interaction between formal and non-formal education sectors
- support co-operation and exchanges on human rights education with other regions of the world, based on mutual learning processes, particularly in conflict-affected areas
- recognise, sustain and stimulate co-operation between local, national and international actors and networks promoting and implementing human rights education
- enhance human rights education and training activities for all professionals dealing with young people and children
- recognise the irreplaceable role of NGOs, including youth organisations, in promoting and implementing human rights education.
- give greater visibility and credit to the human rights activities carried out at local level.

We believe the Council of Europe represents the future of Europe, a future where living, learning and acting for human rights is the rule, not the exception - a reality, not a vision.