



**STATEMENT BY MRS. MUKTA D. TOMAR, COUNSELLOR, ON AGENDA ITEM
105: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS EDUCATION, 1995-2004 AT THE 59TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL
ASSEMBLY ON DECEMBER 10, 2004**

Mr. President,

The International Human Rights Day commemorates this year the 56th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 11th anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. We focus our attention today on the theme of human rights education.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights through Article 26 provides the foundation for human rights education. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA) acknowledged human rights education as an important pillar for the promotion and protection of human rights. Human rights education, training and public information have been recognised as being essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. The General Assembly which proclaimed the first UN Decade for human rights education by its resolution 49/184 had affirmed that human rights education should involve more than the provision of information and should constitute a comprehensive life-long process of instilling in everyone respect for the dignity of others.

Education for all, elimination of illiteracy and wide-spread dissemination of information on human rights, combined with targetted human rights education for key groups such as armed forces, police personnel, judges, lawyers, trade union leaders, NGOs are indispensable elements of any effective strategy to promote human rights. The VDPA, recognising this aspect, called upon States to pay special attention to developing specific national programmes and strategies for ensuring the widest human rights education. It also called for the proclamation of a UN decade for human rights education in order to promote, encourage, and focus those educational activities.

While the importance of human rights education is widely accepted, action is still wanting in most areas. Human rights continue to be perceived through the behaviourist prism of condemnation and punishment rather than promotion. Human rights education offers considerable scope for bringing together the international community in a collective endeavour and, therefore, needs to be taken up as a priority activity.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General's report presents to Member States for their consideration a draft plan of action for the first phase (2005-2007) of the proposed World Programme for human rights education. We shall study the draft plan of action carefully.

Meanwhile, the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights referenced in the Secretary-General's report provides reflections on the achievements and shortcomings of the Decade (1995-2004) that has just been completed. We agree that one of the significant achievements of the Decade is that it has "put human rights education on the agenda." It has helped to increase awareness of the need for human rights education and provided a framework for international cooperation in this area. Several shortcomings and challenges have been identified in the report, including the need for development of appropriate methodologies for human rights education, development of effective coordination mechanisms and frameworks for human rights education at all levels and very importantly, the lack of human and financial resources to implement human rights education programmes, and finally, the lack of political will on the part of the responsible authorities.

Mr. President,

The relationship between democracy and human rights is well established. We believe that a sound democratic tradition that promotes respect for pluralism, diversity and tolerance goes a long way in ensuring the success of our efforts in human rights education. Democratic institutions and people's participation in the political and developmental processes through these institutions would guarantee the success of such efforts. Our own national experience bears this out. In India, the idea of human rights is embodied in the Constitution which was adopted in 1950, soon after India's independence. The Constitution promotes and protects the human rights of the people of India. Thus far, human rights education has been integrated into diverse subjects at different stages of education through India's education policy.

However, recognising the need for further action in this area, the Government of India constituted an inter-Ministerial 'Coordination Committee', under the chairmanship of the Home Secretary. The Committee adopted a National Action Plan for Human Rights Education which was drawn up in cooperation with the National Human Rights Commission, an autonomous institution mandated to promote human rights literacy and awareness under the Protection of Human Rights Act of 1993. The Committee also oversees implementation of the Action Plan which consists of strategies for raising awareness about human rights and strategies for promoting social empowerment through attitudinal change and for sensitising specific target groups such as students, officials in law enforcement and in the administration of justice, and parliamentarians. Specific time-bound action plans have been drawn up for raising mass awareness, human rights education in educational institutions at different levels, sensitisation programmes for government officials and parliamentarians and training for officials in law enforcement and administration of justice.

The Government has undertaken several initiatives in the secondary and higher education sector, including introduction of courses in human rights education in 26 universities; the establishment of a curriculum revision committee to revise textbooks; the development of a number of training modules for teachers and educators in English, Hindi and regional languages by the National Council of Teacher Education; the

provision of financial assistance by the University Grants Commission to universities and colleges for the development of specific courses in human rights; and the establishment of a special Cell at the Indira Gandhi National Open University to play the nodal role in the promotion of human rights education through distance education. In India, human rights have been introduced as a part of school curriculum in all 18 official languages.

Mr. President,

Furthering human rights education is a multi-institutional task. In India, the work of the Government, both in the states and at the Centre, is supported by the active involvement and participation of the National Human Rights Commission. We have also enlisted the active involvement of non-governmental organisations, human rights research and training institutions, grassroots organisations, voluntary social organisations, professional associations and other active civil society organisations in this national endeavour.

My delegation is a co-sponsor of the resolution on "World Programme for Human Rights Education". We would like to thank the main sponsor, Australia, for their efforts in presenting the resolution. The resolution will ensure that the work started in the first decade on human rights education will gather further momentum in the second decade. Our co-sponsorship of the resolution is a demonstration of the importance that India attaches to this subject.

Mr. President,

The VDPA had noted that resource constraints and institutional inadequacies may impede the immediate realisation of the objectives set out. In his message for Human Rights Day 2000 during the mid-term review of the Decade, the Secretary-General noted that there was "a long way to go. Only a few countries have developed effective national strategies for human rights education. There is a big gap between promises made under the Decade and the resources actually committed."

We agree with the Secretary General's comment that "human rights education is much more than a lesson in schools or a theme for a day; it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity." Security and dignity cannot be achieved on empty stomachs, where situations of extreme poverty, hunger and deprivation become the primary concern. Strengthened international cooperation for poverty eradication remains a key ingredient to promotion and protection of human rights, and to promoting human rights education.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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