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Education for human rights

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THE observance of Human Rights Day marks the adoption on 10 December, 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was conceived "as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations." One of the main features of the adoption of the UDHR is that it was the first occasion on which the organized community of nations made a declaration of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Secondly, the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (NDHR) establish the whole range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people. Thirdly, the UDHR is one of the major documents of history whose main strength is its universality and applicability to all countries irrespective of size or ideology, small as well as big countries, and to men as well as to women.

The Declaration is not a treaty and therefore is not legally binding. So, it was considered necessary to translate its provisions into treaty form and to define them in greater detail. As a result, two Covenants, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol were drafted and adopted in 1966 and entered into force in 1976. These two Covenants, together with the Universal Declaration and the Optional Protocol, constitute the Inter-

national Bill of Human Rights.

The Declaration was initially seen and formulated to be non-binding. But over the last forty years, a comprehensive legal framework has grown out of the Declaration's proclamation of common standards for all peoples and all nations. Over sixty international human rights instruments now extensively protect human rights, from the two International Covenants to the most recent addition, the Convention on the Rights of Children.

These instruments now comprise treaty bodies to review national practice, special rapporteurs to look into country situations or categories of abuses, and procedure to take up individual communications. This gradual creation of a comprehensive system to protect human rights ranging from general principles to specific bodies and detailed procedures is one of the most striking achievements of the United Nations.

In spite of all these endeavours of the world community, human rights violations, however, still haunt the world's conscience. To quote the UN Secretary, General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, "Every day, every hour, in every region, the most flagrant

abuses take place. The human rights record of our age is stained by summary executions and arbitrary arrests, by involuntary disappearances and widespread torture, by killing of unarmed demonstrators and detention for reasons of belief and conviction. These assaults upon the most fundamental notions of justice and human dignity cannot leave us indifferent. They are assaults upon each and every one of us. There can be no hesitation in our solidarity and no relenting in our struggle."

A person may fall victim to human rights violations mainly for two reasons. Firstly, for lack of knowledge or awareness of his or her rights and fundamental freedoms, and secondly, for the lack of political will on the part of the government concerned to promote and to protect its citizens. Human rights will never be guaranteed until they come to permeate the very political ethos of a society.

Human rights education can play a crucial role over the long term in preventing human rights violations. The United Nations General Assembly in a resolution, 217, A (III) of 10 December 1948, by which the General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, demands that "every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.

In accordance with the Recommendations of the International Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights held in September 1978 in Vienna, human rights education and teaching must aim at:

(a) fostering the attitudes of tolerance, respect and solidarity inherent in human rights

(b) providing knowledge about human rights, in both their national and international dimensions, and the situations established for their implementation, (c) developing the individual's awareness of the ways and means by which human rights can be translated into social and political reality at both the national and international levels;

In order to make the programme very practical and effective, human rights must be taught at all levels of the educational system, as well as in out-of-school settings, including the family, and in continuing education and training programme, including

১০ ডিসেম্বর ১৯৮৮
10 DEC 1988

literacy and post literacy programmes. At the University level, human rights should also be taught as a subject integrated in the appropriate disciplines and in particular fields such as philosophy, political science, social welfare, law and theology, and they should be taught as an independent course, special training course on human rights also be organized in an integrated way to military as well as justice personnel, including policemen, lawyers and judges. Human rights law must be integrated into the training programme for the police forces.

In Bangladesh, to introduce human rights education at all levels of instructions, there is an urgent need for the preparation and publication of primary and secondary school guide-books and text books for human rights education and human rights manual for the training of judges, lawyers and officers of the law enforcing agencies.

Besides this, a national clearing house for information and research on human rights should be established. The clearing house should: (a) collect and disseminate information on international and national human rights legisla-

tion, adjudication and other human right activities, as well as information, materials, syllabi and instructional guides for all levels and kinds of education, and technical advice on the establishment of academically prepared national human rights yearbooks, and should also facilitate discussion among scholars toward the setting of priorities for effective human rights research; (b) coordinate and promote an international system of exchange of teachers and researchers in the field of human rights and of materials, including information between teachers and researchers working in the field of human rights as well as publications and materials concerned with teaching and research in human rights; (c) create a curriculum centre for elementary school teaching materials on human rights, including kits, books and teaching manuals, to help make them available to teachers.

The Co-ordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB) can play a very effective role as the clearing house on human rights education and information in Bangladesh. The CCHRB is going to organize workshop on the theme, "Education is a human right", to mark the forty-first anniversary of Human Rights Day on December 10, 1989.