Chapter 6

Human Rights Education for Peace and Conflict Resolution

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between human rights and conflict is dynamic, complex, and powerful, constantly shaping and reshaping the course of both peace and war. The world was worried with the devastating effect of the World War II. The United Nations was formed out of the ashes of the war in 1945, putting respect for human rights alongside peace, security and development as the primary objectives. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was also adopted in 1948 as a continuation of that obligation, which provided a framework for a series of international human rights conventions. Presently almost all the national legislations are influenced by these conventions. The modern system of international human rights treaties is based on the concept of universalism. Depending on the agency, human rights include civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, development rights, and indigenous rights. However, what is or is not considered a human right differs from one nation to another (Fedorak, 2007).

INTRODUCTION

Be the change you want to see in the world. - Mahatma Gandhi

‘Human Rights’ as positivist manifestations of ethical category and naturalist concept are entrenched in both domestic as well as international law (Alam, 2007). These are universal rights; belong to every person simply because he or she is a human being. Human rights, now pervade all aspects of human life, are based on the principle that every human being is born equal in dignity and rights. All human rights are equally important and they cannot be taken away under any circumstances. The concept acknowledges that every single human being is entitled to enjoy own human rights without distinction as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political and other opinions, national and social origin, property, birth and other status. These are basically few natural rights which cannot be denied, but at the same time cannot be guaranteed by the statutory law. Thomas Paine, a French scholar first used the term ‘Human

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Rights’ while translating French Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen from French to English. In fact, human rights are the centre of gravity; all other objectives of the United Nations Charter are based on this (Rahman, 2008). These rights are alienable, i.e. cannot be destroyed or opposed. Their denial is not only an individual and personal tragedy but also creates conditions of social and political unrest, sowing the seeds of violence and conflict within and between societies and nations.

Protection and promotion of human rights is now considered one of the main goals of modern welfare states (Faruque, 2012). Human rights are important because they protect our right to live in dignity, which includes the right to life, freedom and security. To live in dignity means that we should have things such as a decent place to live and enough to eat. It means we should be able to participate in society, to receive an education, to work, to practice our religion, to speak our own language, and to live in peace. Human rights are a tool to protect people from violence and abuse. Human rights foster mutual respect among people. Human rights incite conscious and responsible action to ensure the rights of others are not violated. For example, it is our right to live free from all forms of discrimination, but at the same time, it is our responsibility not to discriminate against others. Human rights are recognized as inherent dignity and it is the obligation of the state to promote and protect these rights, which is in fact a big challenge.

The United Nations Charter, adopted in 1945, was the first international instrument by which international protection of human rights have been legally recognized. The Charter declares that the highest purposes of the organization are to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war..., to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights..., to establish conditions under which justice and respect for... international law can be maintained,...and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom (Schlesinger, 2004). The Charter refers to human rights in its Preamble and in six Articles. In the Preamble, the peoples of the United Nations express their determination to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. The human rights provisions of the Charter are quite extensive. As set forth in the very Article 1 of the Charter, one of the main purposes of the United Nations is to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) containing 30 Articles is the founding document of human rights. Adopted on December 10, 1948 by the United Nations in San Francisco, the UDHR stands as a common reference point for the world and sets common standards of achievement in human rights. This declaration (divided as civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights) is regarded as ‘Magna Carta’ for all the people in the world. Although the UDHR does not officially have force of law, its fundamental principles have become international standards worldwide and most countries view the UDHR as international law. Human rights have been codified in various legal documents at the international, national, provincial and municipal levels. International human rights norms that are embedded in international law, widely ratified by states and incorporated into domestic law (if not practice), and embraced by people of all cultures and all walks of life. All the people irrespective of caste, race, sex, religion, language and nationality need to know human rights as a way of life. The broader objective of this article is to analyze human rights education for peace and conflict resolution. However, the specific objectives are as follows:

• To reaffirm the right to education for peace as an element that allows human beings to struggle for equality, gender justice, eradication of poverty and social inclusion; and
• To project the contribution of education for peace and of human rights in the resolution of conflicts.