

Human Rights Council – 28th session (2-27 March 2015)

Item 8 – General Debate

Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

Statement by Ireland

23 March 2015

Ireland aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and adds the following.

At Vienna, all States agreed that education should promote understanding, tolerance, peace and friendly relations between nations and all racial or religious groups and encourage United Nations activities in pursuit of these objectives. While recognising resource constraints, the Declaration explicitly emphasised the importance of human rights education programmes, integrated in education policies at the national and international levels.

In doing so, it built on the already-clear statement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 of which provides that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Our understanding of the importance of human rights education has only been strengthened in the intervening years, including through analysis of Special Procedures of this Council on relevant issues, most recently touching on the role of human rights education in history teaching and memorialisation processes.

For our part, the right to education is a priority issue for Ireland. It is a fundamental right which can serve as a critical force in promoting gender equality, assisting marginalised persons and groups and achieving sustainable development for whole societies. But at a time when it seems that violence and brutality pervade, we echo the words of the High Commissioner that “education of any kind, if it is devoid of a strong universal human rights component, can be next to worthless when it should matter most: in crisis, when our world begins to unravel”.

The individual given the gift of human rights education can absorb the human rights perspective as an inherent part of their worldview. Education which – in the words of the High Commissioner goes “beyond reading, writing and arithmetic and which includes skills and values that equip children to participate responsibly in our communities” –can move us towards the point where identities and narratives of history all too often presented as competing are revealed instead as complementary; where we recognise that our differences are part of our shared humanity.

This same dynamic holds true at the international level. Indeed and as stated in the Global Island, Ireland’s recently published foreign policy review, “in today’s world, nothing is wholly foreign or entirely domestic”.

We commend the human rights education initiatives of OHCHR, including the online tools available, as well as the detailed and creative human rights education programmes of regional organisations, most particularly the Council of Europe.

Human rights education is the tool which can achieve the inspirational vision of Eleanor Roosevelt, who reminds us that without “concerned citizen action” to uphold human rights in “small places, close to home”, we would “look in vain for progress in the larger world”.

The truth and clarity of those words are the reason we still look to them, over 50 years later. We continue today to express our dismay and condemnation of gross and systematic violations of human rights, as we did at Vienna. But we must combine this condemnation with a renewed and positive commitment to tackle these challenges at all levels, including the closest level of all- education of each and every child in human rights, to give them security and strength in the value of tolerance and respect

Thank you