

UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA  
INCORPORATED

SUBMISSION TO SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND  
TRADE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
GOOD GOVERNANCE EDUCATION IN THE ASIA PACIFIC  
REGION

**PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This submission is presented by the Executive Committee of the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA). It represents accepted UNAA policies and principles. UNAA has a long-standing commitment to advancing human rights, and is part of the Australian Forum of Human Rights Organisations (AFHRO). Our national president Margaret Reynolds is a member of the National Committee on Human Rights Education, and of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI).
- 1.2 UNAA has over many years supported education for human rights. In 1993 its Federal Council adopted a policy encouraging Federal and State Ministers for Education to include such education in school curricula. In 1999 UNAA supported increased Government funding for human rights education, and in 2002 it supported the Government's commitment to such education in schools and expressed the view that a national coordinator should be appointed to oversee this.
- 1.3 Within its own work, UNAA members have on many occasions visited schools and spoken on human rights issues. In addition, relevant UN publications and other materials have been made available to schools and the wider community.
- 1.4 Governance has become a more frequent focus in recent years, as public and private agencies (including community organisations) are scrutinised for their decision-making structures and participative processes. It is appropriate that human rights and good governance should be linked as essential companions in education that helps build stronger civil society.
- 1.5 Given the focus of this Inquiry, this submission will concentrate on the impact of human rights and good governance education in the Asia Pacific region. This will include the implications for Australian policies in areas of foreign affairs, aid, trade, defence, immigration, and education. Particular attention will be given to

those aspects of the terms of reference that relate more closely to the United Nations and international co-operation.

- 1.6 As a member of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA), UNAA supports the overall direction and recommendations of the submission presented by ACFOA to the Inquiry. In particular, UNAA supports the emphasis on (a) strengthening civil society partnerships, (b) working for a second Decade for Human Rights Education, (c) strengthening human rights institutions in Australia, and (d) the importance of a whole of government approach.

## **PART 2: HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE EDUCATION**

- 2.1 Sustainable development requires an underpinning of basic understandings of human rights and good governance. The Millennium Development Goals adopted by many countries including Australia at the Millennium Summit in 2000 – eradicating extreme poverty, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating AIDS, and ensuring environmental sustainability and partnerships for development – cannot be achieved without a framework of basic education in the principles of human rights and good governance.
- 2.2 UNAA notes that AusAID has identified on its website the link between key principles of good governance and human rights: democratic processes/civil and political rights; effective public sector/economic human rights; rule of law/civil rights; strong civil society/economic, social and cultural rights; investing in people/economic and social rights; management of the economy/basic human rights. UNAA finds this approach useful as a way of providing a framework for education.
- 2.3 The content of human rights and good governance education warrants consideration. UNAA suggests that the following aspects need to be included:
- . basic philosophy and principles of human rights
  - . international human rights instruments
  - . Australia's human rights institutions
  - . civil society and the rule of law
- 2.4 UNAA is aware of the important steps already taken in the Australian Defence Force to provide military personnel with full briefings on human rights issues in relation to their work. UNAA

believes that this example could be followed in other areas of government administration, especially law enforcement.

### PART 3: AUSTRALIA AND THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

- 3.1 UNAA believes that Australia's interests, as well as those of the region, would be best served by adopting an international focus for issues in the region, using the structures of the United Nations and regional fora where possible. This includes issues of governance and human rights. Australia can encourage democratic processes of governance and adherence to human rights standards by strengthening the institutions of the region.
- 3.2 The challenges of the region are great, and resources are limited. This situation demands a co-operative approach between government and nongovernment agencies. In addition, regional structures are desirable to reinforce initiatives within individual countries. There can be a flow-on effect for Australia, given the limitations of its own human rights structures and inadequate education programs in human rights and governance.
- 3.3 UNAA affirms the role of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions as an effective vehicle to promote human rights and good governance in the region. The foci of the Forum are (a) strengthening the capacity of member countries, (b) assisting the establishment of national institutions, and (c) promoting regional co-operation on human rights issues. UNAA would like to see education as an increasing emphasis of the work of the Forum. Australia could encourage the holding of a regional workshop on education.
- 3.4 UNAA welcomes the publication called *A Directory of Asia and the Pacific Organisations Related to Human Rights Education Work*, by the Asian Regional Resource Centre in Bangkok. UNAA is included in the Directory, and hopes that more agencies will become linked with publications of this sort, to help spread information.

### PART 4: INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES AND THE REGION

- 4.1 A significant feature of developments in the region is the way that UN agencies are being brought into the work of human rights education. In particular, UNESCO and UNICEF are being used as sources of resource materials. UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have been offering

technical support.

- 4.2 In this context it is important that many UN agencies, especially UNDP, UNICEF and UNIFEM, have adopted a strong human rights focus in recent years for their programs. The UN held a workshop on "Regional Co-operation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights" in the Asia Pacific region in March 2002, with a focus on the role of national institutions.
- 4.3 Australian government and NGO links with the region have enabled greater attention to be given to issues of human rights and governance. AusAID has developed priorities that encourage this.

#### **PART 5: PROGRESS IN THE REGION IN RELATION TO THE UN DECADE**

- 5.1 UNAA notes that, according to the website of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been undertaking initiatives to respond to the Decade for Human Rights Education. This is an encouraging sign of commitment to the Goals of the Decade.
- 5.2 In particular, UNAA is pleased that initiatives have been taken in most countries to set up human rights bodies and to encourage human rights education in schools and universities, professional groups, trade unions, legal agencies, business, religious organisations, and government departments.
- 5.3 It is also worthy of note that the policies being adopted are generally within a context of national human rights plans, and include provisions for training and inter-agency consultation.

#### **PART 6: RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Australian Government should

1. support the holding of a second Decade for Human Rights Education;
2. adopt a whole-of-government approach to promoting human rights education within Australia and the region;
3. provide more funds for the development of school curricula, and for a national coordinator of human rights education programs in schools;
4. encourage the Asia Pacific Forum of Human Rights Institutions to hold a regional workshop on education;

5. participate fully in UN fora on human rights and good governance education, and include NGO representatives wherever possible;
6. build upon the excellent work done by the Australian Defence Force and encourage human rights education for all those engaged in law enforcement and other government activities.

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