

**Education for Peace seen in the light of
the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights
and of the World Council of Churches.**

Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

WCC General Secretary

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Passing milestones – and to continue to move together

December 10, 2018, marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the day in 1948 when the newly created General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the first global proclamation of the inalienable human rights to which all persons should be entitled.

The World Council of Churches also celebrate its 70th anniversary this year, and Pope Francis visited us June 21 to mark this. The WCC participated in the drafting of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, in particular through contributing to the text in Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Over the last 70 years, the WCC has remained active in advocating for the implementation of both the Declaration and the body of international human rights law which has been developed in the ensuing years.

There is more than coincidence in these anniversaries and in the theme of our consultation today. After years of war, even world wars, the churches in the world gathered to commit themselves to a joint agenda for unity based on justice and peace. “Never again!” was also the word from the churches. For that to be true, strong means to promote justice, peace and accountability in the world was needed. Declarations and commitments to human rights, caring for all human beings, created with the same dignity in the image of God, was one. Education that could lead to understanding of history, of different cultures and religions, promoting shared values and an ethos of peace was another significant agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need this today, as well, more than ever.

Certainly, considerable progress has been made for human rights since that historic day. The rights enshrined in the Declaration were incorporated into the two International Covenants in 1966, creating legal obligations in those states which adopted them into their national laws. Following this, the drafting of seven further key Conventions and additional supporting treaties has helped to focus attention on particular categories of rights holders, including women, children, and people with disabilities.

It is important to reflect on the progress made in 70 years. War crimes and crimes against humanity can now be prosecuted following the creation of international tribunals, and the

establishment of the Human Rights Council and its monitoring mechanism, the Universal Periodic Review, have increased the transparency of human rights accountability. Rights to development were given a boost by the Millennium Development Goals and their successors the Sustainable Development Goals, in 2000 and 2015 respectively, resulting in a decline in preventable infant mortality and great improvements toward gender equality in education.

The Ongoing Challenge

Yet the gains and progress we have achieved in 70 years remain fragile. Greed and inequality, manifested through racism, discrimination, and a shocking disregard for the protection of our natural environment, are rampant. Despite the grand promises of governments and the legal obligations they have committed themselves to, millions of people in all corners of the world continue to experience violations of their human rights on a daily basis. Discrimination against people on the basis of their gender, age, ethnicity, disability or religious belief leads to violence, displacement, and denial of such basic needs as the right to food, clean water, health care and sanitation, and in many situations such discrimination is carried out with complete impunity.

As both the World Council of Churches and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights mark 70 years, we also acknowledge that the aspiration of equality - that the rights of the Declaration be applied to “all members of the human family” and that they were “equal rights of men and women” – is still far from being realized.

For the WCC itself, it was only after 40 years of hard work and leadership by women – and men - in the WCC that the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women was launched in 1988. For the global community, we are reminded in the Sustainable Development Goals that gender equality in all sectors is still far from being reached.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the levels of violence and abuse perpetrated against women and girls. The deafening conspiracy of silence around sexual and gender-based violence is one of the most serious obstacles to the vision of a just community. We know that it is a reality everywhere.

The 2018 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad is an important – and long overdue – high-profile acknowledgment of the extent to which sexual violence is used as a weapon of war. Such an award is an encouragement for all to do more to end sexual violence in war and conflict. But we are also called to extend the end to gender-based violence at all levels.

How do we overcome the persistent, stubborn realities of prejudice and discrimination based on gender or race or ethnicity, sexual orientation or class? Ultimately such change requires a deep transformation of values. Religion remains the single most influential factor

in the values of most people around the world. To nurture change at the deepest level, therefore, we believe we must enlist the power of religion and religious commitment in the service of human dignity and human rights.

One concrete example of how this transvaluation of values can happen is through interreligious education for peace.

Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World

The question of how faith communities can educate for peace in a world torn by war and conflict is most pressing in today's world. It is imperative that leaders of religious communities of various kinds recognize that one of the most solemn tasks laid upon them is to pass on a vision for the pursuit of peace to those they lead, those they teach, those whose imaginations they shape and whose consciences they help to form. Faith communities as communities of edification at various levels – formal, informal, religious and secular – have a definite role in this. What are the motivations and means for us to capitalize on the constant opportunities for religious communities to teach their members how to be peacemakers?

As Christians we seek peace, and we educate our people to seek peace, because to do so is a clear expression of our obedience to the call of Christ to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. One of the many manifestations of this love-motivated activity of Christians in and for the sake of the wider world is to seek peace.

Inclusivity is one of the most important principles to reshape education. For Christians, the theological foundation that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:27) is at the core of this principle of inclusivity and should shape educational methodologies and practice. Flowing from this principle are two practical implications – namely to make education *accessible* as well as *affirmative*. We have the responsibility to uphold the right of all children, for example irrespective of their gender, to an education that will equip them to make a meaningful contribution to our world today.

This has been foregrounded in the setting up of several Christian educational institutions across the world in the most remote places and among the most marginalized communities. It is also important that opportunities for education not be limited on the basis of gender. That would widen the asymmetries which exist between genders today and constitute a major cause for conflicts and injustice in the future.

Education needs to become an inclusive process, affirming especially the roles of women and children. Education for peace should also have an affirmative dimension where one's perception and understanding of the other should lead to mutual flourishing. A positive vision of human beings who are different from us in ethnicity or religion needs to be nurtured. In contexts where a majority religious community controls the educational system, any inadequate and inaccurate representations of the "other" needs to be avoided in order to avoid distorted attitudes toward them.

The WCC in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has worked on a document on education for peace in a multireligious world. We emphasize together that educational systems need to offer opportunities for encouraging the plurality of society and for enabling effective encounter among different groups and communities. Families in which members come from different religious, ethnic, geographical or cultural backgrounds have particular challenges to meet and unique opportunities to offer. Educational programmes must be directed to the integral development of the human person and to the strengthening of *respect* for human rights and fundamental *freedoms*, including the right to *freedom of religion*.

As part of an interreligious contribution to education for peace, there are some efforts that communities of faith can undertake together. The effective models of education for peace at the local level are significant, where possible inter-religiously, as part of a process of building inclusive communities. Other joint efforts can include developing educational resources and curricula that focus not only on the promotion of knowledge but also on developing skills along with good will to translate them into concrete action and behavioural practice. Faith communities need to work toward enhancing the capacity for behavioural change, based on a genuine respect for the dignity of all human beings.

At the institutional level there is need for faith communities to *challenge governments* to shape education as a means toward strengthening fundamental human rights and safeguarding the dignity of all, dispelling injustice and discrimination, respecting legitimate differences, and enabling greater openness to others.

A renewed commitment

In this and other arenas where human dignity and human rights are at stake, the World Council of Churches is committed to raise its voice for justice and peace, and to support the churches in their efforts towards education for peace. We have to try to be in the shoes of the other and see what protection and peace we all need.

In the language of the Universal Declaration, the states who are responsible for the legislation and security of their people, must make the right to life, liberty and security of every person a reality.

In the language of our faith, we must make our pilgrimage toward justice and peace a time of transformation towards more justice and more peace in all in our communities. Seventy years on, in action and advocacy, education and service, the World Council of Churches remains committed to affirming and upholding the dignity of every person and to working with our member churches, ecumenical partners, the United Nations and its agencies, and all people of good will to implement the ideals of the Universal Declaration.

Let us work together for a future with human rights for all as one humanity!