

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 57th SESSION

Panel on quality education for peace and tolerance for every child

18 September 2024

Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, emphasized the importance of education in promoting peace and addressing the challenges children face globally, particularly those affected by conflict. She highlighted that 460 million children lived in conflict zones in 2023, with many deprived of education. Ms. Al-Nashif stressed that **education must not only focus on literacy and numeracy but also foster critical thinking, social justice, and resilience, providing children with life skills for peacebuilding and conflict resolution**. The statement linked quality education to peace, urging societies to combat hate speech, misinformation, and violence through inclusive and tolerant educational systems. Ms. Al-Nashif referenced key international frameworks, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which advocate for education that promotes understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity. She also underlined the role of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the World Programme for Human Rights Education in achieving these goals. Ms. Al-Nashif concluded by encouraging collaborative efforts to empower children as active participants in decision-making processes, reinforcing that a strong human rights-based approach to education is essential for sustaining peace and preventing future conflicts.

H.E. Ms. Alua Nadirkulova, Ambassador-at-Large of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, underlined that **education is a key tool for fostering peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, gender equality, and respect for fundamental freedoms**. She noted that the UDHR identifies education as crucial for the development of peaceful societies. Grounded in the UNCRC, she encouraged the panel to explore best practices for using education to advance human rights and sustainable peace. She also emphasized the role of education in the recovery and reintegration of children affected by armed conflicts and associated with terrorist groups. Kazakhstan's efforts to repatriate and reintegrate its citizens, particularly women and children from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, serve as an example. Over 700 Kazakh citizens were repatriated, including 500 children. The country provides education, rehabilitation, and social services to help these children reintegrate into society. She stressed the importance of avoiding stigmatization, ensuring equal rights, and engaging children in creative, educational, and social activities. Finally, Ms. Nadirkulova underscored that peace and tolerance can only be promoted through respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, with education playing a central role in this mission.

Ms. Mikiko Otani, a member and former Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, referenced Article 26 of the UDHR, which established the right to education aimed at the full development of human personality and the promotion of peace and tolerance. This principle is reinforced by Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Article 29 of the UNCRC. Ms. Otani emphasized that **education for peace is central to the UN Charter's goal of preventing future wars and fostering tolerance**. As we observe the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, she noted that fostering a culture of peace through education, especially from a young age, is essential. This involves integrating values, attitudes, and behaviours that promote peaceful dispute resolution and respect for human dignity. Despite these ideals, Ms. Otani observed that peace education is often underrepresented in school *curricula*. She called for a **holistic approach that integrates peace education with human rights education across all educational levels**. Additionally, she stressed the importance of training adults, such as teachers and family members, in peace and tolerance education. For children in conflict zones,

education is vital not only for recovery and reintegration, but also for fostering peace and preventing further violence. Ms. Otani highlighted that education must be safeguarded from attacks and that schools should remain safe havens for children and teachers. She underscored that providing education in both peacetime and conflict is a global obligation. To conclude, Ms. Otani supported integrating children's rights into the UN's peace and security agenda, recognizing children as rights holders and agents of change. She called for aligning the theme of education for peace with broader UN peacebuilding efforts and the upcoming review of peacebuilding architecture.

Ms. Eyerusalem Azmeraw, Program Officer at the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), highlighted education as both a fundamental human right and a critical tool for preventing violence and fostering human dignity. Drawing on the principles from the 1976 Revised Peace Resolution, UNESCO supports Member States in developing *curricula* that embed peace and human rights education. IICBA, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, plays a pivotal role in strengthening African education systems with a focus on teacher training and capacity building. Since 2017, IICBA has led numerous projects across more than 25 African countries, aimed at peacebuilding and preventing violent extremism through education. These initiatives have involved training over 13,000 educators in transformative pedagogy, which puts students at the centre of the learning process and promotes critical thinking and peacebuilding skills.

Ms. Azmeraw provided examples of **successful integration of peace education in various countries**:

- In Algeria, a curriculum review led to the inclusion of human rights and conflict resolution topics, and the development of a comprehensive teacher's guide.
- In Ethiopia, peace education was incorporated into the Basic Education Curriculum, promoting values of coexistence and critical thinking.
- In Malawi, peace clubs have connected peace education with environmental sustainability, addressing both social and ecological challenges.
- Additionally, Tunisia has trained coordinators to foster a culture of peace through school activities, including arts.

She outlined several recommendations for enhancing peace education. These include ensuring adequate financial resources, contextualizing education to local needs, integrating peace education into teacher training, fostering collaboration among school leaders and communities, providing mental health support, establishing multi-sectoral response mechanisms, building regional partnerships, and improving monitoring and evaluation systems. Ms. Azmeraw concluded by stressing the importance of making education for peace a priority to create more inclusive and resilient societies, where every child can contribute to a world of peace and tolerance.

Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe, Executive Director of Arigatou International Geneva, highlighted that the current world faces a record number of conflicts, growing militarization, and significant displacement due to violence and human rights violations. With a notable percentage of conflicts exacerbated by religious differences, education's dual potential to either exacerbate or mitigate divisions was emphasized. Ms. Uribe explained that while education is often misused to promote division and superiority, it can also be a **powerful tool for fostering mutual understanding and peace**. She noted that education systems around the world frequently reflect and perpetuate societal divisions through biased content and exclusionary practices, which can contribute to conflict rather than alleviate it. Drawing from Arigatou International's two decades of experience in ethics education, Uribe presented several key reflections and recommendations:

1. She distinguished between peace education, which focuses on teaching children to live peacefully, and **education for peace**, which encompasses a broader transformation of education systems. This includes revising curricula, teaching methods, and school management to promote equity and address structural violence.
2. **Effective education for peace requires a comprehensive approach that involves entire communities.** This includes engaging various stakeholders such as religious communities, educators, parents, and media to transform societal norms and structures. Uribe highlighted an example from Seychelles where ethics education is being integrated into the national curriculum with broad community involvement.
3. Education for peace should enable students to work across differences and address community issues collaboratively. Examples from Arigatou International's programs illustrate how children from diverse backgrounds have engaged in initiatives that transcend societal divisions and promote inclusivity.
4. There is a need for **strong institutional commitment and cross-sector collaboration to ensure education systems effectively address societal challenges.** This includes providing mental health support, ensuring social and emotional well-being, and fostering resilience in crisis-affected areas.

Vinaya, a 15-year-old child rights advocate from India, shared a powerful message about the vital role of education in fostering peace and tolerance. She began by emphasizing the significance of the 2.4 billion children in the world and the importance of maintaining peace and understanding among diverse populations. Vinaya stressed that education shapes individuals and societies, asserting that childhood is a critical period for understanding and embracing diversity. She highlighted the disparity in educational experiences, noting that **while some systems focus predominantly on academics, they often neglect important aspects like peace and tolerance. This gap leaves many children without the opportunity to fully experience their rights and contribute to a harmonious society.** Despite existing legal frameworks and policies aimed at protecting children's rights and promoting peace, Vinaya pointed out that awareness and enforcement are often lacking. She called for a greater emphasis on educating children about their rights and the importance of peace, urging for better implementation of these policies. In closing, Vinaya expressed a **vision for a world where equality, equity, and mutual respect are prevalent, and where children from different backgrounds live in harmony.** She quoted Gandhi, reinforcing the idea that true peace begins with children, and concluded with a call for action to make these dreams a reality.

Panel discussion

27 country delegations took the floor during the panel discussion. Overall, **many delegations emphasized the crucial role of quality education in fostering peace and tolerance, particularly in conflict-affected areas.** The majority of countries underlined that education is not only a fundamental right, but also a key factor in building sustainable societies and preventing future conflicts. At the same time, a consistent group of delegations highlighted the detrimental impact of conflict on education and called for a greater international efforts to protect and support educational systems in these challenging contexts.

Delegations from various regions underscored that quality education is essential for promoting peace and tolerance. The **EU** and **the Gulf Cooperation Council**, *inter alia*, stressed that education systems should foster empathy, conflict resolution skills, and mutual respect. They advocated for inclusive and age-appropriate educational approaches to support children, especially in conflict zones. **Namibia** and

Senegal similarly highlighted the role of education in building resilient and peaceful societies, underlining that education should be equitable and accessible to all children.

Several delegations raised alarms about the impact of conflict on education, with a particular focus on the destruction of educational infrastructure and violence against students and teachers. **Uruguay** and **the Democratic Republic of the Congo** expressed deep concern over the military use of educational facilities and attacks on schools, noting that these actions severely undermine children's rights and hinder long-term peace and development. **Palestine** provided a stark illustration of this issue, detailing the extensive damage to educational institutions in Gaza.

Several statements called for increased international support and accountability to address the educational needs of children in conflict zones. **Iran** and **EU Member States** urged for more international attention to the plight of children in Gaza, emphasizing the need for measures to ensure access to education despite ongoing violence. The **Gulf Cooperation Council** and **Senegal** also advocated for global commitments to protect and rebuild educational systems, emphasizing the need for comprehensive approaches to support children affected by conflict.

Armenia and **Palestine** highlighted concerns about State-induced intolerance and discrimination within educational materials. Armenia pointed to issues with educational content in Azerbaijan that promotes prejudice against ethnic Armenians, while Palestine condemned the systematic efforts to suppress Palestinian education and promote racist narratives. Both delegations called for a focus on creating educational environments that embrace diversity and promote critical thinking.

UNICEF emphasized the critical role of education in fostering sustainable peace and resilience, especially in conflict-affected areas. Education is essential for healing communities, promoting social cohesion, and preventing violence. UNICEF is concerned about the long-term impact of denied education on children's development and community stability. In this context, they urged States to prioritize and protect education in conflict and emergencies to ensure safe, inclusive learning opportunities.

NGOs highlighted the critical role of education in fostering peace and addressing the impacts of conflict. They emphasized the need for quality, inclusive education to counteract the devastating effects of violence and discrimination, while also calling for urgent international action to protect and support educational systems in conflict zones. **Defence for Children International** and the **Medical Support Association for Underprivileged Iranian Patients**, *among other*, emphasized the critical role of education in conflict zones, particularly highlighting the dire situation in Gaza, and advocated for immediate and substantial measures to ensure children in conflict zones receive the education they need. The **Association for Defending Victims of Terrorism** and the **Organization for Defending Victims of Violence** focused on the broader implications of terrorism and violence on education. They stressed that terrorist groups exploit children and that attacks on educational institutions undermine children's rights and futures. **Make Mothers Matter** advocated for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as crucial for long-term peace and development. **The International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEL)** emphasized the need for education that fosters understanding of personal identity and cultural values to prevent manipulation and promote respect.

Delegations that took the floor during the panel discussion (27 country delegations):

Iran, El Salvador, Austria (on behalf of a group of countries), Lithuania (speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic States), European Union, Luxembourg (on behalf of a group of countries), Uruguay (on behalf of a group of countries), Qatar (on behalf of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf), United Arab Emirates (on behalf of the Arab Group), Democratic Republic of the Congo (on behalf of a group of countries), Namibia, Sierra Leone, Israel, State of Palestine, Zambia, Afghanistan, Togo, Mauritius, United Arab Emirates, Senegal, Tunisia, Qatar, Costa Rica, Armenia, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia.

NGOs that took the floor during the panel discussion (12):

Defence for Children International, Association for Defending Victims of Terrorism, Make mothers matter, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education, Plan International, Inc., World Jewish Congress, British Humanist Association, Medical Support Association for Underprivileged Iranian Patients, Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, ECO-FAWN, Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan, New Humanity.

International organizations: UNICEF.

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).