RAPPROCHER NOS DIVERSITÉS | 8e Conférence internationale sur l'éducation aux droits humains | 30 novembre au 3 décembre 2017 · Montréal, Canada

BRIDGING OUR DIVERSITIES | 8th International Conference on Human Rights Education | November 30th to December 3rd 2017 · Montreal, Canada

FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

The 8th International Conference on Human Rights Education, **Bridging our Diversities,** was held in Montreal, Canada, from November 30th to December 3rd, 2017. Concordia University provided the venue and graciously hosted the event.

The 2017 Conference was co-organized by:
- Equitas – International Centre for Human Rights Education, in cooperation with:
- The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Concordia University
- McGill Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism
- Université du Québec à Montréal
- Western Sydney University (Australia)

The following organizations were part of the Advisory Committee:
- Canadian Human Rights Commission
- Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (Québec)
- Amnesty International
- Australian Council for Human Rights Education

Furthermore, the following three levels of government were actively engaged and supported this initiative:
- Global Affairs/Affaires mondiales Canada
- Ministère de Relations internationales et de la Francophonie du Québec
- Ville de Montréal

The following entities also provided financial or in-kind support to the Conference:
- TD Bank Group
- Power Corporation
- The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation
- Tourisme Montréal
- Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC)
- CGI
- BGIS
- Bell Canada
- Bank of Montreal
- International Development Research Center (IDRC)
- Xerox
- Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

In our globalized world today, we are experiencing more and more conflict based on ethnic, religious, and socio-economic identities and differences. Communities are struggling to respond to the impact of global migration patterns and the challenges associated with managing greater diversity.

As our understanding of human rights and equality continues to evolve, we are constantly challenged to ensure the equitable participation of women, youth and groups that have been marginalized, including indigenous peoples; refugees/newcomers; visible minorities; lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people; and people living with disabilities.

More than ever, there is a need for approaches that promote understanding, respect, inclusion, equality and reconciliation.

Human rights education is a key strategy in this regard. The main objective of the Conference was to work together to develop a dynamic articulation of the value of human rights education as well as to document a collection of innovative and effective strategies and practices to respond to current global challenges.

This year's Conference was the 8th in a series of annual conferences previously held in Australia, South Africa, Poland, Taiwan, USA, Netherlands and Chile. The 2017 event was the largest so far, in terms of overall participation, variety of participants and geographic representation.

CONFERENCE THEMES

Spread over the 3.5 days of the event, and covering essentially one day each, the conference consisted of three major themes:

- Human rights education as a fundamental response to global challenges, for reconciliation with indigenous peoples and in achieving gender equality
- HRE good practices for building equitable and inclusive communities
- HRE tools and tactics to ensure impact

CONFERENCE FORMAT

The Conference format consisted of three main types of sessions. These included:
1. **Plenary sessions** to begin each day of the conference during which the key themes were presented by interventions from distinguished panelists and experts and followed by discussion with participants.
2. **Parallel workshops** where good HRE practices related to the Conference themes were shared. Some of the workshops ("**practicum workshops**") focused on practicing innovative good HRE practices (activities, methodologies and tools).
3. **Panel presentations** where research findings related to the Conference themes were presented.

All workshops and panel presentations followed a participatory approach which involved active engagement of participants. The participatory approach is the way we implement a human rights-based approach in human rights education and other social actions. It encourages social analysis aimed at the empowerment of participants to develop concrete actions for social change that are in accordance with human rights values and standards. It enables us to address human rights issues from the perspective of participants lived experiences.

In addition, a selected number of "poster presentations" in public hallways and spaces outside meeting rooms, in which direct discussions between practitioners and participants took place in an informal and open discussion, were also organized.

Finally, an opening/welcoming session, an evaluation session where participants were able to give instant feedback about the Conference and a closing session also took place, and the Ville de Montreal hosted a welcome reception/cocktail for all participants, in the presence of the Mayor of Montreal and several other personalities.

More information and a full list of all plenary, workshop and panel sessions, including main speakers and organizations responsible for organizing workshops and panels, is provided in the attached **Conference programme**.

PARTICIPATION:

More than 310 registered participants coming from over 50 countries in all regions of the world took part in this event. In addition, about 50 other persons representing Equitas partners, sponsors or public authorities also attended the conference at various times. Despite the requirement to pay registration fees in order to attend this event, the Conference was "sold out" already one month before its beginning (a limit was set due to a maximum number of attendees that could physically fit in the conference venue).

What made this Conference a very varied, pluralistic and inclusive event is that participants represented various categories of stakeholders of HRE, including municipal, provincial, national and international public authorities (close to 80 participants), civil society representatives (more than 80), academic professionals (around 75) as well as youth representatives, individual activists and private sector representatives. Approximately, two thirds of participants were women.

Furthermore, as a bilingual conference, we aimed for an appropriate balance between Anglophone (two thirds) and Francophone (one third) participants and between workshops/presentations presented in English or in French. All plenary sessions included simultaneous interpretation.

MAIN HIGHLIGHTS, OUTCOME AND CONFERENCE DECLARATION

Both the Plenary sessions and the workshop /paper presentation panels were consistently attended in large numbers by participants in the Conference. They gave rise to very important discussions

(plenaries) and to practical and inclusive participation via group work, role playing and brainstorming activities during the workshops and paper presentation panels.

While it would be too long to list the main findings of each of the 70 sessions that were organized in total, a brief description of the highlights of the main plenary sessions follows here:

1) Initial/Welcoming panel > Human Rights Education for Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

In his impressive keynote address Senator Murray Sinclair's intervention presented his experience, insight and ideas on how to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The moderator then invited Widia Larivière and Charlene Bearhead to answer the following questions: 1) How do you think human rights education can support reconciliation efforts with Indigenous Peoples? 2) What are good human rights education practices that you would suggest to engage Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians in the reconciliation process? A question and answer period with the audience then ensued, in which the appreciation of Senator Sinclair's impressive experience, intervention and knowledge were greatly highlighted by all present.

2) Keynote panel > Human Rights Education as a Fundamental Response to Global Challenges

This panel featured the United Nations Assistant Secretary General, Mr. Andrew Gilmour, the Canadian Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Matt DeCourcey, and the Quebec Special Envoy for Human Rights, Ms. Julie Miville-Dechêne. It was moderated by Ms. Azeb Wolde-Giorghis, Foreign Correspondent for Radio-Canada. It explored two of the central themes of the Conference: 1) how to document and better articulate the contribution of human rights education (HRE) in tackling current global challenges; and 2) how to identify and implement strategies for ensuring HRE becomes a higher priority for governments and civil society organizations. From the various interventions, it was quickly made clear that in our globalized world today, we are experiencing more and more conflict based on ethnic, religious, and socio-economic identities and differences. There is also a perception of a backlash against human rights in many parts of the world. Speakers pointed out that communities are struggling to respond to the impact of global migration patterns and the challenges associated with managing greater diversity. There was unanimous agreement that, more than ever, there is a need for approaches that promote understanding, respect, inclusion, equality and reconciliation, and that HRE is a key strategy in this regard. The panel also provided an opportunity for participants to learn from the perspectives from the United Nations, the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec and clearly contributed to set the stage for the discussion which took place throughout the conference workshops, and particularly, during the first day.

3) Plenary panel > The Role of HRE in Achieving Gender Equality

This discussion highlighted the importance of the role of human rights education in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls to overcome exclusion and gender discrimination. It also served to share some good practices that help promote sexual health and rights and to change social norms and behaviors to reinforce gender equality. It was also useful to begin to identify some good practices that can be adopted to reinforce the work of governments, academics and civil society.

4) Plenary panel > HRE Good Practices for Building Equitable and Inclusive Communities

This panel addressed the role of human rights education in promoting inclusive and diverse communities, and also served to present and identify good practices and lessons learned that can strengthen the work of governments and civil society. Each of the three speakers shared very useful experiences and insight coming from their work to achieve greater inclusion of LGBTQI people, of children and youth (particularly from marginalized communities) and of migrants. The speakers looked more closely at educational practices that can change social norms and behaviors, as well as to promote a culture of inclusion and empowering of marginalized groups.

5) Plenary Panel > Human Rights Education Tools and Tactics to Ensure Impact

The aim of this session was to discuss the use of new technologies and media to enhance human rights education reach and impact. The session also explored effective evaluation tools and strategies prepared by Equitas and the United Nations OHCHR to better assess the results of HRE. The panelists shared experiences and lessons learned from their work to ensure impact through HRE tools and tactics.

Conference Declaration
The attached **Conference Declaration and Recommendations** compiling existing commitments included in international documents and strategic actions that can reinforce the practice of human rights education globally was adopted by consensus of all participants. Recommendations are inspired from the following documents: United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET), 2011; World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE), Plans of Action (PoA), 1st, 2nd and 3rd phases; UN World Programme for Action for Youth, 2010; UN Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security 2015; Graz Declaration 2003; Geneva Seminar on HRE, 2017, Report; International Conference on Human Rights Education and Training for the Civil and Public Sector, 2013, post-conference report; Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 5, General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6), 2003; UN Declaration on human rights defenders, 1998.

Participants had been encouraged to take note of the contents of the Declaration and Recommendations prior to their arrival in Montreal and to reflect during the conference on how they, as individuals or as part of an organization or community, could contribute towards their implementation and the common aim of strengthening a culture of human rights worldwide.

Over the course of the conference, participants were encouraged to use the Conference App to share their planned action on one or more of the recommendations. And, during the Closing Session, they were invited to write them down and post them on a wall as a visual representation of their collective will and capacity to build a more inclusive, equitable and peaceful world. These are being compiled by Equitas and its partners and will form the basis for a follow-up questionnaire to be circulated to all conference participants around May 2018.

Collection of Good Practices
Equitas will be producing a digital collection of HRE success stories and good practices for practitioners in various based on the experiences shared during the workshop sessions. This publication will provide a user-friendly tool to help educators improve their practice.

TECHNOLOGY, FEEDBACK, MEDIA COVERAGE AND VISIBILITY

Besides audio-visual support in all sessions, live streaming of major plenaries and other technological support, the main tool used by all participants and which greatly facilitated discussion, information gathering and provision and, especially, networking among all those present, was the introduction and extensive use of a smartphone application designed specifically for the Conference and which functioned as the central information and communication tool during the event, greatly facilitating the various activities and other aspects during the 3.5 days. Almost every single participant, partner and organizer used the application frequently and this tool remains operational for another year, thus contributing to enhancing follow-up, networking and implementation of major outcomes.

Around 100 people also used the App at the end of the conference to rate their experience and to contribute to its evaluation. The feedback received was very positive (4 being the top rating) :

- 52% rated the conference 4/4
- 46% rated it 3/4
- 2% rated it 2/4
- 0% rated it 1/4

The Conference's wide use of social media provided it with lots of visibility as well. There were 6,628 messages exchanged on the Conference App, 701 posts on the Conference hashtag #ICHRE2017, over 10 million people reached on Twitter and at least 14 000 video views on Facebook.

Finally, traditional media and institutional communication channels of partners also carried the event.

Some examples:

- Concordia News https://www.concordia.ca/cunews/main/stories/2017/11/01/human-rights-education-now-more-than-ever.html?c=news
- Radio-Canada International http://www.rcinet.ca/fr/2017/12/01/8e-conference-internationale-sur-leducation-aux-droits-humaine-rapprocher-nos-diversites/
- International Observatory of Mayors https://observatoirevivreensemble.org/en/bridging-our-diversities-ichre-2017-in-montreal
- National Observer https://www.nationalobserver.com/2017/12/04/news/canada-and-quebec-should-not-be-giving-lessons-other-countries-about-human-rights