



***Statement of Theodore S. Orlin, IHREC President***  
*Clark Professor of Human Rights Scholarship and Advocacy, Utica College, Utica New York*

Staff Briefing on Human Rights Education

Congressional Human Rights Caucus (CHRC)

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International Secretariat  
Utica College  
1600 Burnstone Road  
Utica, New York 13502 USA  
Tel: 315 792-3267  
Cellular: 315 368-4517  
E-mail: [ihrec@utica.edu](mailto:ihrec@utica.edu)  
Web Page: <http://ihrec.utica.edu>

**International  
Human Rights IHREC  
Education Consortium**

**I want to thank the bipartisan Congressional Human Rights Caucus (CHRC) and its staff for arranging this important briefing. I am convinced there are few topics as important as this one for the promotion of the “*universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms...*”, (Article 55 (c), UN Charter). For all UN member states, human rights education is a critical component in realizing the pledge to take “*joint and separate action*” ...” “*for the achievement*” of this purpose (Article 56, UN Charter). This briefing is consistent with this commitment and I am honored to be given this time to give this statement.**

**I am Theodore (Ted) Orlin, President of the International Human Rights Education Consortium (IHREC). I am presently the *Harold T. Clark Jr. Professor of Human Rights Scholarship and Advocacy* at Utica College in New York State. For over thirty years I have been teaching human rights to undergraduates and, along with local NGOs, to human rights advocates and professionals in their respective countries.**

**Before preceding with my remarks I should make it clear that I am trained as a human rights lawyer, having begun my involvement in human rights, in law school, when then Prof. (now Judge on the ICJ) Thomas Buergenthal taught one of the first courses on the international protection of human rights at SUNY Buffalo. I was honored to have then gone to Strasbourg, France and do an internship at the newly created European Court of Human Rights and had the privilege of hearing Nobel Laureate Rene Cassin, a drafter of the Universal Declaration, lecture on the importance of human rights. As you can see from a personal level how important human rights education is for young students and how educational influences can help mold a career.**

**At this briefing I represent the membership of the IHREC. We are a Consortium of 13 Universities, Colleges and Human Rights Institutes, 14 Human Rights NGOs, and over 40 academics and human rights advocates, working for the promotion of human rights via education in 24 countries. Our seven executive board members, in India, Taiwan, Finland, UK, Canada, Ohio, and California are leading efforts in their respective regions in training programs, conferences, and**

research to better bring the human rights message to students, professionals, governmental officials, and the public.

It needs to be understood that for the Consortium and its members, human rights education is not just degree granting programs at universities and colleges, nor human rights teaching at the primary and secondary schools. Our mission, to promote *“education, collaboration, and research on human rights at the national, regional and global levels”*, is much broader and includes the professionalizing of human rights advocates and providing governmental officials an understanding of human rights to insure that they respect the dignity and rights of those they are serving. This mandate is inspired by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *“that every individual and every organ of society, ...shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms...”*

This is not to say that our membership does not place emphasis on human rights education in the public schools. We are more than mindful of the importance of human rights education for young citizens. One of the motivators for the creation of the Consortium in 2000 was the experience of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education that formally ended in 2005. For many Consortium members the Decade was seen as less than successful, in some countries more so than in others. But most importantly our membership did not see promotion of human rights education as a ten year effort, but rather as an on-going endeavor that requires the commitment of our educational institutes, NGOs and governments. Accordingly, many of our members are involved in teacher education and in efforts to persuade schools administrators to be more active in the support of human rights education in their schools. This is not an easy agenda to succeed at, including in the United States.

In this era with great emphasis on a return to basics, continued testing for outcomes in courses of educational fundamentals, administrators often question the need to include human rights education. The strains on time and resources often discourage schools officials of placing emphasis on human rights education, forgetting its importance for the world let alone the importance the United States played in establishing the UN, drafting its Charter, and the drafting of the Universal Declaration. Nor is there an appreciation of how the

**promulgation of human rights can facilitate peace, development and security in this troubled world.**

**Our call for our young to be prepared for the globalization of the economy, and concomitantly the necessity to compete world-wide often fails to take into account the need for the globalization of the rule of law which inherently includes the human rights message that calls for the “universal” respect of rights and freedoms.**

**In this post 9/11 world, where terrorism looms over our public conscience, we must be mindful of the need to teach our young of the value and need to protect the rights enshrined within the international instruments that our nation has agreed to and in some instances helped to initiate. Yet how many students are taught of FDR’s Four Freedoms, the UDHR, or the role Eleanor Roosevelt, during the Truman Administration, played in drafting that inspirational source for a system of human rights that now protects Europe and has influenced developments globally for the call for human rights? Frankly we do not do a good job in teaching our young of the history or the importance of human rights in the modern era. I wonder how many of our educators and administrators have read UDHR Article 26 Para. 2. –*“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship...”* How many have taken this message to heart and made sure that curricula and teachers pay due attention to this important mandate? As a college teacher I often face full classes where just a handful have ever heard of the UDHR, let alone read it or had a lesson as to how to effectively implement it in their daily lives. That was the promise of the UDHR in 1948 and we have failed to realize it to the point where it could make a difference. It is not too late, but the effort needs to be energized and be made a priority.**

**Much of the Consortium’s activities are outside the U.S. Our partners in Asia, Europe and North America regularly meet to discuss the development of human rights education and engage in cooperative efforts to improve the delivery of the human rights message. In fact this Saturday I leave for India where I will join with our NGO and academic partners to conduct two human rights training programs (Mumbai and Kerala) for human rights advocates and teachers. From there I will be**

attending the Second Albanian human rights film festival organized by a Consortium partner school and co-sponsored by the IHREC, the American, French, etc. embassies, UNICEF and other NGOs and IGOs. Then in Sofia Bulgaria we will be conducting a human rights roundtable for academics and human rights advocates. This roundtable is part of a global initiative. This afternoon a roundtable will be held at the Holocaust museum co-sponsored by the IHREC and George Mason University. Later this spring there will be similar events in Goteborg Sweden and there are roundtables planned for Dayton (Ohio), Canada, Denver, the Philippines and elsewhere. Our next Annual meeting will be in October in Fredericton, New Brunswick where many of our members will meet to continue to map out a strategy to achieve our mission to enhance human rights education.

As you can see from the brochure I distributed, the Consortium is committed to a cooperative approach where academics, human rights researchers and advocates join together to bring the human rights message to a world in great need to understand the dynamics and importance of human rights protection. Human rights norms are meant to be universal, but the implementation is by necessity local. The Consortium works with local partners by aiding their effort with expertise and support in order to bring the universal message to local communities. This is a role we are proud to assume, convinced that our efforts will facilitate meaningful change and a greater appreciation of human right. With a fuller understanding we are convinced that the promotion and observance of human rights will come closer to reality.

My experience as a human rights lawyer living and working in post-Marxist Romania, in Kosovo from 2000-2001, working in Albania from 1992, witnessing the transformation of attitude of the Taiwanese people, whose educators have long been committed to human rights education, is that “transition” from a climate of human rights violations to human rights observance, is long and difficult in coming. There is no quick fix. Education is not a panacea. It is not an instantaneous cure to the years of totalitarianism and the abuse of individual rights and dignity, but it is the most certain effort to institute change.

The rhetoric of the human rights instruments can only become a reality when the population inculcates into its political culture the norms found in the human rights instruments. State commitment to

treaty law is only a beginning. It takes advocates well versed in human rights values and conscious of the techniques of advocacy to bring the change that is demanded by the human rights message. It takes an educated public that understands and demands of its structures and each other the protection of human rights.

I recall vividly when making a visit on behalf of USAID to Indonesia of repeatedly hearing from governmental officials how human rights was a western doctrine not compatible to Asian culture. I approached NGOs about this argument and their response was firm and adamant – “Never accept the judgment of the powerful as to the place human rights has in our culture- without testing the premises with those who have been abused and know the value of human rights to protect our dignity and rights.” We must make efforts to universalize the human rights message to counter the influences of those who are firmly rooted in the destruction of human rights and education is the best means to accomplish that.

This message I heard repeated throughout the Balkans, Africa, India and elsewhere. The role for human rights education to bring the universal message globally is one we of the IHREC are dedicated to. We need support in this effort. Resources are scarce. Many of our members are preparing books, human rights glossaries, have a want and a talent to produce scholarly journals, would like to hold more training programs and do human rights training for teachers and government officials. The investment would be small and yet these projects are not implemented for a lack of funding; which in the scheme of thing would be infinitesimal. Simply, small grants are needed without burdensome bureaucratic requirements. All too often aid is for the big projects and for equipment. We need to find support for the human rights educators who wish to provide direct training to those who teach or can impact human rights. We at the IHREC attempt to find these resources, only to discover our projects are not large and expensive enough.

Once again I thank you for this opportunity and would be glad to answer your questions and hear your comments to my remarks.