



**THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON
MULTIGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF
THE CONGO COMMITTEE**

REPORT OF PROGRAM

***MULTIGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
FOSTERING HUMAN RIGHTS LEARNING***

May 7th, 2009

Mission Statement of the Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships of the CONGO Committee on Ageing

To build lasting bonds among peoples of all ages, to share the world by living in the present, learning from the past and planning for the future in order to increase the understanding and visibility of the interdependence of values and interests among generations.

SOME ACTION SUGGESTIONS

- Raise awareness and appreciation of the importance of multigenerational relationships in families and communities
- Promote programs for grandparents and grandchildren in schools and communities, in places of worship, recreation, health care, civic organizations and the media
- Advocate mainstreaming of ageing and multigenerational relationships in the work of governments, the United Nations and CONGO Committees
- Celebrate a Day of Multigenerational Cross-Cultural Relationships at all levels of society

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- ❖ Kevin Brabazon , United Nations Representative for Generations United
- ❖ Juanita Carrillo, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG)
- ❖ Mary W. Covington, International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE)
- ❖ Verni Ellis, Iota Phi Lambda Sorority (IPLS)
- ❖ Helen Hamlin, International Federation on Ageing (IFA)
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who, together with the Co-Chairs Norma Levitt , World Union for Progressive Judaism, Honorary President, Metro, UNIFEM, USA , Chair UNICEF National Organizations Advisory Council for Children and Rosa Perla Resnick, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), International Immigrants Foundation (IIF), created a program filled with information, education and inspiration.

With continuing recognition to the “World Conference of Religions for Peace” for their enabling support.

*MULTIGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
FOSTERING HUMAN RIGHTS
LEARNING*

Time: 1:15 PM to 2:45 PM

Greetings and Introduction

Norma Levitt

Co-Chair, Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships
World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ)
United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP)

Moderator

Kevin Brabazon

Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships
United Nations Representative for Generations United
Adjunct Associate Professor at New York University (NYU)

Keynote Speaker:

Professor Tony Jenkins

Global Coordinator of the International Institute on Peace Education
Co-Director of the Peace Education Center at Teachers College,
Columbia University
Coordinator of the Global Campaign for Peace Education

Global Reflections

Interactive dialogue with the Audience on the Keynoter's presentation
from a cross cultural perspective

Questions and Answers

Summary

Rosa Perla Resnick

Co-Chair, Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships
International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG)
International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)
International Immigrants Foundation (IIF)

PREFACE

Norma Levitt¹

A preface usually leads readers into the following literature, touching on highlights and possible initiating influences. In this way readers have an introduction to the material which may stimulate their interest. This preface points to the prestigious influences upon the following proceedings. This is the ninth year of the Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships.

First, influences. The United Nations . This world organization chooses each year a theme which will be developed, whether in programs, discussions or notable documents.

The theme chosen for the year 2009 was Human Rights Learning. Also celebrated was the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first declaration adopted by the newly established United Nations. Under the Chairmanship of Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of past President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, this declaration was written, presented and adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

The Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships adopted this theme, Human Rights Learning, which would be studied through the year and presented for an annual program in May 2009.

Members of the Sub-Committee started the year's work in a spirit of questioning and challenge. They asked and debated, "What is the process of learning? How is learning different from education? What are the aspects of learning? And what are the desired results?"

These questions are addressed by Professor Tony Jenkins, who was the keynote speaker. Among other positions, Professor Jenkins is the Co-Director of the Peace Education Center at Teachers College, Columbia University and Education Director of the National Peace Academy. His careful analysis brings to readers a deeper understanding of the difference between learning and education, as well as his presentation of desired results.

Following Tony Jenkins' address are two deeply moving stories, presented by young women, members of the worldwide Focolare Movement, which fosters universal brotherhood. They have written their human rights learning experiences.

A summary by Rosa Perla Resnick, Co-Chair of the Sub-Committee, enlightens the program with her expertise on the day's topic.

These proceedings conclude with a poetic piece composed for the occasion by Norma Levitt, Co-Chair of the Sub-Committee. The vision of Tony Jenkins about the future direction of "Human Rights Learning ... working toward the transformation of the existing order of violence, injustice and inequity into a world social system based upon the principle of Universal Human Dignity".

¹ Norma Levitt, *NGO Main representative to the UN; World Union for Progressive Judaism; Co-Chair Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships, CONGO Committee on Ageing; Wellesley, Phi Beta Kappa; Honorary President, Metro, UNIFEM, USA; Organizer/Chair; UNICEF National Organizations Advisory Council for Children; Advisory for UN Environment Sabbath; Advisory Council World Conference of Religions for Peace; Honorary Life President, Women of Reform Judaism*

Multigenerational Relationships Fostering Human Rights Learning

Tony Jenkins²

Between “Human Rights Learning” and “Human Rights Education” there are some conceptual and pedagogical distinctions. In making these distinctions it’s helpful to first begin by examining the social purposes of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What protections was it seeking? Why were these protections necessary? And most important to our discussion, what change or changes in global human society did the drafters and signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights intend it to contribute to?

The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins by recognizing “the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family (as) the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” This idea is again repeated in Article 1 which states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

I refer to these early passages of the Declaration as I think they are most significant – yet most often overlooked. Human dignity is the conceptual core and basis of all human rights. The principle of human dignity acknowledges that every human being is an inherently valuable member of the human community.

The change in society sought by the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was to nurture a global human community in which every individual’s *human dignity* is recognized and assured by other individuals, groups, governments, policies, institutions, laws, customs, norms and practices.

The 30 Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights describe the specific protections – what we call human rights – that must be assured for humans to live with dignity. Each of the rights outlined in these 30 Articles are significant and their protection must be assured. Simply promoting knowledge of, and assuring the protection of these rights, is not doing enough if we truly seek a world culture in which all people and living things live with dignity.

It’s important to observe that each of the rights outlined in the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was born out of particular social, political and cultural circumstances. Human society has evolved in a rapid fashion. New modes of social organization, institutions and inventions are designed everyday with the intention of improving the human condition and bettering our way of life. Sometimes these evolutions happen so rapidly – or so subtly - that we don’t notice the negative repercussions. These societal evolutions inform assumptions about how humans relate to one another. These assumptions slowly become codified into norms, customs and daily practices. Such customs are reinforced through deeply held world views and mindsets that lead to and promote unequal relationships based on class, gender, age, culture, and religious beliefs. Essentially, these unquestioned and unchallenged *mindsets* and societal conditions give those in power and privilege the justification they need to treat certain human beings as having less value than others. Through guaranteeing certain protections, such as those rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we can reduce the impacts and occurrences of these inequalities.

² *Tony Jenkins is the Education Director at the National Peace Academy; Co-Director, Peace Education Center at Teachers College, Columbia University and Global Coordinator, International Institute on Peace Education.*

However, as long as such negative *mindsets* and world views continue to exist – regardless of the application of the law – there is little possibility for many of the world’s human inhabitants to live with dignity.

Human rights learning, as I’ve come to practice, is a *transformative* mode of learning that seeks to capacitate learners for both personal and social change and transformation; ultimately working toward the transformation of the existing order of violence, injustice and inequity into a world social system based upon the principle of *universal human dignity*.

Human rights learning is critical, participatory and learner centered. It requires that we engage learners in modes of critical thinking and self reflection that are necessary for internalizing the essential principles of human rights, enabling individuals and communities to become agents of change.

The People’s Movement for Human Rights Learning, has been leading the effort to create a global human rights culture. Peace Educator Betty Reardon, an advisor to the People’s Movement for Human Rights Learning, was asked by the People’s Movement for Human Rights Learning to provide a succinct explanation of the difference between “Human Rights Education” and “Human Rights Learning.”

“The word "education" has been co-opted by those who determine what is to be taught, to whom and how it is to be taught, not just by the schools, but any authority who has control over information. The purpose of education is usually to get people to believe and think as the "education authorities" want them to. Learning has not yet been so co-opted. Learning can still be what happens in those who are presented with ideas, issues, values, queries about problems, and through reflection, analysis, assessment and evaluation come to understand and hold independent ideas about their societies and as much of the world as they "learn" about. Education has become mainly input. If it has any authentic output it is learning, but mainly it is socialization to conformity and indoctrination in the dominant value system. Authentic learning happens in and at the will of the learner. Human Rights Learning is more consistent than Human Rights Education with the fundamental purpose of human rights concepts and standards, making it possible for all persons to realize their full human dignity. It begins with assuming the rights of the learners to decide for themselves what they will believe and develops means through which the learners can acquire information while forming their own opinions and determining their own course of action about the issues of concern to them. However, in the absence of authentic Human Rights Learning people will not be able to achieve their full dignity. Education may provide information about human rights, but it will not necessary enable learners to develop the capacity and the motivation to fully realize them.” (as cited in Koenig, 2008, p.3)

Many of my colleagues would suggest that what we describe as human rights learning is really just good education. I wouldn’t disagree. However, I think this distinction needs to be articulated again and again, particularly for formal educators who are often unconsciously contributing to the perpetuation of this hierarchal educational system that does not recognize the dignity of the individual learner.

Let's return for a moment to the change in society sought by the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: to nurture a global human community in which every individual's human dignity is recognized and assured by other individuals, groups, governments, policies, institutions, laws, customs, norms and practices. I see these changes as essentially the social purposes of human rights learning. These changes require radical changes in individual mindsets and societies.

That's a tall task, and that's why this shift from Human Rights Education to Human Rights Learning is so important. I think we can't talk about change and transformation without talking about learning. I see *learning and change as synonymous*. I think of learning as much more than the simple acquisition of new information, knowledge or skills. I see learning as the integration of that new information into the knowledge and experiences we already have. In this sense "learning" and "change" can be seen as interdependent concepts and processes. Learning is a process of personal change that is sometimes minute and other times comes as an epiphany. (Jenkins, 2007)

What then does a world look like in which human dignity and peace is a way of life? And what, more specifically, does the human rights learning look like that might help facilitate the personal and societal transformations that bring us there?

To help us imagine this emergent culture of human dignity – and to begin thinking about the important role multigenerational relationships can play in fostering Human Rights Learning – I would like to introduce a concept of peace and human dignity. This definition comes from the Earth Charter, a civil society derived charter of values and principles for sustainable development and peace.

The Earth Charter defines peace as:

“the wholeness created by *right relationships* with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.”

I think this definition is a wonderful complement to the principle of human dignity that is at the core of human rights. I also like this definition as it is non-utopian and does not imply a perfect world. The idea is also a very active one. Maintaining right relationships requires a lot of work and continuous learning. It is also a definition of peace and dignity that allows for conflict and differences to exist. We can have right relationships - relationships that acknowledge and assure the dignity of others - and not agree with each other.

Why I really like this definition is that it illuminates at least four dimensions that peace and human rights learning need to address: the *personal*, the *social*, the *political* and the *ecological*.

The personal: At the personal dimension, to live with peace and dignity requires that we have a right relationship with ourselves. In achieving personal peace we have to examine how we handle our own internal conflicts and our emotions and to develop the internal capacities that prepare us to live with integrity.

The social: At the social dimension, to live with peace and dignity requires that we establish right relationships with others. In achieving social peace we have to examine how we manage our interpersonal conflicts and differences so that we are honoring the dignity of others.

The political: At the political dimension, living with peace and dignity requires that we establish right relationships with groups of people. In achieving political peace we have to examine how we engage in decision making processes and inquire into the institutions and mechanisms we establish for assuring peace and justice.

The ecological: At the ecological dimension, living with peace requires that we establish right relationships with the earth and ecosystems we belong to – thus granting dignity to all living things – not just humans. Our ecosystems are fragile and human life depends upon our care of the entire planet. We need to shift our relationship to the environment from one based on *control over*, to one based on *living with*.

It is no accident that I use this definition of peace based on the principle of “right relationships.” It requires that we engage in inquiry together to understand what is meant by right relationships. Collective inquiry is one of the modes of learning called for by Human Rights Learning.

I would like to share with you an inquiry framework I’ve developed for teachers to think about the more specific ways in which right relationships – and by association Human Rights Learning -- can be manifested in their teaching. I’ve attempted to adapt this framework today to multigenerational relationships. I think there are five important levels in which Human Rights Learning can be fostered by multigenerational relationships:

- 1) The first and most obvious: Nurturing right relationships between generations. When I talk with educators I describe this level as the relationship between the teacher and the student. Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire critiqued education as a “banking system,” (Freire, 1998) in which the students are seen as empty vessels into which the teacher puts knowledge. In such a system, with which we are all familiar, the student is not considered an active agent in the construction of knowledge. We can change this hierarchy between students and teachers - and in the ways in which different generations interact and devalue the experiences of those younger or older. For us to be effective facilitators of learning we need to be open to learning as much as those we are engaging with. We can model this in our interactions by asking questions and seeking to understand the experiences of different generations. We have to learn to avoid the temptation to tell other generations “how it is.” When we engage in human rights learning there has to be a reciprocal discourse that assures the learning is relevant to everyone’s experience of reality. We have to pull forth and elicit knowledge from those we are learning with rather than imparting or indoctrinating our particular agendas.
- 2) Nurturing right relationships between the student and the self. People in general – and students in particular - are rarely offered an opportunity to reflect upon their lives, world views and values. When we engage in human rights learning between generations we need to allow ourselves and those we are learning with to have ample opportunity to reflect upon the knowledge they are acquiring to determine if it is relevant to their lives. Some methods we can use for this include self-reflection, journaling, meditation, and contemplative practices.

- 3) Nurturing right relationships to existing knowledge. People of all generations need to be able to actively and critically engage with existing ideas and knowledge – again, so we are not passive recipients of information. This is particularly important when facilitating learning between multiple generations. Most ideas and knowledge are contextually generated from particular social and political experiences. These experiences inform our perceived reality and thus become our truths and certainties that we hold onto and defend. We need to allow ourselves to be open to engage in inquiry with multiple generations that might lead to questioning our assumptions about our experiences and the knowledge we have generated through formal and non-formal learning. Through such processes new collective, multigenerational knowledge and new truths can emerge.
- 4) Nurturing the right relationships between students – or in our context what might be described as facilitating relationships amongst peers – or nurturing peer relationships amongst multiple generations. Our formal education systems have been designed to be so competitive that they nurture independence at the expense of cooperation. Cooperation is an essential capacity for anyone working for change. We need to emphasize within our own generations and others cooperative learning experiences, in which people work together toward achieving common goals.
- 5) Nurturing right relationships of the student to society. Human rights learning needs to be socially relevant and reflect the needs and realities of the communities in which people live. The education we design should bring the community into the classroom and the students into the community. It should involve – at every opportunity – perspectives of multiple generations to be shared. The learning should also be oriented toward preparing students to be active citizens who participate in their communities and help shape new, more preferred realities.

We are all educators in some way – in all of our daily interactions we have the possibility to learn and to facilitate meaningful learning with others. As a group of committed activists and professional peace builders I see your work and mission as oriented toward fostering multigenerational relationships, through human rights learning, toward nurturing a global culture of human dignity and peace. As you think about the possibilities for how this can be done – and what this learning will look like, I challenge you to nurture new relationships with yourselves and your own thinking about education; to enter into new relationships with knowledge; new relationships with each other as educators and learners; and hopefully nurture new relationships with different generations, our communities, and the world at large.

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Lydiette Diaz³

In 1985 Marisol Jimenz Lora, a teacher, found herself in the midst of an underprivileged community of the Dominican Republic. She realized the need for a school in the poor section of “El Café” of Santo Domingo. Her first step in meeting the needs of the community was to set up a choir group. Then she organized a summer camp that eventually led to the formation of the school Café con Leche. She felt that it was her responsibility to provide the children of the community basic human rights including literacy. She gave up her life, her job, and her stability for the greater good of the children of El Café.

In December 2008, I had the opportunity to visit Café con Leche and was deeply touched by the efforts of Marisol, her staff, the children, and the community. Marisol gave the community something to claim as their own. Her staff often includes volunteers that understand the importance of human rights and human dignity. She has been able to teach her students many things including that they are important. She has taught the children to be proud of their Hispanic roots and to look past their skin color that often made them feel as less of a person.

I was impressed when the children came to the school to greet us, their guest, in the midst of their vacations. After the children finished with the songs they prepared they handed out snacks. They made sure that we had all received something before they had some themselves. This was an extremely humbling experience considering that these children are never certain of their next meal. The sheer joy of these children despite their living condition served as an example to all. The things we should value most don't have a monetary measure instead they are our rights and dignity as humans which are free but frequently the most costly.

Vanessa Ruiz⁴

I have been working as a nurse in a Nursing Home in a sub-acute rehabilitation unit for almost a year now. It has been a challenging experience, one that constantly teaches me that the key to building relationships and serving others is going beyond yourself and your comfort zone. One of the very first days of orientation, I was assigned to give care to a man named Mr. Green, who was known for pinching, screaming in Italian at the orderly, kicking and being abusive to those who offered him care. I had a pit in my stomach when I found out that I had been assigned to give him care and subconsciously avoided him until it was time to give him medication.

I had been forewarned by the orderly to “be careful.” I took a deep breath, and thought to myself that this man, like all the others, needed quality care and attention, even more so than my easy patients. I realized that Mr. Green spoke Italian, and luckily I had picked up some through some of my friends. I stepped into his room and said in my best Italian “Ciao, buona giornata, come stai?” (Hello, have a good day. How are you?) His eyes lit up and I realized that something in him had responded. I asked him in Italian, “may I take your blood pressure?” He gave me his arm. . I explained before hand everything that I was going to do, and he would respond by thanking me, “grazie.”

I realized that perhaps this man wasn't violent and hostile without good reason, but he simply needed someone to help him understand what was going on. I proceeded by explaining to him that the orderly was there to give him care, and that he was a nice man. So I explained to him that the orderly would help him get dressed and get him ready for breakfast, and tried to get them to connect. The orderly was even surprised, stating that Mr. Green was “not a bad guy.” From then on the orderly and Mr. Green have getting along well. Now, when Mr. Green sees me, he says “Ciao bella.” To make that connection, I just had to forget my fear.

³ Lydiette Ruiz has a undergraduate degree in Political Science and in Hispanic Caribbean Studies from Rutgers University. She is studying for a Master Degree in Diplomacy and International Relationships at Seton Hall University.

⁴ Vanessa Ruiz has a BA in Biology from Skidmore College and a BS in Nursing from Stony Brook University. She is a Nurse coordinator in Brooklyn.

SUMMARY

Rosa Perla Resnick ⁵

The Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships (MGR), CONGO Committee on Ageing, decided that its 2009 Annual Program would be devoted to “Multigenerational Relationships Fostering Human Rights Learning” to honor the UN Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on its 70th Plenary Meeting (Dec. 18, 2008) designating “2009 International Year of Human Rights Learning”.

Among several items, this resolution “Reaffirms its conviction that every woman, man, youth and child can realize his or her full human potential through learning about all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the ability to act on that knowledge in order to ensure the effective realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all”. (Doc. A/RES/63/173)

On this basis, the Sub-Committee on MGR anticipated that generational relations and interactions could be one of the tools to promote Human Rights Learning at the personal and societal levels. Professor Tony Jenkins of Columbia University Teachers College gave the keynote speech, whose edited version is presented in this publication. We regret that par force we were unable to publish it in its entirety due to space and budget limitations. However, we have tried to keep his most important points of view.

Highlights of his talk included a thorough analysis of the difference between “education” and “learning”, which in a very succinct form can be understood following the Webster and Oxford dictionaries definitions: “Education means to give knowledge or training; to develop knowledge, skill or character, especially though formal schooling or study/to teach/to instruct.” “Learning means to gain knowledge; to acquire information by observation/experience, to come to know”.

Great emphasis was placed on the concept of experience which is “an actual living through an event/s; personally undergoing or observing something or things in general as they occur. Anything observed or lived through. Activity that includes practice and personal participation”. Furthermore, experts say “Experience is a function of time lived, of what one has learned from participating in life”. References were also made to the fact that older people bring the social capital earned through decades of work, relationships with family, community members and others.

Professor Jenkins offered a number of interesting illustrations and experiences with students in his various classes, lectures and seminars in several countries. He discussed quite extensively what “Human Rights Learning” means and referred to the important work of his mentors, Betty Reardon and Shula Koenig, by quoting them and their recommendations towards that goal.

He also made special reference to the concepts of “transformation” and “change”, following Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, (with whom I worked in Latin America and in the United States), which infuses hundreds of “grass root” organizations, college classrooms and most recently school reform efforts all over the world.

⁵ Rosa Perla Resnick, Ph.D. / D.S.W. – International Immigrants Foundation (NYC), Chair, Board of Directors; Co-Chair, Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships, CONGO Committee on Ageing; International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG) (Paris, France); and International Association of Schools of Social Work (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), representative to the UN/ECOSOC and DPI.

Basically, Prof. Jenkins, referred to Freire's concept of "conscientization" which means an "awakening of consciousness", a change of mentality invoking an accurate, realistic awareness of one's place in nature and society; critical analysis of its causes and consequences accompanied by comparisons with other situations and possibilities; and praxis aimed at transformation and change, which is a critical reflection on reality and subsequent action upon it".

It is important to note that psychologically it entails an awareness of one's dignity or in the words of Freire's title in Portuguese, Educação como Prática de Libertade, "Education as Practice of Freedom", derived from interpersonal dialogue in what he calls "circles of culture", actually group discussions, leading to actions on their own behalf as well as to change their oppressive social situation.

Along these ideas, Prof. Jenkins then linked Human Rights Learning to Multigenerational Relationships and Life Long Learning through the entire life course. These are two of the basic recommendations contained in the "Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing" (UN, Madrid, 2002), which has been a solid source of inspiration for the Sub-Committee on MGR's work over the last nine years.

He finally presented examples of the ways in which generations can learn from each others' experiences, making this exercise the most important aspect of their exposure and learning about Human Rights. At the end of his talk Prof Jenkins proposed that rather than having a period of questions and answers, it would be a better way to enlist maximum participation from the audience by organizing small group of attendees to discuss issues, and have one of them acting as a leader to convey their ideas and suggestions to the entire assembly. Everyone enjoyed this experience, which gave participants a sense of good interaction, sharing and active presence at that time.

Two young women from the Focolare Movement, presented their experiences from a multigenerational perspective bringing colorful cross-cultural/international dimensions into their lively remarks (see page 6).

All in all, this program was an affirmation of what Eriksson has called the older people's "generativity", which is the impulse to promote positive values in the lives of future generations. At the same time, he is asking "who is better to revitalize the sense of generativity in society: to cultivate and nurture the sense of connection, interdependence and care for the future than older adults on behalf of the well being of all groups, particularly, the youth".

Kevin Brabazon, himself a renowned expert in the field of Intergenerational Issues and author of articles and books in this field, graciously moderated the activities of the day.

Before closing, a poem by Co-Chair Norma Levitt was read and applauded by the entire audience.

The Sub-Committee on Multigenerational Relationships, CONGO Committee on Ageing is proud of having presented its 9th Annual Program on a topic that will reaffirm its appeal to promote Human Rights Learning between and among diverse generations towards reaching human dignity, mutual understanding and lasting peace in our world.

Human Rights Learning, what does it mean?

What is learning? An experience of a person alone. And what are human rights? The values of human beings together.

ALONE

A man stands on the stage. A mime playing an accordion and welcoming the audience. Laying down the accordion, suddenly he is a terrified victim, imprisoned within a tight square. His hands push on walls which stifle him. He pushes and pushes. Gradually the walls spread open and he can walk out, his arms swinging, his head high, a victorious smile on his face.

An then, and then..... the walls start to hem him in again, closer and closer, until they enclose him in terror.

Once again he pushes and pushes. Gradually the wall open and he walks freely. How do we walk freely in a world of many people? How do we learn human rights for ourselves and send the message to other human beings? We push open the wall of fear, walls of poverty, illness, suspicion, one person by one person, one custom by one custom, one law by one law. Learning and promoting Human rights.

TOGETHER

A group of people get on a bus every morning. They do not talk, they do not exchange glances. One person scowls and they are afraid. The days pass and they go their separate ways in silence, trying to gain energy.

One day one girl decides to greet the scowling person. She greets him. There is no answer. She tries again, day after day, and one day she receives a greeting.

After many days the group greets each other. They leave the bus and the day starts. They can work together for the common good. One person has made a difference as people meet together.

Alone and Together.

Walls crumble. One person lights a candle in the darkness, learning and promoting laws of human rights together.

Norma U. Levitt