Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

"Youth shaping sustainable and innovative solutions: Reinforcing the 2030 Agena and eradicating poverty in times of crises"

SIDE EVENT AT THE 2024 ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM

Digital technology, environment and gender equality:
Youth shaping transformative human rights education

**Organized by OHCHR, UNESCO and UN Youth Office
16 April, 13:00 – 14:30 EST**

With co-sponsorship of **SDG4Youth & Student Network** and the
UN Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY)

Summary of the side event
Note by: **Moazzam S.B. Syed**, member of the SDG4Youth & Student Network

I.   **The importance of human rights education for children and youth (keynote speech)**

Understanding rights is just the beginning. Human rights education goes further—it's about giving children and youth the power and the right attitude to make real change happen globally. Human rights education is about teaching children and youth how to stand up for themselves and others. Human rights education ensures children and youth feel empowered and ready to take action that really moves global action forward in making sure everyone's rights are respected and protected. In highlighting the significance of human rights education for children and youth, it becomes evident that while access to quality education remains a challenge for many young people, it is imperative to recognize education at the heart of the global sustainability agenda. Beyond mere access to education, ensuring the provision of quality education that offers equal opportunities for all is crucial. Human rights education serves as a cornerstone in empowering the younger generation to comprehend, question, and advocate for their rights as well as those of others. To achieve this, member states are called upon to prioritize human rights education by integrating it into educational systems and policies. Ultimately, education is a fundamental human right, not a privilege, and must be guaranteed for all children and youth, irrespective of their circumstances. This underscores the urgent need to embed human rights education values in children and youth as a foundational element in shaping informed, empathetic, and empowered global citizens.

II.   Education on human rights and digital technologies

Education on human rights and digital technologies encompasses a multifaceted approach to equip children and youth with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to navigate the digital landscape responsibly. This includes fostering an understanding of data privacy and transparency, ensuring awareness of how data is handled and stored, as well as promoting safe digital spaces. Moreover, it involves recognizing the importance of global accessibility of technologies, to ensure equitable access across diverse communities worldwide. Additionally, emphasis is placed on teaching digital skills tailored to the AI age and enhancing internet media literacy to critically evaluate online information. Cultural representation in data and the potential of digital technologies to expose individuals to new cultures and ideas are also key aspects. Furthermore, acknowledging the unique perspective of youth as digital natives and teaching them to balance the positives and negatives of technology while addressing their learning needs are integral to this education. By addressing these dimensions comprehensively, education on human rights and digital technologies empowers children and youth to engage ethically and responsibly in the digital world.

III.   Education on environment and climate change

Human rights education on environment and climate change should adopt a holistic approach, addressing issues at both local and global levels across diverse geographic areas. This entails fostering an emotional commitment among individuals to drive and lead efforts toward environmental conservation and climate action. Moreover, involving people of all ages is essential to enhance their understanding of various environmental issues, from local concerns to broader global challenges. Advocacy and activism should be encouraged starting from primary schools, extending through high schools and beyond, facilitating the grassroots formulation of knowledge and solutions. Emphasis should not only be on addressing current environmental issues but also on prevention measures. Young people play a crucial role in effecting change in attitudes towards environmental stewardship. Additionally, learning should extend beyond textbooks, drawing inspiration from local examples and lived experiences worldwide. By incorporating these principles, human rights education on the environment and climate change can effectively empower individuals to become informed and proactive agents of environmental sustainability.

IV.   Education on gender equality

Human rights education on gender equality necessitates cultivating an open attitude towards differences and fostering awareness of critical issues surrounding gender. It emphasizes the importance of inclusivity, where individuals are encouraged to participate in the dialogue for change, recognizing that no issue is inherently gender-specific. Intergenerational dialogue plays a crucial role in challenging patriarchal norms and advancing global change towards gender equality. By promoting openness, awareness, and dialogue, human rights education on gender equality empowers individuals to actively contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable world for all genders.

V.   Enabling an environment for children and youth to learn about human rights (particularly as related to digital technologies, environment and climate change, and gender equality)

Enabling an environment for children and youth to learn about human rights, especially concerning digital technologies, environment and climate change, and gender equality, involves a multifaceted approach. Firstly, it requires recognizing the significance of individual identities and perspectives and providing support for self-expression and understanding. Addressing basic needs is essential, ensuring access to necessities like nutrition, transportation, and safe spaces conducive to learning. Furthermore, educational content must be delivered in engaging and appropriate ways, fostering

active participation and sustained interest. Offering real-world opportunities for impact allows children and youth to contribute meaningfully to human rights issues, reinforcing their sense of agency and purpose. Cultivating a desire to learn and contribute simultaneously is crucial, tapping into their natural curiosity and eagerness to make a difference. Encouraging feedback and collaborative learning creates a dynamic exchange of ideas, enhancing understanding and skills collectively. Additionally, facilitating peer-to-peer learning fosters a sense of community and empowerment, where individuals learn from and support each other. Through these integrated efforts, we can create an empowering environment where children and youth feel motivated and equipped to learn about and advocate for human rights in various contexts.

VI.   Key Takeaways/Highlights:

Human Rights Education Empowers Change: Human rights education is more than just understanding rights; it's about empowering children and youth with the attitude and skills to effect real change globally, particularly in areas such as digital technologies, environment and climate change, and gender equality.
Access to Quality Education is Crucial: Access to quality education is essential for empowering young people to understand and advocate for human rights effectively. This includes addressing issues at both local and global levels and ensuring equal opportunities for all.
Holistic Approach to Environmental Education: Education on environment and climate change should adopt a holistic approach, involving emotional commitment, intergenerational dialogue, grassroots activism, and a focus on awareness as well as prevention measures.
Inclusivity in Gender Equality Education: Gender equality education emphasizes inclusivity, challenging patriarchal norms, and fostering dialogue to create a more equitable world for all genders.
Creating Enabling Environments for Learning: Enabling environments for human rights education involves recognizing individual identities, addressing basic needs, delivering engaging content, offering real-world opportunities for impact, and fostering collaboration and peer-to-peer learning.
Empowering Children and Youth: Overall, the goal is to empower children and youth to become informed, empathetic, and proactive global citizens capable of advocating for human rights in various contexts, including digital technologies, environment and climate change, and gender equality.

Group photo from the side event