

## 6. Human Rights in Schools : (marginalisation & disadvantage)

We are constantly reminded of the mantra “think globally, act locally” as a means for campaigning for international social justice. There continues to be a plethora of human rights abuses across the globe, from:

- the denial of education
- persecution of trade unions
- slave labour of outworkers by global corporations
- religious, racial, gendered and sexuality discrimination
- the sexual trafficking of women and girls
- the denial of medical aid and life saving medication, and
- the displacement and discriminatory treatment of indigenous peoples and refugees

all of which have ramifications or reflections within our education sector, as well as the clear incitement of disgust and outrage that would prompt us, as unionists, to join campaigns against human rights abuses where we are able.

The AEU has always had a firm commitment to international involvement and the protection of human and trade union rights. It has played a constructive role in the promotion of these through its involvement with international organisations such as Education International and the Council of Pacific Education; international development programs and projects through the International Trust Fund; Australian organisations such as the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Council for Overseas Aid and the Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad. Teachers and education workers have very often been principal victims of repression of various forms in certain countries.

The AEU affirms the view that human and trade union rights are universal and indivisible. Our [policy on International Affairs](#) declares our strong commitment of the achievement of human rights standards but notes that there are numerous instances of violations of basic human rights in many countries.

The AEU federally, and its Branches and Associated Bodies, do promote a range of human rights organisations and campaigns as they arise and believe it is important to raise awareness of human rights and provide knowledge and skills for members to actively advocate for human rights in their work and personal lives. It is also important to visibly promote the human rights work the union is already undertaking both in the workplace amongst colleagues and fellow union members, and with students.

The AEU federal web site, <http://www.aeufederal.org.au> includes a section devoted to human rights teaching resources and campaign information. The web details AEU campaign approaches to Indigenous Studies, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, and Poverty, amongst many issues. It also is soon to include the AEU Human Rights Training Manual which was a campaign kit detailing training modules for teacher in a range of human rights issues, for use in classrooms as well as other training and learning environments.

Though educational institutions provide an essential beginning to shaping a society based on cohesion, understanding, liberty and respect for individual’s rights, unions cannot and should not attempt to solve the world’s problems via the classroom alone. Importantly, as with any group in society that is marginalised, victimised or abused, the fight for freedom must be their own, but supported by those who understand that ownership and autonomy is paramount to successful liberation. Union members can act as a powerful force when locally supporting communities fighting for their basic human rights.



## What Can I Do?

### Activism around Human Rights in Schools

#### Action component :

Human Rights spans many areas, so if attempting to teach awareness of human rights abuses, or aiming to address an issue that has particular local relevance regarding human rights issues, having a breadth of knowledge and appropriate focus is the key.

The United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights' website has information on bioethics, civil and political rights, children, democracy, detention, development, disability, economic, social and cultural rights, education, environment, executions, health, housing, food, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion and belief, globalization, human rights defenders, human rights education and training, independence of the judiciary, indigenous peoples, internal displacement, mercenaries, migration, minorities, poverty, racism, slavery, terrorism, torture and women.

The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission website: [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/info\\_for\\_teachers/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/info_for_teachers/index.html) contains information for teachers including: Human Rights Education Modules, Curriculum Links, Flexible Resources, Web Links and Human Rights Education Mailing List.

Teaching modules to date cover abuses including:

- "Bringing them home: Learning about the separation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children from their families"
- "Face the Facts: Questions & Answers about Refugees, Migrants & Indigenous Peoples";
- "A last resort?" National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention;
- "How to Celebrate Human Rights Day";
- "Paid Maternity Leave: Gender & the Workplace"; and
- "Teaching "Rabbit-Proof Fence"

More teaching resources and links on valuable Human Rights is at [www.aeufederal.org.au/HR/index2.html](http://www.aeufederal.org.au/HR/index2.html)

Also, 'The Role of Teachers in Combating Human Rights Abuses' was produced by the AEU's Jenni Devereaux (SA) in 2002 for the Global Education Centre Conference and contains links to a range of action sheets around human rights and how to:

- lobby your local member of parliament,
- hold a community meeting to promote a campaign or raise awareness on an issue that might have particular resonance with your local community
- ask your local council to pass a resolution and adopt an action plan against racism
- contact the media
- help organise young people - helping promote global justice and anti-racism messages in schools, on campuses and in young people's communities
- organising other events to involve community members - film nights, seminars, and other cultural events

As a beginning resource for new activists, the action sheets contained in the website <http://www.alhr.asn.au/rak/rakintro.html> (in association with Amnesty International Australia, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, and the Human Rights Council of Australia Inc amongst others) can be used for much more than the conference it was geared towards.

Of course finding access to good resources and information (as kits like these aim to provide), is the first step in building knowledge on human rights so you are able to teach it, and take action in you own ways.

