

# Introduction of the Centre **for human rights and peace**

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**Participants of a recent workshop for documentalists from human rights organisations in Kenya.**

The University of Nairobi Centre for Human Rights and Peace (CHRP) was founded in August 2008 with the aim of coordinating human rights and peace research, training, teaching, documentation and outreach programmes at the University. The main goal of the CHRP is to contribute to the understanding, appreciation, internalization, practice and realization of human rights and peace in Kenya in particular, and in the Eastern African region in general.

The Centre's approach is multi-disciplinary. Thus, it brings together the following academic units: Faculty of Arts and its constituent departments; School of Law; School of Journalism and Mass Communication; Institute of Anthropology, Gender and African Studies; Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies; and School of Economics.

These units, provide the CHRP with a rich, balanced, well-qualified and diverse teaching fraternity, which ensures that human rights education is



delivered in a multi-disciplinary approach. This approach is useful and pertinent since it provides a deeper and broader appreciation of human rights and peace.

The CHRP is founded on the premise that human rights education is widely considered to be an integral part of education at all levels of learning. This approach is aimed at repudiating the traditional way of teaching human rights in universities. In the traditional way, human rights education is largely taught to a few students who are pursuing courses such as law, international studies, and political science, gender and women studies, among others.

However, other organizations such as the World Conference on Human Rights, for example, consider human rights education as essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities, and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. Indeed, it is undeniable that human rights education will help to foster an understanding of the common responsibility of each individual in promoting human rights. In this respect, human rights education contributes to the long-term prevention of human rights abuses, promotes peace and sustainable development.

Nevertheless, human rights and peace education cannot continue to be considered a luxury. That is why the centrality of universities in promoting human rights education cannot be overemphasized. Since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and the Program of Action in 1993, universities around the world have featured human rights education prominently in their curricular.

The University of Nairobi is

pursuing this route. Kenya, for example, has in the era of multiparty politics held four general elections most of them characterized by bloody ethnic violence. In the ensuing chaos precipitated by political instability, human rights abuses have been committed on a large scale.

In the neighbouring countries of Somalia and Sudan, there exist conflict situations leading to human rights abuses and the disruption of peace. They have created an opportunity for the acquisition of illegal weapons commonly used by criminal gangs to terrorize citizens. Indeed, crime levels have substantially increased in Kenya due to instability in the region. The criminal environment has bred gangs and militia types masquerading as vigilante groups on the pretext of maintaining security. The operations of these militia types are rife with human rights abuses and violation. Although the conflict situations may be viewed as the consequence of failing economies, it is also a reflection of the paucity of human rights and peace education. Even where human rights and peace education exists, it is an exercise mostly associated with NGOs, faith-based organizations and other civil society organizations whose main approach is human rights and peace advocacy. The University of Nairobi through the CHRP seeks to change this state of affairs by contributing to human rights education at various levels.

To do this, the newly established CHRP proposed five (5) broad programmes:

### Education and Training

It consists of degree programmes (undergraduate, graduate), higher and ordinary diploma, as well as short targeted courses aimed at NGOs, security agencies,

government officials and private sector operatives, among others. The Centre seeks to organize public lecture series, seminars and community outreach sessions.

### Research and Publication

The CHRP seeks to engage in research whose findings will be published in occasional papers, policy briefs, journals and e-journals and books. In addition, it seeks to support senior and junior research.

### Documentation

This programme focuses on establishing a resource and archival centre in human rights and peace for use by lecturers, students, researchers and human rights organizations. Through the assistance of RWI, the CHRP has already refurbished a small but fairly equipped library at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, UoN.

### Links, Exchange and Attachment

This entails establishing links and partnership with academic and non-academic institutions working in the field of human rights and peace. It is meant to provide opportunity for exchange of students and lecturers from the CHRP with other HR&P institutions. The programme is meant to expose both students and lecturers to new ideas and experiences for the purposes of improving their knowledge so as to be more effective human rights educators.

### Outreach

This entails reaching out and educating communities on human rights and peace. Such communities include schools, slums, women organizations, mosques and churches. This programme aims at enhancing the knowledge base of communities on human rights and peace.