

## Educating For Tolerance

**T**HE 44th International Conference on Education, held in Geneva in October 1994, adopted a Declaration that has direct bearing on the UN Year for Tolerance. Some 100 Education Ministers pledged to promote education based on tolerance and respect for human rights. The ministers agreed to give "a major priority in education to young people, who are particularly vulnerable to incitements to intolerance, racism and xenophobia," and to take steps to ensure that educational institutions become ideal places to practice tolerance.

The Framework of Action, which defines procedures for implementing the Declaration, includes recommendations for incorporating into curricula at all educational levels, formal or informal, lessons on peace, human rights and the effects of racism. It also includes an endorsement for improving textbooks to eliminate negative stereotypes and distorted views of the "other."

Discussions at the conference also covered violence practised in the name of religion, the role of religious education in the promotion of tolerance, and the universality of human rights. Religious education, said participants at a Round Table organized during the Conference on Education,

should be revised to include lessons learned from pilot educational institutions that teach tolerance and mutual respect. Religious textbooks should focus on themes and precepts shared by the world's different religions, and presented in the most neutral way possible, said Abdelfattor Amor, a special rapporteur on religious intolerance at the United Nations Centre for Human Rights.

### How To Teach Tolerance :

1995, the UN Year for Tolerance, will see the publications of the final version of UNESCO teaching guidelines towards educating for tolerance. This work, entitled *Tolerance : The Threshold of Peace*, focuses on education for tolerance in primary and secondary schools. It addresses at the same time the social climate in which schools educate, recognizing that it is not only schoolchildren who need to be educated for tolerance.

The five chapters in the guide deal with the questions of why it is necessary to educate for tolerance, how to diagnose intolerance and describe tolerance, the problems and the opportunities, how schools themselves are a kind of laboratory for practicing tolerance and, finally, how

to include the concept of tolerance into every subject taught at every level and in every country.

It is one of a series of brochures, manuals, and teaching guides to be issued during 1995 concentrating on number of issues central to education for tolerance. These include : improved language teaching, language being the essence of mutual understanding; familiarizing students with the UN instruments of the defence of human rights; introducing a universal approach to teaching history and literature (in particular because the narrow national approach to history, supported by national literature, has often resulted in stereotyping other nations, debasing their cultural heritage and increasing suspicion of foreign nationals); and a reform of teaching concepts based on experience in informal teaching.

Federico Mayor, Director-General, of UNESCO, made a clear statement to this effect during his address at the dedication of the Beit-Hashoah Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles in 1993 : "A peaceful future depends on our everyday acts and gestures. Let us educate for tolerance in our schools and communities, in our homes and work-

places, and, most of all, in our hearts and minds."

UNESCO's strategy of educating for tolerance finds its practical in-the-field support through its already-existing network of some 3200 schools around in the world, known as the Associated Schools Project (ASP). This project covers some 1300 schools in North America and Europe, nearly 500 in both Africa and the Asian/Pacific region, just under 600 in Latin America and the Caribbean, the remainder being in the Middle East region.

The Associated Schools Project is joining forces with UNESCO's recently-established Culture of Peace Programme, to sponsor a series of festivals designed for children, to celebrate both the UN Year for Tolerance and the UN's 50th Anniversary. Two of these festivals have already been confirmed : one in Greece in May 1995, and the other on the Caribbean island of Grenada, planned for July. Four further festivals to take place in Jordan, the Cook Islands, El Salvador and Thailand, are awaiting confirmation. A final festival is envisaged in India, in connection with the commemoration of the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth.

(To be continued)