

Celebrating Differences...
and now with Eminent Citizens backing up aren't we glad we Dared to Hope?

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Celebrating Differences is how we have named our Human Rights Education in Schools. The last scholastic year saw around 5529 students of 105 schools spread over 10 districts in Andhra Pradesh Celebrating Differences. Today we had the inauguration of the State Advisory Committee meeting (SAC) of the HRE Programme. And the line up of the SAC is a veritable "who is who" in Human Rights Promotion and Protection initiatives in AP. With Mr.K.R.Venugopal IAS (Retd), former Principal Secretary to three Prime Ministers heading the SAC we can reach for the stars!!

A child comes to the hallowed precincts of our temples of learning at the tender age of three and a half. It's another matter if this is something that we should encourage! But that discussion is for another time, another place. The child is then just a child, not boy, not girl, not Hindu, Christian or Muslim, not Telugu, Tamil, Bengali or Bihari, not rich, poor, low or high. But by the time the child leaves our threshold for the wide world outside it will have become defined, included or excluded on the basis of those identities. All that adds colour, variety, beauty, diversity – everything that the child celebrated - will have become the defining principles of exclusion or inclusion. Our ardent hope is that the HRE programme will instead help the students to continue to celebrate differences even as they become aware, acknowledge and accept them.

To guide us in this challenging yet noble task, to speak up for the children and for us and to navigate this pilgrimage through the corridors of power and decision making we have now eminent citizens on our State Advisory Committee. Mr.K.R.Venugopal IAS (Retd), Former Principal Secretary to three Prime Ministers heads the SAC. The line up along with him is impressive: Prof. Fatima Ali Khan (retd), Prof. G.Chakrapani of BRANOU, Prof.M.Sridhar of Nalsar, Prof.Haragopal of HCU, Ms.Laita Iyer, Chief Correspondent, the Week, Ms.Akhileshwari, Special Correspondent, Deccan Herald, Fr.Raymond Ambrose, renowned development practitioner, Fr.Noel our Provincial, Fr.Thomas Koshy, indefatigable advocate for the child on the street, Advocates P.Venkateswarulu and M.Subbarao and Human Rights Monitors Nandagopal and Devakumar. The inaugural function was held at CHAI, Secunderabad at 11.00 hrs today. The presence and the experiences shared by Dr.Sevasahayam who designed the various modules and pioneered HRE programme in India went a long way in setting the right environment for taking courageous decisions. The SAC took upon itself the task of lobbying with the government to get all the required permissions to extend the HRE programme to selected government schools in 10 districts in AP initially and then work for mainstreaming the HRE in regular syllabi of school education! They will also negotiate the possibility of the government including HRE in the training by Sarva Siksha Aabyan, the flagship programme for Universal Primary Education (SSA) for all the teachers in AP. And with Fr.John Tharakan chairing the Curriculum Committee along with Ms. Symala and Jose Kunnel, Mr.Ch.Venkatrao the State Coordinator of HRE and Ms.Swarnlatha can look forward to a very enabling environment for taking forward their challenge of turning HRE into a Celebration of Differences.

Where else but in our schools can we lay a solid foundation for a culture of Inclusion, of Celebration of Diversity, of Reverence for Human Dignity, for Promotion of Human Rights? The little hands of the child stretch out to all in an endearing embrace. Who else but the child can preserve Inclusiveness and Celebrate Differences!?

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