

2011 World Human Rights Cities Forum

*“Globalizing Human Rights from Below:
Challenge of Human Rights Cities in the 21st Century”*

16-17 May 2011
Gwangju, Republic of Korea

Gwangju Declaration on Human Right City¹ (final edited version)

1. We, the more than 100 participants of the 2011 World Human Rights Cities Forum including mayors, city representatives, and UN human rights experts as well as civic and human rights NGOs both from Korea and abroad who gathered in Gwangju, Republic of Korea on 16-17 May 2011 at the invitation of Gwangju Metropolitan City and the May 18 Memorial Foundation, shared and discussed experiences of building ‘human rights cities’ in different contexts mainly from the perspectives of civic participation and human rights education.
2. The theme “Globalizing Human Rights from Below - Challenge of Human Rights Cities in the 21st Century” highlights the important role that cities can play in coping with various socio-economic and political challenges through a human rights framework and a human rights-based approach.
3. ‘Human rights city’ was defined as ‘both a local community and a socio-political process in a local context where human rights play a key role as fundamental values and guiding principles’.
4. ‘Human rights city’ was understood as ‘human rights governance in a local context’ where local government, local parliament, civil society, private sector organizations and other stakeholders work together to improve quality of life for all inhabitants in a spirit of partnership based on human rights standards and norms.
5. ‘Human rights city’ also means, in practical terms, that all inhabitants, regardless of race, sex, color, nationality, ethnic background and social status, and in particular minorities and any other vulnerable groups who are socially vulnerable and marginalized, can participate fully in decision-making and policy-implementation

¹ A “City” is defined as a local government of any size: regions, urban agglomerations, metropolises, municipalities and other local authorities freely governed according to the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City.

processes that affect their lives in accordance with such human rights principles as non-discrimination, rule of law, participation, empowerment, transparency and accountability.

Civic Participation

6. Civic participation is important in the building of human rights cities since it gives people an opportunity to express their views on the problems that need to be addressed. It also gives people ownership of the process of identifying human rights issues, making them more likely to engage in constructive collaboration with other stakeholders, namely governments, businesses, and NGOs. This ensures shared responsibility for the implementation of human rights standards and norms.
7. All cities have assets and historical processes that bring about political change. However, a fundamental principle of participation in building human rights cities is that a bottom-up approach involving genuine and meaningful participation by all inhabitants is preferable to a top-down approach by city officials.
8. Where States or cities have repressive political systems, lack rule of law, or suffer from rampant corruption, people are fearful to participate. The need there is to build a support network, both at the local/national levels and across boundaries for victims and defenders of human rights violations. The solidarity network within human rights cities should focus on supporting participation of the people in that repressive political system.

Human Rights Education and Learning

9. Until all inhabitants know and own their human rights, there can never be a human rights city. With that understanding, we shared the belief that human rights learning and education are essential to the development of human rights cities. Informal education and play are appropriate ways to integrate the human rights framework and introduce them to young people. Applied techniques that are ongoing and sustain learning are vital to ensuring that, in time, every person knows, owns and is able to act upon their human rights.
10. Interchange and sharing of best practices among schools, cities, and institutions are a key way to improve the learning and education process within new and established human rights cities. As there is no definitive approach to learning and

integrating human rights, each city must, based on its own experience and the best practices it receives from others, develop myriad strategies that work in its own communities.

Challenges of Human Rights Cities

11. Establishing a legal basis should be the first step for any human rights city initiative. Ordinances, legal instruments, such as a Human Rights Charter, and legal organizations, such as a Human Rights Commission or Human Rights Bureau/Office, can serve as effective legal basis. These should be adopted based on non-discrimination and non-selectivity principles to provide sustainable legal basis for policy-formulation and full implementation.
12. Implementation, however, is more important than policymaking. Strong leadership is required as a matter of priority. Leadership should be based on principles of competency, transparency and accountability. For these, human rights education for government officials is needed. Supports from the central government can be crucial. All legislation and implementation processes should be communicated to all citizens and inhabitants.
13. Participatory democracy and consultation among all the stakeholders (including the private sector) is the key to a human rights city. Institutional mechanisms to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between civil society groups and government should be put in place. Socially and economically disadvantaged groups, such as women, immigrants, and disabled persons, should be specifically considered. Human rights education for all habitants is necessary to support these processes.
14. Effective accountability mechanisms need to be developed to make city government accountable to its pledges and commitments. Monitoring mechanisms, including human rights indicators for human rights impact assessment, should be established.
15. Networking among cities at the national and international levels should be initiated or strengthened to support and encourage global networks, partnerships, and exchanges of experiences and practices.
16. In this regard, we urge the UN Human Rights Council to request its Advisory Committee to take up the issue of the 'human rights city' as a topic for study. We

further urge the UN Office of the High-Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to provide necessary assistance for cities interested in becoming a ‘human rights city’.

We further urge the UN and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to incorporate the framework of ‘human rights city’ into international development cooperation.

Five Commitments to a Human Rights City

- 1) We commit ourselves to making the vision of a human rights city a reality on the ground by implementing international human rights norms and standards as well as by promoting the right to the city;
- 2) We commit ourselves to develop effective mechanisms to protect and defend the human rights of all citizens and inhabitants; such mechanisms could include citizens’ committees, municipal commissions on human rights, human rights indicators and human rights impact assessments;
- 3) We commit ourselves to develop and implement concrete human rights education and learning programs for all involved in building a ‘human rights city’ in line with UNESCO’s Education for All (EFA)-Dakar Framework for Action (2000), with the World Program on Human Rights Education, with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training², and with other relevant standards and programs;
- 4) We commit ourselves to strengthening national and international networking and alliance-building among people committed to the vision of a human rights city by joining the UNESCO-led International Coalition of Cities against Racism (ICCAR), UN Global Compact and International Association of Educating Cities;
- 5) Upon adoption of “the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City” of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), we commit to ensure that cities ratify and fully implement the Charter.

In conclusion,
we resolve to recommend that Gwangju Metropolitan City continue to organize the World Human Rights Cities Forum as a platform for the global promotion of the ‘human rights city’ movement.