Section I: Background Information

Historical Background

Human Rights and Child Rights

- What are human rights?
- What is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*?
- Why do we need human rights?
- What are child rights?
- Why do we need child rights?

Human Rights Education for Children and Youth

- What is human rights education?
- Why do we need human rights education?
- The importance of music and activities.

Historical Background

Early in 1947, with the horrors of two world wars fresh in their memories, the newly created United Nations appointed a committee to create a document that would spell out the meaning of the fundamental rights and freedoms to which we are all entitled. It took the commission almost two years to produce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was adopted on December 10, 1948, in Paris, by the 56 members of the United Nations General Assembly.

The 30 articles of the Declaration cover economic, social, cultural, political, and civil rights. These rights are:

- Inalienable—they belong to every person and can't be taken away under any circumstances.
- Interdependent—they are complementary in nature and build on each other.
- Indivisible—all the rights are equally important to the full realization of one's humanity.
- Universal—they apply to all people everywhere.

No right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is less important or non-essential.

Most countries treat it as law, and nations are obligated to honor human rights by international treaties. They are required to teach human rights to their citizens through their education systems and other civil institutions, which means they should protect their citizens from discrimination and the denial of their guaranteed rights.

However, rights are of little value to a person who doesn't know that she or he has them.

Colega joins hands with the many other efforts to call out discriminatory treatment at all levels. It intends to teach students a standard of behavior they should both practice and experience at the hands of society.

Human Rights and Child Rights

What are human rights?
Human rights are fundamental rights that belong to every person simply because they are a human being. They are based on the principle that every human being is born equal in dignity and rights. All human rights are equally important. They are indivisible, inalienable and interdependent. They cannot be legally denied except under unusual circumstances.

> **What is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*?** *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* is the founding document created by the UN commission. Adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948, it stands as a common reference point for the world, setting standards of achievement in human rights.
>
> Although the UDHR does not officially have force of law, its fundamental principles provide **international standards** worldwide. Most countries view the UDHR as international law.
>
> **Why do we need human rights?** Human rights challenges are increasing worldwide while respect for human dignity is generally decreasing. Human rights foster mutual respect among people. They stimulate conscious and responsible action to ensure that the rights of others are not violated.
>
> Human rights are a tool to **protect people** from violence and abuse. They protect our right to live in dignity, including the right to life, liberty and security, with such essentials as a decent place to live and enough to eat, allowing us to participate in society, receive an education, work, practice our religion, speak our own language, and live in peace.

What are child rights?
The rights of the child are specific rights documented in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*. They are a tool to protect all children everywhere from violence and abuse. This treaty was adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989. As of April 2017, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is the most ratified document of the United Nations.

The child is defined as any person younger than 18 years old unless the laws of a particular country set the age of majority at a younger age. Children have a right to all the human rights of the UDHR. However, because of their vulnerable position in society, children also have specific rights that afford them special protection.

Why do we need child rights? Child rights give each child the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. In order for children to fully enjoy their rights, the fundamental principles for the CRC must be respected and promoted by all members of society from parents, to educators, to the children themselves. The CRC emphasizes the major importance of the role, authority and responsibility of parents and family.

Children themselves must recognize that every person has the same rights, and then adopt **atti**tudes and behaviors of respect, inclusion and acceptance.

(Adapted from *Play It Fair! Human Rights Education Toolkit for Children*, 2008 Equitas—International Centre for Human Rights Education)

Human Rights Education For Children and Youth

"Human rights education is a central component in the campaign to develop a human rights culture."
- Nelson Mandela

What is human rights education?
Human rights education promotes knowledge and understanding of human rights. It is all learning that builds knowledge and skills, as well as attitudes and behaviors of human rights.

- Human rights education is about helping people understand human rights and recognize that they have a responsibility to respect, protect and promote the rights of all people.
- It supports democratic principles from diverse perspectives through a variety of educational practices.
- It helps develop the communication skills and informed critical thinking essential to a free and safe world where justice and dignity prevail.
- It encourages students to be sensitive to their own words and actions while recognizing and calling out unacceptable behavior such as bullying or shaming.
- It encourages the practice of respect, cooperation and inclusion in daily life.
- Human rights education engages the heart, as well as the mind, in fostering attitudes and behaviors to produce appropriate social change.
- Human rights education affirms the interdependence of the human family.

(Adapted from *The Human Rights Education Handbook*, Nancy Flowers. University of Minnesota 2000, p. 8.)

Why do we need human rights education?
"We must not just educate our children and youth 'to know' and 'to do;' we must also educate them 'to be' and 'to live together.'"
- Jacques Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within*

Human rights education inspires empathy. It encourages students to think about how they interact with others, and how they can change their behavior to better reflect human rights values.

Human rights education encourages the development of self-confidence and active participation to make a positive contribution to family, school and community.

Why are music and activities important in human rights education?
Music and activities provide a crucial element in the Colega lessons. They are to be used in a participative, interactive instructional method, which human rights educators have found to be an effective and powerful way to achieve learning goals in students.

The activities and themes of the songs in this manual are meant to reinforce in students the skills, knowledge and attitudes essential to achieve a world free of human rights violations. Please do not hesitate to use songs from your own culture that reinforce the same themes.

(Adapted from *Play It Fair! Human Rights Education Toolkit for Children,* 2008 Equitas—International Centre for Human Rights Education)