

# Human Rights Olympics final round (Opening remarks by Martin Nesirky, Director, United Nations Information Service, Vienna)

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear guests and distinguished finalists of the 17th Human Rights Olympics,

“One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world.”

Some of you may know this quote. It’s from Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani school girl, who was shot in the head for standing up for the right to education. She made a remarkable recovery and continues to speak out, including at the United Nations.

Education is a precondition for peaceful coexistence and one of the pillars of sustainable development. It is also a major priority for the United Nations as we celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the organization this year and chart the way ahead.

That’s why the theme of this year’s Human Rights Olympics, the “Right to Education and its Key Aspects” is so topical and important. Your timing is perfect!

Let me explain why.

A good education is crucial to finding a job, for escaping from poverty and hunger, and for living a healthy life. Intolerance and extremism can be fuelled by a lack of education. Fear and hate can be spread.

But education is not only the foundation of development and peace. It is also crucial to ensure that human rights are being respected.

And with “education” I mean life-long learning, which does not begin or end in school.

Apart from helping us to defend and promote human rights, education is a human right itself. To be exact it is described in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Unfortunately in many parts of the world human rights are being violated every day rather than respected.

In what many see as a radicalized, brutalized world how can we do a better job on human rights? How can we counter the seemingly growing risks to peaceful co-existence?

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, received much of his primary education under a tree in post-war South Korea. He is passionate about the importance of education and has made it a priority with his initiative “Global Education First”.

The Initiative focuses on three main points:

- putting every child in school
- improving the quality of learning
- and fostering global citizenship

There are still 58 million children without any access to primary schooling. Existing school systems are often characterized by bad quality education, discrimination against marginalized groups and gender inequality.

From next year, a new development agenda will replace the Millennium Development Goals that have already helped bring many children into school. Education will figure even more prominently and more broadly. Instead of merely looking at whether children are in school or not, it will also measure the quality of tuition and focus on how those children in school are equipped to work.

So, as I said at the start, your theme is brilliantly chosen.

Let me thank the organizers of the Human Rights Olympics for this wonderful initiative and your dedication.

I also want to extend my sincere gratitude to all teachers here for preparing your students for this important event.

Teachers – you – are vital to the healthy functioning of society. You are also multipliers who can help students develop a sense of global citizenship and teach them about the human rights.

It is our collective duty to equip young people now to handle the challenges of tomorrow. This you are doing magnificently.

So, to both organizers and teachers, I want to thank you for your inspirational leadership.

Now to you, the finalists.

You already made it through two rounds of knowledge tests and each one of you wrote an essay related to this year’s theme. I had the opportunity to read some of your essays. I was really impressed by how you expressed yourselves. Clear, eloquent and thought-provoking.

I wish you the best of luck in the final challenge over the next days.

The young generation today, in 2015, 70 years after the United Nations was founded, is the largest the world has seen. More than half of the world's seven billion people are under the age of 30.

You are both the present and the future of this planet. You will help to shape this world for generations to come. Slovakia, as part of Czechoslovakia, was one of the founding signatories of the UN Charter 70 years ago. Your country continues to place priority on the work of the United Nations, and that is something you can be proud about.

I encourage you to continue your commitment so that human rights become a reality for everyone, everywhere, every single day of the year.