

IHRTP 2007 - June 12, 2007

Opening ceremony

MARIE NYIRAMANA, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

In October 2006, CIDA created the Office of Democratic Governance, which is responsible for relations with Equitas. CIDA is proud to have supported Equitas for the past 13 years. One of the principal pillars of democratic governance is the protection of human rights. CIDA appreciates its partnership with the organisation with which there is a transfer of knowledge. The office particularly likes Equitas' participatory methodology.

Each time a person defends a principle in order to improve the destiny of others, history is shaped. This struggle sends a message of hope. Small waves create a current that will overthrow the walls of oppression. All the participants are part of this current of social justice that is working for equity.

ZHANNA HARUTYUNYAN, Armenia, Co-facilitator

Ms. Harutyunyan participated in the International Human Rights Training Program (IHRTP) in 2004. She works for CARITAS in Armenia where she is the Director of youth projects. She also works with the Minister of social services for the protection of the rights of refugees.

In 2004, she had a lot of ideas and expectations. Today, she is really happy to be back. All the participants share a sense of belonging: human rights promotion. The training program allowed her to realize what she could accomplish, to recognize the power of transformation of the participatory model, to develop civic education programs, to develop new models of education, to realize the diversity of practice of human rights. She was able to put into practice what she has learned.

She suggests that the participants, like the John Lennon song, "*Let it be*".

In the next three weeks of training, the participants will learn how people live without borders and without wars. This creates a feeling of pride.

The participants will have the opportunity to put into practice the transformation of their capacities. Those memories will strengthen them.

She suggests the participants to be ready to give and to receive, to open up their hearts in order to discover human rights and to make the most of their stay.

RAMON MONCADA, Colombia, Co-facilitator

I remember... This is the force of Quebec and of the IHRTP put together in one sentence. Actually, it is not a sentence, nor a motto. Rather, it is a spirit, that receives and that shares. It is a friendly and smiling spirit, ready to meet with other spirits.

What do I remember? I remember the warmth of the people: Canada is not a cold country. With this training, the spirits heat up with friendship. The spirits are ready to live and to fly.

What is Equitas? It is simple. It is the equity of the spirit's warmth. There are warm spirits everywhere. There is strength and warmth for everyone. There is no equity without dignity. Dignity is essential to the training.

Equitas bring together participants from all around the world. Each spirit has its own experiences and dreams. Each reflects a culture and a collective dream. With this training, all those dreams form one. The participants have a path to travel together: the path of dignity. Is it possible, a person without dignity?

I remember a participative atmosphere, the magic spiral and the knowledge.

Why learn? Learning helps to better dance the dance of transcendence. It is a state of mind, of encounter, of sharing, of learning and of change.

Equitas represents the dignity and the magic that are necessary to the combination of dance, of transcendence.

PETER LEUPRECHT, Director, Institut d'études internationales de Montréal de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM).

Mr Leuprecht has a vast experience in human rights. He was an official at the Council of Europe from 1961 to 1997 where he served as the Secretary of the Committee of Ministers, Director of Human Rights and Deputy Director-General. In Austria, he was an advisor to the Department of Justice. He was a member of a committee of four "sages" asked to prepare a human rights agenda for the European Union. In 2005, he served as the special representative of the United Nations in Cambodia. He is now the director of the International Studies Institute of the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM).

All the IHRTP participants are very lucky to be here and to be attending this training. Mr. Leuprecht recently met a former participant from Russia, who is now working towards a doctorate degree in the United Kingdom. He felt that the Equitas training program was the best one he had ever attended, especially for shy persons.

Professor Leuprecht wished to raise four major questions during his talk.

First, he warned against all false discourse of freedom. People need to reflect on the real nature of freedom, because there is a lot of misuse of language. Discourses are constructed for ideological ends. For example, during the inauguration of Bush's second mandate, he spoke about freedom more than 40 times!

What freedom? Marx spoke about freedom: the fox in the chicken coop. Some say that free market is essential to democracy, but Mr Leuprecht doesn't believe so. There is no liberation without borders. He doesn't believe in the market's morality, as described by Thatcher and Reagan. Free market is not a real freedom.

Fundamental freedom is endangered by various phenomena, especially by the war against terror. Many violations are committed in the name of the war against terror.

The language used by Bush intends to legitimize violence. Vice-President Cheney, states that it's a new necessary stage. Many anti-terrorist laws limit fundamental freedoms. Fortunately, the Supreme Court of Canada has made a courageous decision on the security certificates.

In Guantanamo, law doesn't exist. Some of the inmates were arrested at the age of 15 and are still detained. And let us not forget the Maher Arar case.

Yet, security can only be attained by the full respect of fundamental freedoms. Those who violate fundamental freedoms to attain security don't deserve both.

Concerning globalisation, it is a phenomenon which negatively impacts human rights. All the theories on the end of history and of ideologies are false. The dominant ideology now is economic and aims at the subordination of the world to the market. This conception reduces human beings to tools, to economic actors. It is a serious phenomenon. Globalisation intensifies inequalities and marginalizes human beings.

Extreme poverty is a massive violation of human rights. The Universal declaration is a double liberation from poverty and fear. Instead, human rights should be globalized. But human rights stop in front at the doors of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Bank.

Concerning human rights and cultural diversity, Canada celebrates its diversity as enrichment. We must not forget that throughout our colonialist and imperialist history and even nowadays, diversity is not totally accepted.

Diversity is endangered by a series of phenomena, like globalisation and cultural imperialism. The United States controls the world with its information and communications technology. Even intellectual property doesn't protect creativity. Will the UNESCO Convention on cultural diversity prevail over the WTO rules?

According to Mr. Leuprecht, human rights are not only a western notion.

It is true that their roots emerged in North America and Europe. But the fundamental ideas behind human rights are the same in other cultures: Confucius in China (idea of human dignity), Muslim world, Buddhism (harmony by the respect of others), etc. It is important to dare the travel to our common humanity in order to arrive at a more human conception of human rights.

Mr Leuprecht invited participants to keep a critical mind in regards to power during the training, because human rights need to be protected from economic, social and religious powers; to use reliable information in a world where there is a lot of manipulation and disinformation.

With the IHRTTP, participants will be enriched, encouraged, trained and equipped to build a better and more human world.

*... the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world... **Universal Declaration of Human Rights***