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HUMAN RIGHTS FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

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WHAT IS A HUMAN RIGHTS FRIENDLY SCHOOL (HRFS)?

A HRFS is a community that practises and promotes human rights values in all aspects of school life and beyond.

HRFS make a commitment to teaching:

ABOUT human rights so that the school community understands what they are and why they are important

THROUGH human rights so that the school becomes a model of excellence in human rights practice

FOR human rights so that all members of the school community know their rights and learn to protect the rights of others

HRFS take a whole-school approach. This means that human rights are applied to four aspects of school life: governance, relationships, curriculum and environment.

When human rights come into the classroom, onto the playground and into the hearts and minds of young people, attitudes and behaviours begin to change. Children, teachers and other school community members explore, promote, and live human rights and responsibilities.

Inclusion, tolerance and respect for diversity are core principles of human rights. When these principles start to direct the thoughts and actions of the school community, little room is left for bullying and discrimination: we relate to one another, not as rich or poor, dark or fair, passed or failed, but as human beings made equal by the rights we share. Members of HRFS communities act, speak out and stand-up for their rights. They recognize and live up to their responsibilities by respecting the rights of others.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HRFS?

When a school decides to become human rights friendly, it takes an important step towards improving the lives of children and communities. HRFS cultivate the skills needed by the leaders of today and tomorrow. They help to produce and strengthen central capabilities for each and every person in school communities and beyond.

By creating a culture of human rights, students, teachers, and other members of the school community develop strong practical understanding of their own responsibilities in society.

Amnesty International's experience has shown that making a school more human rights friendly can lead to educational benefits, including:

- Improved student attitudes toward learning
- Higher student achievement
- Better relationships among students and teachers and other staff
- Improved ability to analyse difficult problems in society

HRFS also produce benefits for the wider community by:

- Encouraging all members of the school community to treat each other with respect
- Empowering teachers to include important local issues in the curriculum
- Teaching students how to participate in society as responsible people

At the heart of the decision to become human rights friendly, is a school's commitment to empower all members of the community to participate in decisions that affect their lives, and the lives of their children.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT HRFS?

Families and communities are encouraged to participate in HRFS.

You can get involved by:

- Bringing important local issues to the attention of teachers, students and school authorities
- Attending public events held by HRFS
- Encouraging students to talk to you about school life
- Supporting human rights campaigns and other activities led by school community members
- Protecting the school as a safe learning space for all students

If you have any ideas about how HRFS can better support human rights in the wider community. Please share them with us. One example of how HRFS have supported the wider community is described below.



HRFS cultivate the skills needed by the leaders of today and tomorrow

Image: Human rights debate at the Statehouse Girls School
© Amnesty International Kenya
Cover Image: School community from Lycée Ibn Youssef in a human rights awareness march
© Amnesty International Morocco

MONGOLIA: STARTING A VOLUNTEER SERVICE PROGRAMME

The Mongolia-India Joint Secondary School in Ulaanbaatar reached the wider community through their volunteer service programme which included human rights-focused activities.

In 2010, during one of the coldest winters in history, the temperature in Mongolia dropped to -58 °C. This gravely affected the population: food was scarce and communication difficult; it was considered a natural disaster by the authorities and international organizations.

The students and staff of this school took action. Together, they collected and distributed warm clothes, lights and matches, while the teachers donated a day's salary, to the affected communities. The programme kept the students and staff actively engaged with the wider community – after the disaster, it continued to assist marginalized groups and people living in poverty.



HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

Contact your school, or your nearest Amnesty International office:

You can find your local **Amnesty International office** by searching for your country here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/>

Regional Office contacts are here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/about-us/contact/>

See also: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/human-rights-education/human-rights-friendly-schools/>

Image: HRFS activity at the Joint Secondary School in Ulaanbaatar
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