

Summary

General Overview

From March 16-19, 2000, the United Nations Association in Canada ran an extremely successful three-day Youth Action Course on the United Nations, Human Security and Human Rights. Twenty-three youth between the ages of 16 and 18, from a total of sixteen different high schools in the National Capital Region and beyond, participated in the intense experience. The Course took place at Merrywood Easter Seal Camp, a picturesque and fully accessible facility near Smith Falls, Ontario. The Course was offered free of charge to participants, exclusive of travel costs to and from central Ottawa. The Youth Action Course was developed, coordinated and facilitated by Ele Pawelski, Human Rights Project Officer, and Steve Mason, Educational Outreach Project Officer for UNA-Canada.

Context

The Course was held in the context of the priority status that both the United Nations and Canada have given human security and human rights on their international agendas. Moreover, the Course was felt to be especially timely as the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) passes through its mid-point. The focus and structure of the Course arose out of the belief that educating young people on global human rights issues is an important first step in creating a generation of concerned, aware and involved citizens engaged in bringing about positive global change.

Structure

The structure of the Course was a series of interactive workshops on specific topics, each led by a specialist in the given field. The presenters came from the government, NGOs, the RCMP, and the academic sector. These workshops were complemented by two evening role-play activities in which the youth were able to explore the realities and potential of international cooperation on human security and human rights issues. The final session of the course was devoted to developing strategies for action to be followed-up on by the youth in their home communities and schools.

Results and Outcomes

The principal result of the Course was that participants were equipped with the knowledge and critical tools necessary to assist in the strengthening of respect for human rights within Canada and abroad. The specific outcomes that emerged from the Course were:

- a group of empowered and bonded youth educated about the UN, human security and human rights;
- enhanced links between the youth who participated in activities which demonstrated the benefits of working together to achieve common goals; and
- the establishment of a framework for action that enables youth to initiate programmes and activities in their schools and communities.