

# Rallying For Democracy

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## Tolerance

2008-09-22 15:11:50 by rallying for democracy

Tolerance is respect and acceptance of the rich diversity of the world's cultures, forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance is the virtue that makes peace possible. It contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

Tolerance involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism and affirms the standards set out in international human rights instruments. One is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behaviour and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others.

A tolerant society cannot tolerate intolerance, which would destroy it. It is difficult to strike a balance, however, and different societies do not always agree on the details. Authoritarian systems practice intolerance, the opposite of tolerance.

### Implementation of Tolerance

The Charter of the United Nations affirms in its preamble that to practice tolerance is one of the principles to be applied, to attain the ends pursued by the United Nations of preventing war and maintaining peace. In its 1993 session, the UN Assembly declared 1995 the United Nations Year for Tolerance. On 16 November 1995, the UNESCO member states adopted the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance that provides a guideline to further strengthen the international principles of tolerance. In 1996, the 16th of November was officially declared the annual International Day of Tolerance.

Tolerance at the state level requires just and impartial legislation, law enforcement and judicial and administrative process. It also requires that economic and social opportunities be made available to each person without any discrimination. Exclusion and marginalization can lead to frustration, hostility and fanaticism.

In order to achieve a more tolerant society, states should ratify existing international human rights conventions, and draft new legislation where necessary, to ensure equality of treatment and of opportunity for all groups and individuals in society.

It is essential for international harmony that individuals, communities and nations accept and respect the multicultural character of the human family. Without tolerance there can be no peace, and without peace there can be no development or democracy.

Intolerance may take the form of marginalization of vulnerable groups and their exclusion from social and political participation, as well as violence and discrimination against them. As confirmed in the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, "All individuals and groups have the right to be different" (Article 1.2).

As affirmed by the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, measures must be taken to ensure equality in dignity and rights for individuals and groups wherever necessary. In this respect, particular attention should be paid to vulnerable groups which are socially or economically disadvantaged so as to afford them the protection of the laws and social measures in force, to respect the authenticity of their culture and values, and to facilitate their social and occupational advancement and integration.

Taking a tolerant stance is one of the more difficult tasks citizens face in a society. We are not born tolerant, but must learn to be tolerant. Enlightened citizens understand the role of tolerance in a democratic society and are committed to practicing tolerance and respect for minority rights.

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Education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance. The first step in tolerance education is to teach people what their shared rights and freedoms are, so that they may be respected, and to promote the will to protect those of others.

Education policies and programs should contribute to development of understanding, solidarity and tolerance among individuals as well as among ethnic, social, cultural, religious and linguistic groups and nations.

Education for tolerance should aim at countering influences that lead to fear and exclusion of others, and should help young people to develop capacities for independent judgment, critical thinking and ethical reasoning.

A serious examination of the role of tolerance in a democracy entails looking at extremist or unconventional political and social beliefs. Teaching tolerance is thus inherently controversial; however, studies indicate that when curricula are specifically designed to teach young people the role of tolerance in a democracy, levels of tolerance can increase.