

NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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HUMAN RIGHTS DAY: 10 DECEMBER 2002

NEW CARTOON HOPES TO CATALYZE ACTIVISM ON THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

To raise awareness of health as a human right among the general public, the World Health Organization (WHO) is today launching, "The Right to Health" a colourful, interactive cartoon booklet.

It is essential that people — especially poor, vulnerable and marginalized population groups — become aware of their right to the highest attainable standard of health. They should also be aware that their government has certain obligations and should be accountable. Awareness is the first step in mobilizing action in favour of being able to claim this right.

"Awareness of human rights means that the disadvantaged can mobilize and empower themselves. The language of rights makes people conscious of the possibility of change," said Helena Nygren-Krug, Health and Human Rights Advisor, WHO.

The goal of the cartoon is to reach out to adolescents and children. It is just one of several tools WHO is using to raise awareness of the right to health amongst people, including health practitioners and government officials. In addition to various publications on health and human rights, WHO is developing health and human rights training both at its headquarters and regional offices.

The cartoon's story takes place in a classroom where a teacher interacts with children from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe, emphasizing the universality of human rights. They talk about children's rights, women's rights, discrimination, freedom to make personal life choices and the right to healthy living conditions and education. They also discuss access to affordable health services, how governments must strive to increase their ability to promote and protect the right to health and the responsibility of rich countries to help poor countries in making this right a reality.

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The cartoon gives the general public, including adolescents and children, an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned by playing a game in which they mark boxes containing statements true or false.

A resource pack is being prepared for teachers, health professionals and human rights organizations; in addition to the cartoon, it will contain a teaching guide, a poster and the recently published "25 Questions and Answers on Health and Human Rights" which is available online at: <http://www.who.int/hhr/activities/publications/en/>. The cartoon itself will be published on this same web site on 10 December, Human Rights Day.

On this day, WHO is bringing together a broad range of health and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, for a meeting titled "Advancing the dialogue on health and human rights."

The aim of the meeting is to assess how the trend of linking health with human rights is playing out in different parts of world. Non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives from Brazil, India, Nigeria and Uganda will report on their experiences. Participants will also discuss how to strengthen the agenda to advance health as a human right and to further integrate human rights principles in health policies and programmes.

Note for editors: The right to the highest attainable standard of health was first enshrined in the WHO Constitution (<http://www.who.int/governance/en/>). Subsequently, it has been firmly endorsed in a wide range of international and regional human rights instruments.

The most authoritative interpretation of the right to health is outlined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which has been ratified by 145 countries. In May 2000, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors the Covenant, adopted a General Comment on the right to health. The Comment clarifies the nature and content of this right, including individual entitlements and government obligations.

Traditionally, the global human rights movement concerned itself almost exclusively with civil and political rights violations. The recognition that the international community must treat all human rights — civil, cultural, economic, political, and social — "in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis" (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights, 1993), is being given strong emphasis since the end of the Cold War. This trend, alongside recent efforts to address poverty through human rights, is changing the landscape of the human rights movement. Leading human rights NGOs, such as Amnesty International, are now carefully expanding their mandates to incorporate the right to health alongside the more "mature" civil and political rights.

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For copies of "The Right to Health" cartoon, please contact A. Peters petersa@who.int

All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features as well as other information on this subject can be obtained on Internet on the WHO home page: <http://www.who.int>