

Campaigners mark UN Human Rights Day



A group of human rights campaigners in Edinburgh joined other members of Youth for Human Rights International (YHRI) in commemorating United Nations Human Rights Day, 10 December, with its third annual "International Walk for Human Rights." Students of all ages from more than 30 countries on six continents joined in the walk, to raise awareness of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The events included petition drives, distribution of human rights education material, and concerts.

The theme of Human Rights Day 2011 is "Social Media and Human Rights," and the history of the YHRI International Human Rights Walk is testimony to the power of social media in this arena.

In 2009, it was social media that made it possible for a group of dedicated young human rights advocates from a broad range of religions, races, ethnic backgrounds and cultures to meet online and share their ideas. From this interaction, the first annual walk was born. Held in 12 countries in 2009 and 27 in 2010, members anticipate 30 countries to participate in 2011: Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Barbados, Benin, Colombia, Cambodia, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Haiti, Holland, Honduras, India, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Russia, Scotland, South Africa, Switzerland, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tanzania, Ukraine, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America, Venezuela, and Zambia.

"We want to wake up the world," says Dustin McGahee, 21, International Walk for Human Rights Coordinator. "People from

across the globe will join forces to promote the need for human rights.”

In Edinburgh members of United for Human Rights, Youth for Human Rights International and the Circle of Friends Human Rights group walked up the Royal Mile to the Edinburgh Castle handing out human rights educational books to the public and collecting petition signatures as they went.

There was a lot of interest shown from the people on the Royal Mile as they gladly took books from the human rights walkers along the route and spoke about their own challenges with human rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) grew from the determination of human rights advocates to prevent the devastating human rights abuse that occurred during World War II from ever happening again. On December 10, 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt presented the UDHR to the General Assembly of the United Nations. The document is a compilation of the 30 human rights that apply to everyone, everywhere. In ratifying the Declaration, the General Assembly of the United Nations called upon the member nations “to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories.”

Despite this mandate, more than six decades after the Declaration was adopted, most countries do not require human rights education in their schools, resulting in widespread ignorance of this document and its content.

YHRI is a non-profit, secular organization founded in 2001 by educator Dr. Mary Shuttleworth. Having spent more than 30 years working with youth, she realized how vulnerable youth are when they do not know their rights.

“It is important that they not only know they have these rights,” said Dr. Shuttleworth, “but according to Article 29

of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they also have responsibilities to protect their rights and the rights of their peers. That is exactly what these youth organizing and participating in the International Walk for Human Rights are doing.”

With over 180 chapters globally, the purpose of YHRI is to teach youth around the world about human rights, specifically the UDHR, so they become advocates for tolerance and peace.

The 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are presented in youth-oriented public service announcements at <http://www.youthforhumanrights.org/watchads/index.html>.