

Dear all

First of all: thank you, Aleksander Shislov and Rune Åsheim, for your kind and inspiring words. It means a lot to us that you wanted to come to open this conference, and we see the presence of the ombudsman for human rights and our Norwegian consul general here in St. Petersburg as an expression of support for our work. At the same time it is an underlining of the cooperation between our two countries as close neighbors. Even though we don't think about that on a daily basis, our mutual project is of course in fact a part of this cooperation. We actually facilitate dialogue between our countries at a grass-root level.

I also want to wish you all a heartfelt welcome! I feel so grateful and happy to see you all gathered here. Now the conference that we have been planning through the dark winter and cold spring is indeed a fact. I have the honor of being the chairman of the board of the Human rights academy in Oslo, and this conference marks the culmination of five years work in Russia for our foundation. We see this event as an important milestone.

A few words about the Human Rights Academy. We were established as an ideal foundation in 2008 with the purpose to specialize in teaching human rights and multicultural understanding. Participant pedagogic is central for us. People learn more when they use themselves and their own experiences in the learning. One of our largest projects is the teacher project here in Russia. And our activities here also include journalism students in cooperation with the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University in Kaliningrad. It makes a lot of sense to work with both teachers and coming journalists. They are both in what we can call mediation professions – professions that describe and interpret society to itself. Our Academy also has extensive activities in Norway. Among them are courses for teachers in secondary school. We have learnt that Norwegian teachers have limited knowledge of human rights. When we survey how they see their own competence, more than half of the Norwegian history and social sciences teachers express that they have too little knowledge about human rights to teach the topic. This indeed calls for reflection, and action.

Our work in Nizhny Novgorod and Kaliningrad, and this conference, would never have been possible if it was not for our engaged and highly skilled cooperation partners in the Youth Center for human rights and legal culture. I want to address a sincere and huge thank you to Vsevolod Lukhovitsky and Svetlana Dyachkova. We appreciate our important cooperation so much and also look forward to our mutual work in the future. The support of the regional human rights ombudsman offices and the centers for teachers' further education in both regions has also been extremely important for our project. Thank you so much.

This is an important conference. Our main aim is to put education in human rights as a discipline high on the agenda. Human rights education is still a field in its early development both in Norway, Russia and internationally. We hope that this conference will contribute to highlight the importance of human rights education as an effective and peaceful tool to promote respect for human dignity, anti-discrimination and the development of democratic societies where human rights are respected. We also hope that we can create an arena for exchanging experiences of all sorts regarding human rights teaching. Hopefully, and probably, also some new ideas will develop and some good networking will take place these couple of days.

I hope you have had the chance to take a look at the conference program. I will not be modest – we are proud of it! We can offer the best experts to expand our knowledge about the status and challenges for human rights education both internationally and in Russia in particular, from different perspectives and angles. We also have the very best workshop leaders with

special competence within their fields. And most important: the teachers are here! To make this conference as valuable as we hope, your engaged participation in both the plenary sessions, the workshops and informally during the coffee breaks are the most significant success factors for this conference. I wish us all a conference filled with new knowledge of human rights education, intellectual challenges, inspiration and joy. Thank you.