


REQUEST FOR COUNCIL ACTION

Date: February 27, 2012
Item No.: 5 . b

Department Approval

City Manager Approval



Item Description: Recognize Human Rights Essay Contest Winners

BACKGROUND

Each year the Human Rights Commission holds an essay contest for sixth, seventh and eighth grade students within the Roseville Area School's boundaries. This year nearly 280 students from RAMS and Parkview School entered the contest. Commissioners conducted an anonymous review of the essays. Names of the students were not known until after the winners were selected.

This year we asked students to:

- Compare and contrast the human rights that young people of your age in your community might take for granted that may not be as readily available to young people in other areas of the United States or around the world.
 - Reference the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United States Bill of Rights or the Minnesota Human Rights Act.

The Commission will recognize the following students and teachers:

First place	Gabriel Cederberg	8 th Grade	Parkview	Mr. Lucas Ebert
Second	Noah Clark Zander	8 th Grade	Parkview	Mr. Lucas Ebert
Third	Audrey Wilson	8 th Grade	RAMS	Mr. Lee Thao
Honorable Mentions (in alphabetical order)				
HM	Sam O'Donnell-Hoff	8 th Grade	Parkview	Mr. Lucas Ebert
HM	Sophia Rossini	8 th Grade	Parkview	Mr. Lucas Ebert
HM	Maren Youngquist	8 th Grade	RAMS	Mr. Lee Thao

The first, second and third place winners will be invited to read their essays. Each honorable mention will receive a certificate.

COUNCIL ACTION

Recognize the essay contest winners.

Prepared by: Carolyn Curti, Communications Specialist
Attachments: A: Winning Essays

New Friends in Roseville: The Karen

“Li li li!” shouted some players during soccer practices at Roseville Area Middle School (RAMS). This unique call for the ball fit in with the different languages used at RAMS soccer practices so much that it barely caught my attention for a few weeks. Once tryouts were done and we were placed on our teams, I realized that three out of every four of my teammates used this message. I was curious to find out who these kids were. I soon learned that they are the Karen (Kuh-ren) immigrants who came to Minnesota to avoid persecution and genocide in their home country Myanmar, which was formerly known as Burma. Because of the violation of human rights against the Karen people, I have come to value my life here in Minnesota more than I have ever appreciated it before.

What does one think when someone says “Genocide”? Perhaps one thinks of Adolf Hitler’s persecution of the Jews in Germany and Poland during World War II, the Khmer Rouge regime that killed about 20 percent of the population in Cambodia back in 1975, or the Hutus killing the Tutsis in Rwanda today. Here in Minnesota, genocide seems so far away and inconceivable. In reality, genocide isn’t that far away from us. There are thousands of Karen people in our community who have experienced the constant fear of genocide. Over 3,000 refugees live in St. Paul and Roseville. This is the largest population of Karen refugees in the United States. Many of their families immigrated here to Minnesota in 2003 with the Resettlement Wave, and more are expected to come to St. Paul and Roseville to reunite with their families this coming year in search of a better life together.

Over the past 63 years in Burma, and since 1989 “Myanmar”, the Karen people have been in immediate danger of persecution and ultimately genocide by the military. In 1948, Burma gained its independence from Britain through guerrilla warfare. Shortly thereafter in 1949, the Karen people wanted to break away from Burma and have tried to separate ever since. This separatist movement has created one of the longest-running civil wars in world

history. The Bamar, the largest ethnic group in Myanmar, have fought the Karen over their desire for separation since 1949. The Bamar's military, the Military Junta controlled the government and ruled the country from 1988 to March 2011. The Military Junta breached many human rights laws and is guilty of genocide against the Karen people. From March 2011 to the present there has still been persecution going on in Myanmar against the Karen by the Bamar military even though the Military Junta has been officially dissolved. The Karen people have always been a minority and today make up only seven percent of the 58 million people in Myanmar whereas the Bamar people make up 65 percent. The genocide of the Karen people in Myanmar has received much less international attention than the mass killings in Rwanda, but this doesn't make Myanmar's genocide any less tragic.

Back in Myanmar, the ruling military still attacks Karen villages, looking to kill and capture the Karen to use as slaves. Dispossession, forced labor, torture, rape and genocide are some of the worst acts that the military have done and still are doing to the Karen people. Many Karen people have resorted to escaping to refugee camps in Thailand. Approximately 150,000 Karen people now live in Thai camps. The Karen people as a whole could peacefully emigrate from Myanmar to Thai refugee camps for better and more peaceful living conditions, but the military won't let them. There is great risk involved in the attempt to cross the border, and food shortages in the camps are becoming a major issue.

I once again was introduced to the Karen people when a Karen choir full of youth of all ages came to my church one Sunday morning. They sang vibrantly in Karen and English. They talked about their country and culture and informed us of the persecution and genocide going on in Myanmar. Seeing kids my own age who have already experienced more horrifying things than most adults ever will in their lifetime made me look at my life with greater appreciation of my freedoms and rights.

I was teased sometimes at soccer this year by RAMS middle school students because I attend Parkview Center School, a K-8 school. In preschool I was pushed around by another kid who called me “stupid”, and now sometimes I am called “nerd”. But beside those occasional instances, I rarely feel threatened. When I am skipping to the park while babysitting my adorable three-year-old cousin, a 12 year-old Karen boy in Myanmar might be sprinting away from pursuing soldiers while trying to avoid being shot. It is terribly difficult for me to imagine that if our soccer team’s fearless goalie hadn’t escaped from Myanmar, that he could have been that 12 year-old boy running away from the military.

We all have had bad nightmares. But many Karen here in Roseville have practically lived a nightmare. Looking at what the Karen people suffered in Myanmar makes my everyday American life seem easy and uncomplicated. In our established daily lives in Minnesota we take for granted many rights that the Karen people are deprived of in Myanmar. Their persecution was a direct violation of Human Right #1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Hopefully the Karen will find these rights and dignity here in the United States.

The message “Li li li!” meant almost nothing to me at the beginning of the soccer season, but now it has lead me to a whole new way of looking at life. I am more thankful for my own life and also for the lives, safety and new opportunities for my teammates and other Karen immigrants. I hope that the Karen can put their persecution behind them and thrive here in the United States.. On our soccer team, we all became a bit “Karen” when we all used their simple call during our soccer matches. As a community, I hope that we all can do our very best to welcome our new friends in Roseville: the Karen.

Bibliography

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**Water, Water, Everywhere...
But When Will We Notice Some Are Still Thirsty?**

I wake in the middle of the night coughing and choking from my dry mouth and run to the sink to get a glass of water to sooth my parched throat. The refreshing water spills from the faucet and yet, it doesn't even cross my mind that 20 feet from my room, I have access to something 1 billion people on earth don't have: safe, clean, reliable water. How is it that 37% of the world's population doesn't have easy access to safe, sanitary water? Water is necessary for life, yet is taken for granted by almost any person who can turn a knob and have it flow cleanly and abundantly from a tap. In 1948, The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights outlined fundamental rights, standards and freedoms that every human life should be accorded. Article 25 addresses the right of every human being to clean, safe and affordable water. It states:

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care...”

These rights apply to every human being and recognizes the value of their life. They are basic standards that each of us has a right to demand from our existence. Yet in some developing countries, these rights are dreams more than reality. Safe, clean, reliable water is a basic human right that people in the United States take for granted compared to people in African countries.

Having something freely available sometimes lets people forget about its value and its importance. Here, in the United States, most people can access water easily. It is usually abundant, free flowing and safe. The average American uses 176 gallons of

water per day compared to 5 gallons of water the average African family uses each day (www.water.org). The toilet alone takes up 27% of American's household use (www.epa.gov). I am not suggesting that we, in the US go back to outhouses, but I do think that it is easy to forget that you are using a limited resource when it is so plentiful and available. Having sanitary water accessible from inside our homes, offices, schools has changed our perspective.

In contrast, in underdeveloped countries like drought stricken Sudan, water is hard to come by. Civil war and drought has made water a precious resource that many can't get. Only 30% of the homes in Sudan have running water (worldvision.org). Typically, the average distance that people in Africa walk is 6 kilometers (3.5 miles) to get water (UNFPA [2002]). Traveling that far for drinkable water takes much time and energy. It also means that people have to make choices about what to give up. In Africa, children often go get the water, which prevents them from attending school. Their education is sacrificed to help their families but the consequence is that they are uneducated which leads to further poverty. Taking water for granted isn't possible when you have to work to get it everyday.

Clearly, clean, safe water is fundamental for the human body to survive. Contaminated disease infested water is killing millions all over the world. Unclean water causes diseases like dysentery, diarrhea and cholera. Yet, 2.6 billion people worldwide live without basic sanitation (World Water Council). Due to poor sanitation and bad water, diarrhea is the number one leading cause of death children under the age of 5 in Africa (World Health Organization). In the developing world, 24,000 children under the

age of five die every day from preventable causes like diarrhea contracted from unclean water (World Health Organization).

In comparison, citizens in the United States rarely think about the safety of their water. Kids in the US don't think about water quality when they take a sip from a water fountain. We, in this industrialized nation, don't have our friends, our siblings or our parents dying from water borne illnesses. Water safety is not even thought about in this country. Having safe water to drink makes one forget about its source, its cleanliness or even its effect on health. This is a luxury over a third of the world does not have.

Certainly, all human beings should have certain basic rights that respect the dignity and importance of human life however, clean, safe, affordable water is a basic human right that is taken for granted by some and inaccessible for others. We, who have it free flowing from our faucets and showers each morning presume that the rest of the world has the same ease and access and trust in this precious resource. However, our assumption is completely wrong about the availability and safety of water for a large number of people in this world. Water should be clean, safe and reliable for every person on this planet.

Resources:

<http://www.epa.gov>

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR06-complete.pdf>

<http://www.un.org>

<http://www.unfpa.org>

<http://www.water.org>

<http://www.worldvision.org>

<http://worldwatercouncil.org>

<http://www.who.int>

“Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.” -- 14th Dalai Lama

I rarely think twice about my human rights and how lucky I am to have the rights that I do. I experience my human rights every day. Human rights ensure that every person – no matter their race, gender, age, or sexuality – get fair treatment and everything that they need. Most kids in my community, including me, take our human rights for granted; however, many kids either don't have human rights, or their rights are not protected. Many kids here, and around the world don't have adequate living conditions, the right to education, or the freedom of belief and religion.

Having adequate living standards is one human right that many kids live without. In Minnesota one in six kids are homeless. Where I live, Roseville, Minnesota (Ramsey County), the ratio is one to five. This means that out of every five kids in my school, one of them may be homeless. This means they do not having stable living arrangements. Article 25 in the Bill of Human Rights states:

“You have the right to have whatever you need so that you and your family: do not fall ill; go hungry; have clothes and a house; and are helped if you are out of work, if you are ill, if you are old, if your wife or husband is dead, or if you do not earn a living for any reason you cannot help.”

Around the world, thousands of kids do not have adequate living standards. In seven select cities in India there are 414,700 children living on the streets. They are put at risk of many different diseases, like anemia, dental problems, gastric ulcers, other gastrointestinal diseases, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, acute and chronic infectious

diseases, diabetes and malnutrition, and even death. Every five seconds one child in another country dies from malnutrition. These kids do not get help, like Article 25 says they should. In my community, many kids who go to church and school go on mission trips. On the last trip I attended, I went into Minneapolis and helped homeless people that we met. We organized a clothing drive, made sandwiches at a shelter, and ate with the homeless people in a soup kitchen. That weekend we all got to experience the devastation of homelessness. No one should have to deal with being homeless. Still, generally, I do not think about how lucky I am to have the right to adequate living standards that I do.

Only a few children in third world countries get the chance to go to school. These children live in families who can afford to send their children to school. Most kids, however, do not get the opportunity to go to school. In most first countries, like the United States, and even in most second world countries, kids go to school every day and are offered many different school choices. In the past, India's education system was recognized as superior, but now as the population rises and the economy gets worse, the education quality has decreased. It is very unfortunate that only some children get good education, when it's stated in our human rights that everyone should get the chance to go to school. Good things are happening, too. General Mills did a "Win One Give One Sweepstakes" where kids could win a laptop, but that also means a kid in another country gets a laptop a well. A program called "Girls Education Movement" (GEM) is an effort to make education in South Africa better for the woman living there. They help by sending donations and gifts that they fundraise for.

In third world countries religious rights are enforced very differently than my peers' rights or my rights; however, I believe my religious rights are the same as theirs. Haiti's official religion is Roman Catholic, but children still have the right to choose what they believe in. The

United States does not have an official religion. In my family my siblings and I don't always want to go to church, often because we do not want to get up early, but we have the choice. In other countries the same kind of resistance goes on, but for some people going to worship is like a break from their difficult life. My family enjoys getting together to celebrate religious views. It's fun and exciting. While religion can be controlled, our beliefs cannot really be taken away. Having our beliefs is one right that we can all enjoy, even if for those people who do not have some of the other basic human rights.

“Human rights education is much more than a lesson in schools or a theme for a day; it is a process to equip people with the tools they need to live lives of security and dignity. On this International Human Rights Day, let us continue to work together to develop and nurture in future generations a culture of human rights, to promote freedom, security and peace in all nations.” – Kofi Annan, seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations

Human rights are a necessity every day. Whether it is waking up to a home of your own, eating three meals a day, or going to school every morning. Unfortunately, many of us who enjoy these rights every day do not realize how our human rights shape our life. Most kids in my community, including me, take our human rights for granted. Sadly, many kids in Minnesota, in the United States, and in the world either don't have human rights or do not have their rights protected. We need to work together to keep our rights how they are so that our children, and our grandchildren for generations to come, can have the same rights that we get today. I could never imagine my life without having human rights. Can you?

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The Death Penalty

"What says the law? You will not kill. How does it say it? By killing!"

This is a quote from Victor Hugo, author of *Les Miserables*, about the death penalty. The capital punishment is a cruel way of sending the message to not kill, and hypocritical at that. Here in Roseville, Minnesota, we can forget that the rest of the world, and even some of the United States still use this unacceptable destruction of rights. Just because Minnesota has outlawed the death penalty, does not mean that you should not care about the rest of the world. The U.N. Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to life, yet 58 countries in the world still use the death penalty. This is not the only rule that is being broken. Also stated in the U.N. Declaration, is that we are all equal before the law, we have rights wherever we go, and we are all innocent until proven guilty. However, even in the USA these are obstructed. There is no justice in the death penalty, only vengeance.

The place that I am looking at is a country that's probably very familiar. It is our very own United States of America. Unfortunately, only 14 states (and Washington D.C.) have abolished the death penalty. That means that 36 states still disregard human life, with Texas leading the way. Ever since Rick Perry became governor of the Lone Star State, he has had 234 executed. That is a whopping 40% of all executions carried out in the USA since December of 2000. The current method of execution is by lethal injection. This has proven more humane than the gas chamber, but according to a study done in 2005, 21 out of 49 tested after death have had low enough blood concentrations of sodium thiopental to regain awareness before their death. Sodium Thiopental is the first of three injections, and the one that stops the pain by making putting the person in a state of unconsciousness, so they do not detect it. Perry has also executed seven people from

Mexico who were not told of their right to contact their embassy for legal assistance. This breaks a treaty set by the USA and Mexico. So, in Texas not only is the right to life being broken, but also the fact that you should have rights wherever you go.

Racism is something that can also negatively affect the justice system. According to a study done by an Iowan professor and his colleagues, a black man is about twice as likely to be executed compared to a white man, and a murderer of a white person is about 4.5 times more likely to be executed compared to the murderer of a black person. Also, many blacks have been convicted with things such as beaten confessions and witnesses who recant later. One such case is the execution of Troy Davis. Troy Davis was executed with doubt of his guilt still existing. Despite the fact that 7 of 9 witnesses (whose testimonies identified Davis as the murderer) signed an affidavit changing their testimony, or taking it back. The U.N. Declaration of Human Rights states that we are all equal before the law. However, in the USA your ethnicity is still a factor of conviction.

Another human right stated in the U.N. Declaration is that we are all innocent until proven guilty. This should be easily upheld. However, Hank Skinner is set to be executed on November 19, 2011. This is ridiculous, because Texas is refusing to examine DNA evidence that could prove his innocence. This is because the Texas Attorney General ruled that the Texas Forensic Science Commission can't look at any evidence collected before September 2005. The Attorney General stated this because of an execution dating back to 2004. Cameron Todd Willingham was executed for allegedly starting a fire that killed his three children. However, the Chicago Tribune found that there was no evidence pointing towards arson. Since Texas is trying to cover up for its mistake of executing an innocent man, so the DNA that could prove Skinner innocent

cannot be examined unless Texas gives the nod. Everyone is innocent until proven guilty, not the converse.

Death is the most intolerable punishment anyone can receive, and not only the penalty itself but also the process in which one is convicted is corrupt. What if it was a friend, a family member, or someone you loved and cared about? Abolishing the capital punishment is something that must happen. We are hypocrites, by killing the killer. If not simply eradicated, the death penalty should at least be mitigated. Hopefully the world will see that this razing of rights is unacceptable, and it will end once and for all.

Yesterday's Issues Today

Segregation. It's a word that to many of us has fallen out of use, said only when referencing a time in the 1960s. To most of us, segregation only happens in other countries where women have to stay inside and keep their heads covered. But we are wrong. Gender segregation is still happening today in the United States. It's an issue that not many people know about, and it needs attention to be stopped. A school in Kaplan, Louisiana separated the middle school classes into all girl classes and all boy classes. Here in Roseville, Minnesota, we take for granted that we are treated the same as males, and aren't thought less of. We celebrate diversity, but also practice equality. In Louisiana, they are violating articles one and two in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, saying that there will be no discrimination by gender. They think females don't learn as well as males, don't do as well on tests, and in general aren't as apt as males. This is supposedly done to help kids learn better. This kind of thinking encourages stereotypes that are false and need to be stopped. We've spent centuries trying to move away from this kind of discrimination, especially here in the United States where we are supposed to be advocates for others' Human Rights.

Michael Gurian and Leonard Sax have been the source of several theories that males and females learn so differently that they should be educated separately, while here in Roseville Minnesota we know that there aren't any reasons for that.

This segregation was allegedly done to help students learn better, and based on the untrue theories that females and males learn so differently that they have to be taught differently. This has been proven to be false, but people still believe it. Some points in this theory are that females “can’t handle stress and shouldn’t be given timed tests” while males “should be allowed to hit things with a Nerf bat during class to relieve tension.” These points are demeaning to females, and say things like “girls can only do as well as boys on math tests on the few days a month when they have an estrogen surge, while boys can do well on a test any day.” The equality we have is often taken for granted, and opportunities have been wasted. We don’t realize how lucky we are to be valued the same as males, or how heart-wrenching it is to know that we’ve fought and fought for equality, to have it swept aside once again.

Another thing that is wrong with single sex education is that it doesn’t really work. Scientists have proven that there are no real advantages to this kind of learning. Actually, this teaching style has shown negative results, and has shown lower test scores. It’s more important than we think to have a diverse classroom, because it helps kids to develop a tolerance and an acceptance for diversity. It’s often used as a “quick-fix” to the ongoing problem of how to better educate kids. Everyone learns differently, and it’s extremely generalizing to say there’s a way males learn and a way females learn. Sax and Gurian are well known for their theories, but neither of them do their own research. Their credibility is highly

questionable, and perhaps they are just prejudiced against females and don't care about kids' education.

One of the most atrocious things about this segregation is it encourages stereotypes that males have more worth than females. When kids are exposed to these thoughts, it damages their self-worth and self image. Young girls learn to think less of themselves and have low self esteem. This is 21st century America! We don't want people degrading females! There is no reason for these stereotypes to continue, and they're just plain wrong. We are raising the next generation to regress back to the early 1900s, and females will have to fight for their rights all over again. Females are worth just as much as males here in Minnesota, and shouldn't it be the same elsewhere?

Prejudice against females, sadly, still goes on today. What's worse is it still goes on in the United States, while most people think it has been abolished. Some schools in Louisiana are using single sex education because they say it's "An effective learning style", while really it's degrading females. It encourages sexist thinking, and sends a message saying females don't learn as well as males, and won't do as well on tests. This style of learning improves nothing, and actually can decrease test scores and self-esteem. The bottom line is, however, that this is discrimination, and needs to be stopped.

Human Rights Essay

Have you ever thought about what life would be like without running water? We take many things that are part of the way we live everyday for granted. I don't think much about the things I say or how lucky I am to have the freedom to say them. Nor do I think about how fortunate I am to be dry and warm with a roof over my head on a rainy day. I don't give a second thought about how I have the privilege to go to school everyday when I grumpily get up at 6:30 in the morning. I am focusing on Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 19, Freedom of Opinion and Information, Article 25, Right to Adequate Living Standard, and Article 26, Right to Education. The truth is that there are many people around the world that wish for these things very much.

UDHR article number 19 claims that you have the right to think and say what you want, when you want, and express it however you wish. Everyday, I share my thoughts by speaking to others. I didn't give it a second thought to today when I complimented my friend on her new shoes or when I sat down at the piano and began to play my favorite tune. Now I look back, I realize how lucky I am to have the freedom to do these things. In other places in the world, people are forced to choose their words carefully. They must make sure they express no opinion in what they say. They know not to complain about how cold or hot they are, how hungry they are, or how much they would love a roof over their head at night.

Everyone has the right to have whatever they need so they are healthy, well fed, clothed and have adequate shelter. Everyone who is in need of financial assistance will be granted help. This is claimed by UDHR Article 25, the Right to Adequate living standard. As I sit at my dinner table in the warm kitchen of my house eating a delicious and hot meal, I can't help but wonder how many people have never experienced this. I can't even imagine skipping one meal a day

when there are whole families who can't imagine eating one. A good meal to them may consist of a couple bites of rice, maybe once a day or once every other day. People are forced to eat dirt when I don't think twice when I reach for a third cookie.

At night, after I've taken a hot shower, I sink into my soft, warm bed. I think yet again about how many people have never experienced this. There are so many people who sleep on the ground. They go to bed in a one-room house, shivering in a cramped corner with only their family for warmth. Some even lay down to rest on pavement. Based on the Minnesota Human Rights Act, people are not protected based on familial status for employment. This could affect the quality of some family's shelter, food, and clothing.

Before school in the morning, without comprehending the depth of my words, I complain to myself, "I have nothing to wear!" This statement is false. For on the contrary, I have enough clothes to last me a month without repeating the use of a garment. As I look through my closet I realize that many people would be ecstatic to own even one of my many sweatshirts for warmth. I grudgingly head out the door in a fuzzy fleece jacket, again complaining to myself, but this time about school.

UDHR Article 26 states that everyone has the right to go to school free of charge. Many days the last thing I want to do is go to school. However, on these same days there are thousands more children that want nothing better than the chance to have an education. Kids all over the world are deprived of the opportunity to learn in school. This makes it difficult for them to find a job and therefore earn a living. Some people's families don't live close enough to a school for them to be enrolled. Other children aren't allowed the opportunity. There are kids that must stay home and take care of their family. Some must work to make an income for their family because

of an ill or disabled parent. I know that I need to start appreciating all my rights including my education more.

There are many freedoms and rights that we have that we aren't thankful enough for. The Freedom of Opinion and Information, Right to Adequate Living Standard, and the Right to Education are only a few examples of the things that aren't appreciated for what they're worth. I think that it's unfair that there are hundreds of thousands of people wishing for the freedoms that we take for granted. I know that I will put forth my best effort to be more thankful for the rights I have and I hope you will, too.