

The Core Problem: Preventing the United Nations Takeover of K-12 Education in America

By Jim Kelly

April 26, 2013

Since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has developed a common core of international human rights principles, policies, and practices that constitutes a global ethical religion. Through the Common Core State Standards Initiative (“CCSSI”), with the co-operation of state governors, President Barack Obama and the U.S. Department of Education are using the UN human rights common core to indoctrinate impressionable k-12 students and fundamentally transform America.

Key Points:

- Since 1948, United Nations officials have developed human rights principles, policies, and practices.
- These human rights include economic rights, such as the right to food, right to housing, right to health, right to education, and right to work.
- These economic rights are the foundation of a “Second Bill of Rights,” long sought by liberal progressives.
- UN officials and human rights activists want human rights education to be taught in primary and elementary schools worldwide.
- The Obama Administration, U.S. Department of Education, and states are using the national Common Core State Standards Initiative to indoctrinate k-12 grade students in a global ethical religion of human rights.
- One proposed lesson plan calls for students to study human rights, read the Pledge of Allegiance, then “*rewrite the Pledge of Allegiance in words that people use today.*”
- 5th grade students in New York are expected to show expert knowledge on human rights that would enable them to answer such questions as “*Who has the right to marry?*” and “*Who gets to decide who gets married?*”
- Absent publicly funded parental choice in k-12 education, the teaching of human rights violates the religious freedom of parents and their children.

UN Human Rights Education

Since 2001, the United Nations and human rights activists have aggressively promoted the teaching in elementary and secondary schools of the human rights listed in the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights.¹ These human rights are explained in greater detail in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (“ICESCR”), each of which the UN General Assembly adopted in 1966. As a result of the ongoing work of the Geneva-based treaty monitoring bodies responsible for developing and implementing the provisions of these two Covenants, the UN has produced a “catechism” of human rights, the purpose of which is to promote a global ethical religion that transcends (and replaces) traditional theistic religions, such as Christianity.²

The economic rights contained in the ICESCR include, but are not limited to, the right to food, right to housing, right to water, right to health, right to education, right to work, right to a clean and safe environment, and right to social security. UN Member States that have ratified the ICESCR are responsible for taking the steps necessary to fulfill these economic rights. Although the United States of America is one of the few nations that have not ratified the ICESCR, human rights activists are taking significant steps to ensure that its provisions are effectively implemented nationwide.³ It has long been a goal of liberal progressives in America to secure these economic rights as a “Second Bill of Rights,” that is realized through federal laws, government regulation, and court decisions.⁴

In 2004, at the urging of human rights activists, the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly adopted, and they have since been implementing, a World Program on Human Rights Education (“HRE”). The World Program on HRE, provides a detailed roadmap for the teaching of human rights in elementary and secondary schools throughout the world. By producing human rights teaching manuals, lesson plans, and teacher training and other materials, international organizations, such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and OECD, support the World Program on HRE.⁵

The foundation of HRE is the common core of human rights reflected in international human rights treaties. In 2006, the chairpersons of the various UN human rights treaty monitoring bodies endorsed the first part of a new set of “Harmonized Guidelines,” which UN Member States must use in preparing their periodic reports to the treaty monitoring bodies. These new Harmonized Guidelines require States parties to provide to the treaty monitoring bodies one basic document, the common core document (CCD), that includes a full account of their laws, policies, and infrastructure relating to human rights policy and implementation.⁶ The CCD is to be used by all the treaty bodies in their reviews of States parties’ treaty compliance, which makes it easier for human rights activists to build and influence the matrix of human rights governance networks.⁷

Because the education systems in many European countries are federal ones, UN officials and human rights activists have had more success implementing the World Program on HRE in Europe than in the United States, where K-12 education is a state and local concern. Now, with 45 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity adopting the CCSSI, the UN, the Obama Administration, U.S. Department of Education, and human rights activists will be better able to implement their human rights education agenda.⁸

U.S. Common Core State Standards Initiative

The stated purpose of the CCSSI is “to provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them.”⁹

From 2002 to 2004, in partnership with the Education Trust, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and the National Alliance of Business, Achieve, Inc. worked with representatives from the K-12, postsecondary, and business communities in Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nevada and Texas to identify the English and mathematics knowledge and skills high school graduates need for success in college and careers. A set of academic content standards allegedly reflecting the convergence of both employer and postsecondary expectations, the American Diploma Project (“ADP”) benchmarks, emerged from this research.

In 2005, to help states close the gap between what students need to know for postsecondary success and what states require them to demonstrate in order to earn a high school diploma, Achieve and 13 states created the ADP Network. By 2008, the ADP Network had grown to 33 states—collectively educating 80 percent of the nation’s public school students. Through the ADP Network, Achieve works closely with states to help them align their high school academic content standards. As of 2008, Achieve had identified 22 ADP Core English Benchmarks that cut across the eight strands of the ADP Benchmarks: language, communication, writing, research, logic, informational text, media and literature.

Beginning in 2009, through its “Race to the Top” program, the U.S. Department of Education began funding the implementation of the CCSSI at the state level. With a substantial pool of federal Race to the Top money available to “encourage” states to adopt standards and assessments and build student data systems, in June 2010, Achieve and its partners, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (“NGA”) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (“CCSSO”) published *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in Historical/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (“CCSSE/L”) and *Common Core State Standards for Mathematics* (“CCSSM”).

Efforts are also under way to develop state common standards in science and social studies. Recently, human rights educators who are members of the National Council for the Social Studies (“NCSS”) were encouraged to review, and provide comments and recommendations to, a draft of the national “The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards” that the NCSS created in partnership with the CCSSO and NGA.

The production and implementation of the CCSSI is enabling human rights activists to realize their long-held goal of weaving the UN human rights agenda into the fabric of K-12 education in America.¹⁰

Human Rights Education in English Language Arts and Literacy

The textual and progressively complex nature of the UN’s human rights common core fits very nicely with the expectations educators have for teaching English Language Arts and Literacy under the CCSSE/L.

According to the Foundation for Excellence in Education, the CCSSE/L expectations include:

- *Balancing Informational and Literary Text.* Increased attention to informational text in the English Language Arts curriculum.
- *Knowledge in Other Content Areas.* Students build knowledge about the world (content areas) through text, rather than the teacher or activities.
- *Staircase of Complexity.* Reading of high quality, more difficult text.
- *Text-based Answers.* Students engage in rich conversations about text, using text evidence to support arguments.
- *Writing from Sources.* Purposeful writing that uses text evidence to support reasoning, and building and defending arguments.
- *Academic Vocabulary.* Students constantly build the vocabulary they need to access grade-level complex texts.¹¹

The use of “embedded readings,” is a key element of the CCSSE/L. A leading U.S. expert on embedded readings recently described how embedded readings are to be used:

The first version of the text, or the baseline version, is at a basic level, easy for any student in the class to understand. It is a summary or an outline that provides a strong foundation for success. Each succeeding version of the text contains additional words, phrases or sentences that provide new information and/or details. The final version of the text is the most challenging. However, each and every version of the Embedded Reading contains the baseline version, and each subsequent version created, within it. The scaffolding of the versions builds success, confidence and interest.¹²

Human rights activists and curricula development companies are developing CCSSE/L guides for embedded readings based on the UN’s common core of international human rights. On March 21, 2013, a guide for an embedded reading on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (“UDHR”) for the 5th grade was posted to the Embedded Reading website.¹³

Among other things, the guide for an embedded reading on the UDHR:

- States that the UDHR “inspires us to support human rights.”
- States that the UDHR is “a promise that we deserve these rights.”
- Calls upon the class members to define the words “declaration,” “rights,” and “inspire.”
- Directs the class members to learn the definitions for the words “dignity,” “foundation,” “fundamental,” and “inherent;” read how they are used in a sentence; think about them; and use them in an answer to a question, such as “Why might someone think that dignity is important?”
- After having the students read the Pledge of Allegiance, requires the students to “*rewrite the Pledge of Allegiance in words that people use today.*” (emphasis added)
- Explains that the UDHR has inspired many human rights agreements and that it inspires us when we address injustice and conflicts, examine repression, and in our efforts to support human rights.
- Explains that the international community has made a promise to keep dignity and justice for all, whatever our nationality, place of residence, gender, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. It then instructs the students to brainstorm other items that would be considered “status.”¹⁴

The guide for an embedded reading on the UDHR closes with a reference and link to the UN manual on teaching human rights.

Human Rights Education in the New York State CCSSE/L Curriculum

On April 3, 2012, the New York State Department of Education awarded Expeditionary Learning the contract for developing English Language Arts and Literacy curricular and associated professional development materials and services aligned to the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for grade 3 through grade 5. The contract was funded with federal Race to the Top funds.

An outgrowth of the Outward Bound program, historically, Expeditionary Learning has partnered with schools and districts to open new schools and transform existing schools by providing school leaders and teachers with professional development and curriculum planning resources, and new school structures. The New York State contract for the development of the CCSSE/L curriculum is one of Expeditionary Learning's early forays in the area of common core.

In 2003, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is a significant financial backer of the CCSSI, awarded \$12.6 million to Expeditionary Learning to help create 14 small public secondary schools throughout the United States. In 2007, the Gates Foundation granted an additional \$11.1 million for the creation of nine more small high schools. As of 2010, Expeditionary Learning had a network of 165 schools in 29 states and Washington, D.C.

A key aspect of the Expeditionary Learning model of education is the emphasis on both academic learning and "citizen education," the latter of which focuses on a student's moral development and acquisition of "soft skills" in the context of project-based learning and deeper thinking skills.¹⁵ Unable to rely on Christian or other theistic religious education, in implementing their public school model, Expeditionary Learning emphasizes character education and, with the advent of its work in the common core area, human rights education.

Beginning in the 2012-2013 academic year, the state of New York introduced a Grade 5 English and Language Arts ("ELA") Module 1 pertaining to human rights education, which Expeditionary Learning developed.

Unit 1 of Module 1 is designed to build background knowledge on human rights. The overview of Module 1 explains that:

What are human rights? Why do we have them and how are they protected? This unit is designed to help students build knowledge about these questions while simultaneously building their ability to read challenging text closely. Students begin this unit by exploring human rights themes through images and key vocabulary. They then will analyze selected Articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) through a series of close

readings, text-dependent tasks and questions, discussions, and writing. They will explore the history of the development and language of universal human rights documents, developing skills to determine meaning of words and phrases, and learn to quote from an informational text to explain meaning that supports inferences.¹⁶

In Module 1, Unit 1, Lesson 4, the 5th grade students are required to explain the main idea and identify the important words in each of the following paragraphs:

1. All human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. The United Nations is committed to upholding, promoting, and protecting the human rights of every individual. This commitment stems from the United Nations Charter, which reaffirms the faith of the peoples of the world in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person.

3. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has stated in clear and simple terms the rights which belong equally to every person.

4. These rights belong to you.

5. They are your rights. Familiarize yourself with them. Help to promote and defend them for yourself as well as for your fellow human beings.¹⁷

Later, in Module 1, Unit 1, Lesson 7, the 5th grade students are expected to show expert knowledge on UDHR Articles 16, 17, 25, and 26 as evidenced by their ability to answer the following questions:

1. Who has the right to marry?

2. What does it mean to have the right to marry and to found a family?

3. Who gets to decide who gets married?

4. What does the word “deprived” mean?

5. What does the word “association” mean?

6. What does the phrase “standard of living” mean and what specific types and care are included?¹⁸

Recommended optional activities relating to Module 1, Unit 1 include:

- Inviting members of local human rights organizations, the school principal or assistant principal, or a school board member to come discuss human rights in their daily work.
- As a class, visiting a human rights organization headquarters, such as the United Nations, or a school board meeting.
- Work with a local human rights organization to share information or educate the public about human rights, or create or revise the school's code of conduct.
- Create visual representations of the UDHR.
- Write and perform a song about human rights.
- Create a timeline of key events in the Western Hemisphere leading up to the creation of the UDHR or perform research or complete a project on human rights heroes.¹⁹

On behalf of the Public Consulting Group, Expeditionary Learning is also developing the English Language Arts and Literacy curricular materials aligned to the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for grade 6 through grade 12. Thus, once New York public schools indoctrinate 5th grade students in the UN's human rights common core, that indoctrination serves as the foundation for further human rights education in more advanced grades.

For example, in a February 13, 2013 draft of the CCSSE/L curriculum materials for grades 6-12, UN human rights education appears in the form of the following "Module 4: Forming Positions:"

- Insecticides: Controlling Disease or Saving Wildlife (i.e., Right to a Clean and Safe Environment) (Grade 6)
- Water is Life (i.e. Right to Water) (Grade 7)
- Sustainability of World's Food Supply (i.e., Right to Food) (Grade 8)²⁰

Conclusion

The use of the CCSSI to indoctrinate American children in UN human rights principles, policies, and practices is in its early stages. However, as other states implement the CCSSE/L curriculum, they will be inclined to rely on proven models, including the one developed and marketed by Expeditionary Learning, which includes human rights education.

As the opposition to the CCSSI increases in many states, Governors, legislators, and education officials should use the ensuing debates to closely examine the degree to which implementation of the Common Core State Standards will result in the imposition of a global ethical religion that violates the consciences of parents who wish to provide for the moral education of their children using the religious teachings of their choice. State leaders should also consider whether, if they move forward with the implementation of the CCSSI, they are willing and able to remain ever vigilant to prevent UN officials and human rights activists from hijacking the CCSSI to advance their human rights education agenda.

Jim Kelly is an international human rights lawyer based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Endnotes

¹ James P. Kelly, *Human Rights Education, Religion, and Parental Choice in Education*, ENGAGE: THE JOURNAL OF THE FEDERALIST SOCIETY'S PRACTICE GROUPS, Vol. 6, Issue 1, May 2005, at <http://www.fed-soc.org/publications/detail/human-rights-education-religion-and-parental-choice-in-education>

² James P. Kelly, *Democratic Evolution and the Church of the United Nations*, ENGAGE: THE JOURNAL OF THE FEDERALIST SOCIETY'S PRACTICE GROUPS, Vol. 8, Issue 3, June 2007, at <http://www.fed-soc.org/publications/detail/democratic-evolution-and-the-church-of-the-united-nations>

³ James P. Kelly, *Building the Global Welfare State: The United Nations as Community Organizer*, ENGAGE: THE JOURNAL OF THE FEDERALIST SOCIETY'S PRACTICE GROUPS, Vol. 12, Issue 1, June 2011, at <http://www.fed-soc.org/publications/detail/building-the-global-welfare-state-the-united-nations-as-community-organizer>

⁴ See CASS SUNSTEIN, *THE SECOND BILL OF RIGHTS: FDR'S UNFINISHED REVOLUTION—AND WHY WE NEED IT MORE THAN EVER* (2006), at

http://www.amazon.com/The-Second-Bill-Rights-Revolution--And/dp/0465083331/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1366932249&sr=8-1&keywords=second+bill+of+rights

⁵ *Teaching Human Rights: Practical Activities for Primary and Secondary Schools*, United Nations Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights (2004)

http://visit.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/visitors/shared/documents/pdfs/Pub_United%20Nations_ABC_human%20rights.pdf

⁶ “Final Draft for Comment,” International Women’s Rights Action Watch (2008)

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/CCDmanual-09.html>

⁷ James P. Kelly, *The Matrix of Human Rights Governance Networks*, ENGAGE: THE JOURNAL OF THE FEDERALIST SOCIETY'S PRACTICE GROUPS, Vol. 9, Issue 1, March 2008, at

<http://www.fed-soc.org/publications/detail/the-matrix-of-human-rights-governance-networks>

⁸ Interestingly, to describe their national education standards, proponents of the U.S. Common Core State Standards Initiative adopted the same “common core” terminology used by the chairpersons of the UN treaty body monitoring committees to describe the foundational human rights standards to be used by nations in reporting on their human rights records.

⁹ “Implementing the Common Core State Standards: Mission Statement,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, at <http://www.corestandards.org>

¹⁰ As explained in 2005 by a representative of one of America’s leading developers of classroom curricular and teacher training materials on human rights: “In my view, a campaign is needed on the national, state and local levels to make sure the language of human rights is infused in the state standards, curriculum guides and textbooks for these courses [on “civics,” “law” and “government”].”

¹¹ “Information: Examples of Common Core English Language Arts Standards,” Foundation for Excellence in Education, at <http://excelined.org/policy-library/common-core-toolkit/information-english-language-arts/>

¹² Clarcq, Laurie, “What is Embedded Reading?” July 25, 2012, at <http://embeddedreading.com/about/>

¹³ “Embedded Reading: Declaration of Human Rights Common Core ELA: In English,” Embedded Reading, at

<http://embeddedreading.com/2013/03/21/embedded-reading-declaration-of-human-rights-common-core-ela-in-english/>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Scott Hartl,” Ashoka United States, at <http://usa.ashoka.org/fellow/scott-hartl>

¹⁶ “Grade 5 ELA Module 1, Unit 1,” New York State Education Department, at <http://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-5-ela-module-1-unit-1>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ “NYSED Grade 6-8 Curriculum Plan: Draft February 14, 2013,” Expeditionary Learning, February 14, 2013, at <http://engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/ela-grades-6-8-curriculum-plan.pdf>