



Cayman Islands Human Rights Commission

promoting, protecting and preserving human rights

Date: 8 September 2017

Human Rights Commission's Statement on International Literacy Day

The Human Rights Commission (“the Commission”) joins the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (“UNESCO”) in observing 8 September as International Literacy Day. This year’s theme is ‘Literacy in a digital world’ and, as part of its education mandate, the Commission has prepared an activity guide for young people related to this topic.

UNESCO was founded on 4 November 1946 following a United Nations (“UN”) conference in which member states agreed to the formation of an educational and cultural organization. The UN envisaged that the proposed organization would establish the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind”, whilst preventing the outbreak of another world war.¹ Since that time, UNESCO has spearheaded global literacy efforts and advanced the vision of “a literate world for all.” It views the acquisition and improvement of literacy skills throughout one’s life as an intrinsic part of the right to education. UNESCO further notes that the “multiplier effect” of literacy empowers people, enables them to participate fully in society and contributes to improve livelihoods.²

Literacy is also a key driver for sustainable development, “in that it enables greater participation in the labour market; improved child and family health and nutrition; reduces poverty and expands life opportunities”.³ In 2016 a UNESCO report revealed that some 758 million young people and adults cannot read and write and that 250 million children are failing to acquire basic literacy skills.⁴ These numbers are concerning since adults and young people who are illiterate or who have limited literacy skills also lack the necessary skills to benefit from digital technologies, digital literacies and are unable to participate fully in modern society.⁵

The Commission supports UNESCO’s sentiments about the invaluable link between literacy, the right to education and achieving sustainable development that improves people’s lives. Section 20 of the Cayman Islands Constitution 2009, the Right to Education, makes the provision of education a mandatory obligation for governments and parents alike.

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/history/>

² <http://en.unesco.org/themes/literacy-all>

³ <http://en.unesco.org/themes/literacy-all>

⁴ <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs38-50th-anniversary-of-international-literacy-day-literacy-rates-are-on-the-rise-but-millions-remain-illiterate-2016-en.pdf>

⁵ <http://en.unesco.org/themes/literacy-all/pearson-initiative/about>

The Commission recognises the numerous individuals and community groups who work to promote literacy in the Cayman Islands. This Literacy Day the Commission encourages you to get involved in one of the following ways:-

- Hold a book drive and donate books to a local charity;
- Read a book to someone in need (i.e. a resident of The Pines);
- Start a book club with a theme of your choice;
- Tutor an adult in your community that is learning how to read;
- Volunteer at your district's public library branch; or
- Do a crossword puzzle or plan a family night and play board games that promote literacy and language skills such as Scrabble or Taboo.

The Commission has identified the right to education as one of the human rights upon which it wishes to focus in 2017. It is for that reason, and in order to show its support of UNESCO's International Literacy Day, that the Commission has prepared an activity guide for young people that discusses the global importance of literacy and the right to education. The guide also contains an addendum of learning activities that students of all ages can participate in during International Literacy Day. If you are interested in receiving an activity guide you may visit the Commission's website at www.humanrightscommission.ky or request a printed version by e-mailing info@humanrightscommission.ky or calling 244-3685.

Ends.