

The Commonwealth Students Association works to amplify students' voices and promote their interests within the 56 member countries of the Commonwealth. The organisation's primary objectives are to safeguard the rights of Commonwealth students, promote unity among student organisations in Commonwealth countries, and contribute actively to the development of student movements so they may actively advocate for themselves freely.

Within this context we answer the following questions which reflects the input of our executive leadership and student membership.

Question 1: What are the challenges the world is facing now, how they will affect the future of human rights, and what future do you want for human rights?

Access to Education:

Many students, particularly those in underserved communities, are unable to access education due to economic insecurity. This threatens their right to education, which is fundamental for the realization of other human rights. Moreover, economic insecurity is closely tied to the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to an adequate standard of living.

Access to Quality & Inclusive Education:

Even where students can access education there are still many challenges of systemic racial and social injustices in institutions which mirror their lack of diversity and inclusion. There is also a need for more focus on non-formal education and character building that creates socially aware and socially responsible agents of change.

Student Representation, Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom:

Students have been at the forefront of movements addressing social and racial injustices, but student activists in some contexts still do not benefit from institutionalized student representation mechanisms and some are in fear of reprisals.

Moreover, students continue to face restrictions on freedom of expression and academic freedom. Suppression of dissenting voices in educational institutions threatens democratic values and human rights principles.

Digital Divide and Data Privacy:

The rapid shift to online learning during the pandemic exposed the digital divide, where some students lack access to the internet and appropriate devices. However even with the resumption of face-to-face learning, digital modalities can be a good intervention when situations compromise in person access. Therefore, concerns about data privacy and digital rights are essential components of human rights in the digital age.

Mental Health and Well-being:

Students' mental health has been disproportionately affected by the consequences of the pandemic and it remains unaddressed in many contexts. However even in a post-covid context many students are still struggling to get high quality, timely and appropriate mental health support due to poverty, stigma, and limited treatment options.

Climate Change and Environmental Rights:

Climate change poses a significant threat to the future of students and their right to a safe and sustainable environment. Urgent action is needed to address climate-related challenges and ensure intergenerational equity.

Considering these challenges, the future of human rights should be characterized by Equitable Access to Inclusive Education, Economic & Social Security, Robust Mental Health Support, Digital Inclusion and Privacy, Environmental Justice and the Protection of Expression & Academic Freedom.

Question 2: What are your recommendations to decision and policymakers, including governments, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations, and others, to advance human rights in the future?

We recommend that policies and programs should engender students' equal access to quality education, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographical location while advancing social and racial justice, diversity, and inclusion to ensure that every student's human rights is respected.

We recommend the prioritization of economic and social security of students as economic rights are intrinsic to the broader human rights framework and of mental health services and support for students, recognizing mental health as a fundamental human right.

We recommend the upholding of academic freedom, freedom of expression and institutionalized student representation in educational institutions to foster critical thinking, open dialogue, and more relevant and responsive education systems.

Question 3: What commitments and actions can young people take towards advancing human rights in the future?

Students are not only beneficiaries of human rights intervention but are equal, indispensable partners as well as potential leaders.

Therefore, the Commonwealth Students Association applauds the students of the Commonwealth who are already advancing human rights through their elected student bodies and student led groups and initiatives. Through these mechanisms they are implementing various projects in their schools and communities and are fostering positive change.

They are also holding their education administrations and Governments accountable through advocacy and activism, proposing policy and programmatic interventions, and partnering on them where possible.