

Human rights around the world

By Ben Proulx News Staff

On Dec. 10, Albertans celebrated International Human Rights Day — a day to recognize the importance of human rights in communities across the province and around the world, commemorating the 1948 signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This year's theme, chosen by the United Nations, was Celebrate Human Rights, and encouraged the celebration of the fundamental human rights set out in the declaration.

The campaign also pays tribute to the work of human rights defenders world-wide, and encourages others to get involved in the global human rights movement.

In conjunction with the celebration, Salisbury Composite High School students took part in the school's third annual human rights symposium on Dec. 13.

Session topics ranged from conflict resolution and aboriginal rights, to women's rights and peacekeeping in Kosovo.

Students rotated through a series of 25- and 50-minute stations in the school library and hallways, linked to the theme The Right to Know.

The symposium included presentations by representatives from the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, the Centre for Race and Culture and the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies, among others.

"Living in Canada, we are fortunate to have a government that maintains a consistently strong voice for the protection of human rights and the advancement of democratic values," said Salisbury teacher-librarian Janice Sundar.

The symposium buildt on themes in the senior high Social Studies curriculum and allows students to gain new perspectives, Sundar added.

Presenters included Roger Ramcharita, director of Clean Energy Policy with Alberta Environment and Water; and Phil Okeke-Ihejirika, who is a professor at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Arts in the women's studies program.

"Dr. Phil," as she is commonly known, spoke about the struggle to enforce women's rights at the international level, including exposing unanswered questions and explaining the progress made to date.

Other presenters highlighted the work of the Palestinian Solidarity Network in advocating for and upholding human rights for Palestinians, as well as human rights and peaceful resolution in Burma/Myanmar.

One of the day's presenters was Sgt. Gary Cook, who spoke to the students about an RCMP mission to Kosovo.

Cook started his career as a police officer in 1975 in the Military Police, before joining the Edmonton Police Service in 1979.

His career has seen him serve in K-9, undercover and detective units, as well as training his fellow officers.

The presentation surrounded a mission that took place in November 2002, when he was seconded to the RCMP Peacekeeping Operations Branch, and completed a nine-month mission in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, Kosovo Province.

There, he was responsible for patrol duties with the Kosovo Police Cadets, as well as four international officers.

Cook was then transferred to the Police Academy for the final five months of his mission before returning to Canada and the Edmonton Police Service, where he has since been promoted to Patrol Sergeant.

John Humphrey's Centre for Peace and Human Rights is encouraging teens to get involved in its Youth Action Project (YAP), created for those between the ages of 16 and 26.

YAP leaders are taken on a study tour to explore and debate the critical human rights issues in Edmonton, visiting different social justice organizations around the city.

They also gain first-hand experience with one of these partner organizations, learning directly how human rights play a role in Edmonton, and exploring how change can be affected.

The next Youth Action Project runs from Feb. 28, 2012 to May 29, 2012, with sessions running from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Tuesdays.



Students at Salisbury Composite High School took part in the school's third annual human rights symposium, held in conjunction with International Human Rights Day on Dec. 13

Sherwood Park News – December 28, 2011