



## In Berlin, Global Homeschooling Leaders Unveil Historic Declaration

BERLIN - Leaders in the homeschooling movement from some two dozen countries signed a historic document dubbed the “Berlin Declaration” on November 3, demanding that governments around the world respect families and the fundamental human right to home education while slamming authorities in places like Germany and Sweden that ruthlessly persecute homeschoolers.



The Berlin Declaration, the first of its kind, argues that the right to home educate must be respected by every jurisdiction — after all, no government can legitimately violate the fundamental rights of citizens. Citing multiple human rights documents and a growing body of evidence showing the benefits of homeschooling, the document’s signatories — a surprisingly diverse coalition united by a passion for home education — say the senseless persecution must come to an end.

“It’s an expression of the growing confidence among homeschoolers that this is just another historical struggle for human rights and that we will win,” Swedish Home Education Association (ROHUS) chief and [Global Home Education Conference](#) (GHEC) Chairman Jonas Himmelstrand, who [fled from Sweden](#) with his family, told *The New American*. “The Berlin Declaration shows that these rights are already recognized in various human rights conventions; they simply need to be manifested all over the world.”

Assembled in Berlin, Germany, over the weekend for the first Global Home Education Conference, some 200 homeschool leaders, policymakers, experts, parents, and human rights activists have joined forces in the battle to protect and expand educational freedom. With the Berlin Declaration, which outlines various treaties and conventions recognizing the unalienable right to educational freedom, advocates plan to turn the pressure up on certain “rogue” governments.

“We remind all nations that numerous international treaties and declarations recognize the essential, irreplaceable and fundamental role of parents and the family in the education and upbringing of children as a natural right that must be respected and protected by all governments,” the Berlin Declaration explains, citing multiple examples of formal documents in Europe and internationally enshrining parental rights over education.

Even the controversial United Nations, widely perceived among critics as a “dictators club,” has recognized home education as a fundamental human right. In 2007, for example, the UN “Special Rapporteur on Education” officially condemned the German government’s vicious oppression of homeschoolers while stating that home education is an entirely legitimate alternative to state schooling. Multiple binding European human rights treaties are also cited in the Berlin Declaration.

Attorney Michael Donnelly, director of international affairs for the powerful U.S.-based Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) and a member of the GHEC board, said the Berlin Declaration was historic. It will also be a key tool going forward as activists from around the world work to support each other in the struggle for educational freedom everywhere.



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on November 4, 2012

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“This is the first ever Global Home Education Conference, so it is really unique — it’s the first time that so many references to international treaties and conventions have been referenced in a single document in this home education context,” Donnelly told *The New American*. “It’s also the first time that so many diverse home educators and activists from around the world and from so many backgrounds have come together to make such a powerful statement. We will not tolerate oppression anywhere.”

Aside from the human rights angle, the document also points to the well-documented success of homeschoolers academically and socially. “We further note that credible and scientific research indicate that home education is an effective means of educating children to become literate and productive citizens and members of civil society and that there is no evidence at all of harm to children or an increased risk of harm on the basis of home education,” it explains, echoing a common theme at the conference supported by experts who spoke out in favor of homeschooling.

Next, the Berlin Declaration condemns the policies of certain national governments that trample on the right to home education, as well as the barbaric persecution employed to enforce the bans: coercive fines, threats to [parental custody](#), and criminal sanctions. While not specifically cited by name, it is hardly a secret that aside from overtly totalitarian regimes such as the one ruling North Korea, the primary culprits in these types of human rights abuses, at least in the Western world, are Sweden and Germany.

As *The New American* has been [reporting](#) for years, the lawless and harsh persecution faced by German and Swedish homeschoolers has led to an exodus of so-called “homeschooling refugees.” Most go to other European nations — virtually all of which permit home education — but some have gone as far as Canada and the United States, where a German family was granted asylum by a federal immigration judge who [slammed](#) the barbaric behavior of authorities trying to smash homeschooling families. Himmelstrand, the GHEC chairman, fled from Sweden to the Finnish Aland Islands earlier this year.

Still, the victims seemed optimistic, and the positivity was reflected in the Berlin Declaration. “We now urge all members of the international community to take concrete steps to affirm in their law, policy, and civil and criminal procedures that parents have a natural and fundamental right to direct the education and upbringing of their children which includes the right to choose the type of education their child shall receive including home education,” the document continues, encouraging national governments to consider the growing body of research showing the benefits of home education.

The declaration signatories also called on human rights bodies, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), officials, and individual citizens everywhere to “seek greater respect for the fundamental right of parents to choose the kind of education their children receive including home education.” Members of the global homeschooling community, meanwhile, should take active steps to present the Berlin Declaration to their governments and ensure that the fundamental human right to home educate is upheld regardless of the motivation or methodology of those who chose it, the document added.

To start with, the declaration was signed by the entire GHEC board. However, as the document was unveiled in front of a packed conference room with close to 200 people from some two dozen countries, GHEC Chairman Himmelstrand said the goal was to continue gathering signatures and support from organizations and individuals around the world, using the document to keep the pressure on hostile governments. The room erupted in applause.

While GHEC attendees hold all sorts of diverse views — Christians, secularists, conservatives, liberals,



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and much more — they all agreed on a few key points. “We commit to support freedom, diversity and pluralism in education through formal and informal coordination with the goal of making home education a legitimate educational option in every nation and the right of every family and child,” the Berlin Declaration concluded.

European leaders who spoke to *The New American* said they were pleased with the document, and that now it was time for action. “It is a very good declaration,” said Pia Amacher, chief of the pro-parental rights and -education freedom Swiss Parents Lobby. “We need more educational freedom, and we need to get parents involved all across Europe so people can choose all different kinds of education. We have a big network in Switzerland, but this must expand throughout Europe.”

With GHEC winding down on Sunday, participants will soon start returning to their homelands: Brazil, Russia, Taiwan, South Africa, Canada, the Philippines, South Korea, Ireland, Australia, Switzerland, Luxemburg, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Morocco, France, Spain, Nepal, Austria, Kenya, Finland, Sweden, the United States, Germany, Poland, and more. Berlin Declaration in hand, though, the real action is just getting started.

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