

The role of *animal welfare* in the  
*United Nations' ground-breaking*  
*addition* to the

# *Rights of the Child*

Presented  
by

*Humane Education Specialist*

**Louise van der Merwe**

CEO: The Humane Education Trust

A presentation at the invitation of the  
**National Children's Rights Intersectoral Coordination Meeting**  
of the Department of Social Development, South Africa  
on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024



Almost unnoticed by the world,  
on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023, a major shift  
took place in the realm of world ethics.

On this date and without the fanfare it  
deserved, the **United Nations** officially  
adopted an addition to the  
***Charter on the Rights of the Child.***





For the first time in history, as **part of their right to environmental health**, the **UN** has decreed that children are to be protected from all forms of violence – be it domestic, societal or inflicted on animals.





The exact wording of paragraph 35 in General Comment 26, brought into being by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, is as follows:

*“Children must be protected from all forms of physical and psychological violence whether in their home or in society, and from exposure to violence, such as domestic violence or **violence inflicted on animals.**”*

See GC26 on our website:

<https://www.naturebased.education/un-news>



What makes this so important  
is that it is an  
acknowledgement at the  
highest international level  
that how we treat animals  
matters – for ourselves,  
as much as for them.

To learn more about the link between  
animal abuse and inter-human abuse,  
visit the

***European Link Coalition***





Social scientists have been telling us for decades that a child's mental, spiritual and moral development is severely compromised by acts of violence, including violence towards an animal.

Long-term consequences include:

- *progressive desensitization to violence*
- *normalisation of violence*
- *erosion of empathy*
- *disruption of fundamental human values*
- *acceptance of violence as part of life*
- *participation in acts of violence*



South Africa's Children's Commissioner for the Western Cape **Christina Nomdo** has confirmed her support for the UNs' GC26.

*“As a society, we are challenged by deep cultural norms that include harmful practices against animals. We need to counter all practices that involve the abuse of animals. So it is not only about working with children but, in addition, it is about confronting the adults who introduce children to these practices and ‘normalise’ them in the minds of our children. This is the harm.”*



**Dr Julie Reddy**, Deputy Chair of the South African National Commission for UNESCO, has added her voice for a more compassionate world...







*“If we teach our children at a very young age about care and respect for **other**... it doesn't matter who they are or what they are... respect for the diversity that we find ourselves in, we will be a much, much better country and we will learn compassion.”*

Pretoria 16 April 2024





The following acts of  
violence serve as  
illustrations...



# *Shooting stray dogs in the dead of night* — Morocco





***Incarcerating sentient farmed animals*** for life  
— worldwide





## *Using animals in gang initiation rituals* — South Africa





***Killing animals for the fun of it*** —  
South Africa





***Fox hunting as a sport*** among the UK's gentry has already been **banned** but **continues illegally**





**Bull fighting** — Spain, Portugal, Mexico







# **Trophy hunting** with children — Southern Africa





Indeed, this **shop** at **OR Tambo airport** in Johannesburg sets the scene for a cultural practice that is now **internationally taboo**





On 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024, at the *United Nations' 95<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child*, Vice-Chair Dr Rinchen Chopel urged the South African delegation to **criminalise the practice of allowing children to participate in trophy hunting.**





He said: *“GC26 has made a significant break-through. Various psychological studies on violence and animal abuse have shown that witnessing or participating in violence can severely impact children’s moral and psychological development, normalizing violence, and conditioning life-long negative behavioural patterns. The popular and societal acceptance and practice of child participation in animal trophy hunting is horrendous to say the least.”*





Earlier this year, a school in the northern Cape offered the hunting of a lioness as a prize in one of its fund-raisers.

We alerted the Principal to GC26 and he cancelled the lion hunt with immediate effect.

## School cancels lion hunt!

*Animal Voice and Nature-based Education thank the Futurum Akademie school for its co-operation, and we thank our supporters for helping to alert the school about the **Right of the Child** not to be exposed to violence against an animal.*

“A [Northern Cape](#) private high school has removed [lion](#) hunting as a fundraising prize following an outcry by [animal rights](#) organisations last week.”

— The Citizen, 21 February 2024

<https://www.citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/local-news/school-calls-off-lion-hunting-fundraiser-amid-animal-rights-backlash/>



We thank the UN for this momentous stride forward in the annals of history whereby ***animal welfare*** has been brought directly into the domain of ***Human Rights, as part of the Rights of the Child, an acknowledgement at the highest international level that our children are emotionally harmed by witnessing violence inflicted on animals.***



UNITED NATIONS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**



The Humane Education Trust has a 3 decades-long history of cooperation with the Education Department specifically aimed at the nurturing of empathy in children through the inclusion of animal welfare in the South African Schools' Curriculum.



As we know, **humane education** is a process through which children are assisted in developing *the knowledge and understanding necessary to behave according to the ethical principles of*

- ✓ **Compassion**
- ✓ **Empathy**
- ✓ **Justice**
- ✓ **Respect**





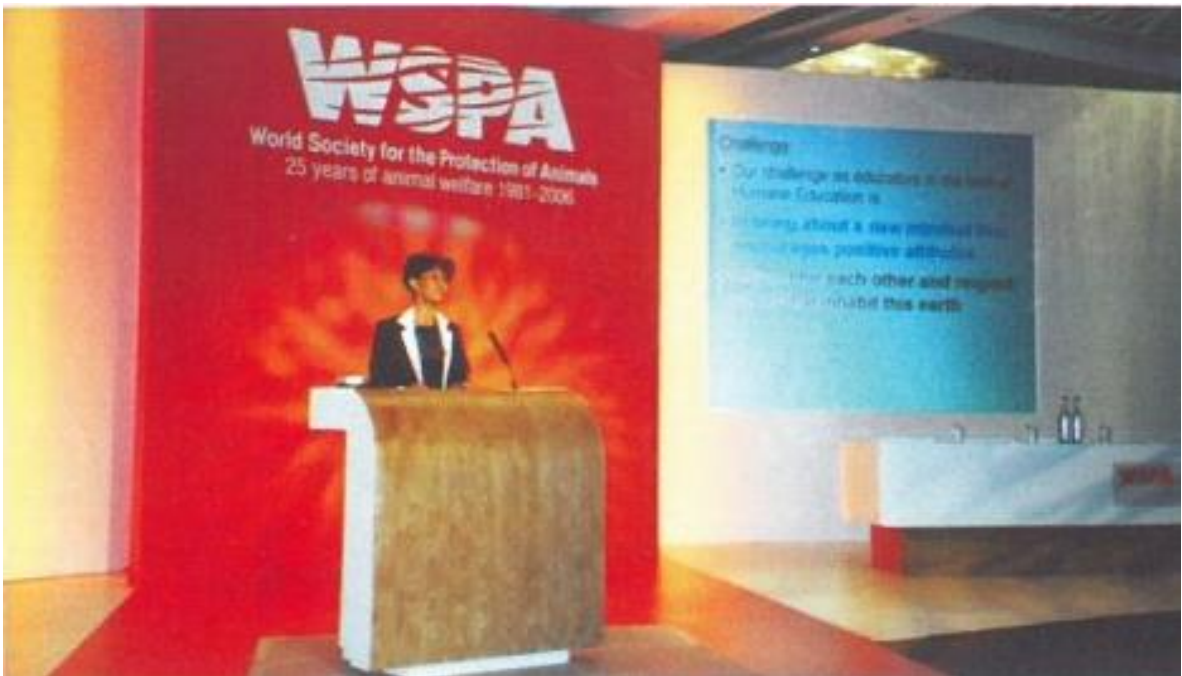
In this endeavour we have worked with countless schools and conducted numerous teacher workshops.



Teacher Pumla Ngcukana with her Grade 3 class of caring kids, at **ACJ Pakade Primary School** near Cape Town became one of our enthusiastic supporters.



South African teacher Vivienne Rutgers joined our endeavours and became a specialist in humane education, even presenting our work on the world stage.



She was invited to speak at a conference in London and at the ***UN Conference on Sustainable Development and Community Upliftment*** in New York, 2006.

Over the subsequent years, *The Humane Education Trust* continued to develop resources that align with topics in Life Skills and Life Orientation in the CAPS Curriculum. From Grade R right through to Grade 12, these are now **included** in the **Department of Education's Learner-Teacher-Support-Material and Library Resources.**





## Humane Education's online outreach is significant

Since January 2022, our online platform with its FREELY down-loadable, curriculum-aligned lesson plans, have been used by:

- Teachers **346**
- Schools **295**
- Learners reached **43 560**

[ Figures updated on 13 April 2024 ]

*In response to demand we will now start with Online Workshops for Teachers*



Also of interest, a two-year pilot programme carried out by *The Humane Education Trust* with Grade 3 learners at **Forest Heights Primary School**, Eerste River, proved that empathy is an emotion that children **can learn**.

Indeed, so compelling is this research that it is included in a ground-breaking international resource, set for publication in 2024, titled *Handbook of Humane Education*, edited and produced by the **Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics**.

*The Ferrater Mora*

Oxford Centre  
for  
**Animal Ethics**

[www.oxfordanimalethics.com](http://www.oxfordanimalethics.com)



See this research, as well as a play on the **Five Freedoms for Animals**, presented by the learners themselves, here:

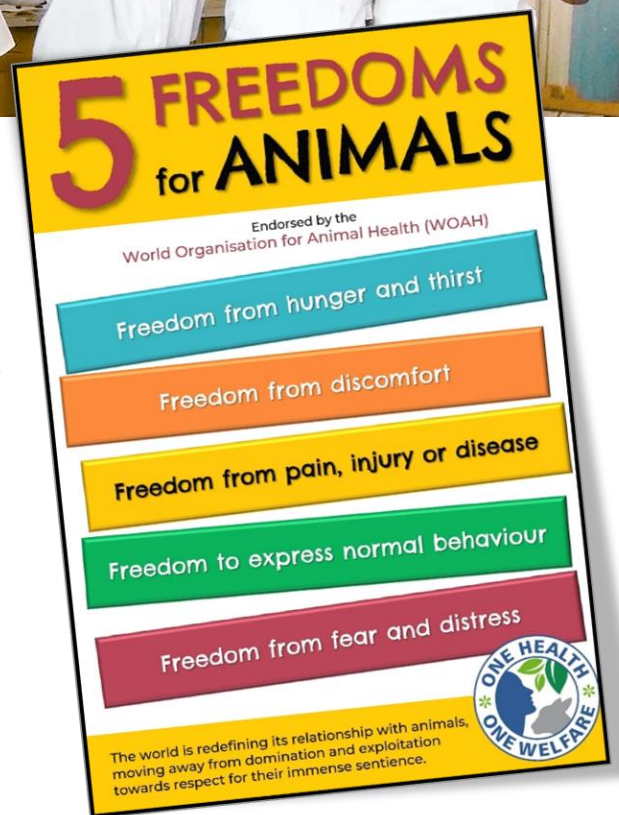
<https://www.naturebased.education/>

*Parental permission to show the children's faces was given in order for SABC2 TV to film the puppet show*



The **Five Freedoms for Animals** are principles of animal care that are endorsed by the **World Organisation for Animal Health**.

In the months of January & February 2024, 30 schools won this free classroom poster in one of our on-line competitions.





Through **humane education**, young people are tasked to take care of the Earth and all who journey through life alongside us. In so doing, **humane education** fosters self-esteem and embeds the vital sense of care and respect into our culture, to the benefit of all.

The South African CAPS Curriculum gives many opportunities for humane education in the learning areas of **Life Skills** and **Life Orientation**.



To download our CAPS-Aligned Lesson Plans from Grade R through to Grade 12, **FOR FREE**, please visit [www.naturebased.education](http://www.naturebased.education)



## ***Vivienne Rutgers***

gives us an insight into why she believes in

# ***Humane Education***

as part of

***Life Skills and Life Orientation***





“

I don't have all the answers, but I do know that in the years I have been teaching *humane education*, changes in learner behaviour have taken place.

”





“

The early manifestations of empathy begin to show up in different ways. An example is in the discussion I overheard in the playground recently.

A dove was sun-bathing nearby, extending its wing to catch the rays of warmth.

Two nine-year-old boys saw this and the one said to the other:

*‘See! That’s freedom from pain, injury and disease.’*

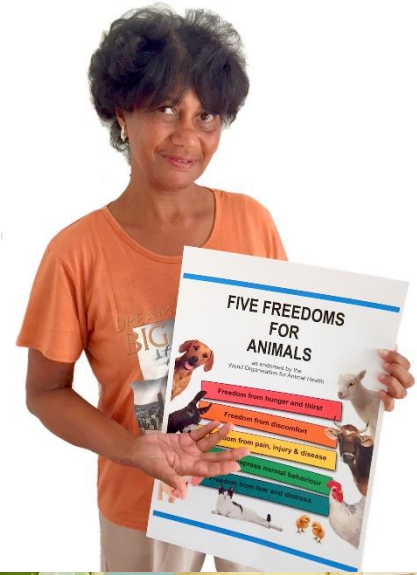
*‘No,’* argued the other, *‘that’s freedom to express normal behaviour.’*

They amicably argued the point.

”

“

Our programme based on the **Five Freedoms** had opened a whole new window of curiosity for them that would otherwise have remained closed. It was really heart-warming.



Without our programme, they probably would not have even noticed the bird, OR, based on my experience, they may well have decided to chase it away by throwing stones at it.

”



“

On another occasion, we unlocked the classroom for the day's schoolwork to begin, only to find a little bird had somehow been shut in all night.

It perched on a rail on the wall and was clearly traumatized by the sudden surge of 46 children into the room.

Before our programme, I believe the children would have caused pandemonium, trying to catch the bird. Instead, they heard me...

I said: *'Sit quietly. I'll open the window, and we will be patient while the bird finds its way out.'*

”



“

The little bird took a significant amount of time to do this but as it hopped nearer to the open window, one child whispered ‘nearly there’ as encouragement.

To hear that whisper, all 46 children had to have been as quiet as mice.

Then several of the children whispered ‘nearly there’ with every hop the bird took in the right direction. And we all whooped when it finally flew out.

*That ‘nearly there’ whisper of encouragement was empathy in action!*

”

**Safe Schools** gave us an opportunity to work with learners in Belhar, Cape Town

## What learners say...

*“For me, humane education is a great and joyful programme. It’s made me into a better person.”*

– Elton, Grade 10

*“In what other subject do you learn to love, care and protect?”*

– Hewston, Grade 10

*“Humane education gave me a new pair of eyes. Everything I look at now, I see differently.”*

– Brendan, Grade 10



**Cian'an Danhaus**  
is a specialist in  
**Wellness Counselling** at  
**Huis Horison, Stellenbosch.**

**He believes forging  
relationships with animals  
is central to any emotional  
healing process.**

Cian'an explains that he grew up in a community bedevilled by frustration, anger and violence on an almost daily basis.

*“I was just 5 or 6 years old when our dog Buddy crawled back to our home one day. Someone had thrown boiling water on him. He died. I think it was Buddy who propelled me to study to become a trauma and grief counsellor.”*



We wish to express our deep appreciation to **Malcolm Plant** and the [\*\*World Link Coalition\*\*](#) for *exposing the link between animal abuse and inter-human abuse*, such that the world's most powerful child protection authority, the **UN's CRC**, has brought to bear its whole-hearted **support**.







We thank **Mr Khethani Hlongwa**,  
Director of the Office on the *Rights of the Child*  
at UNESCO in South Africa, for his support for  
our endeavours to bring the new Right of the  
Child to be protected from violence, including  
violence against an animal, to the children of  
South Africa through Education.





We thank UN Secretary-General  
**António Guterres** for his leadership.

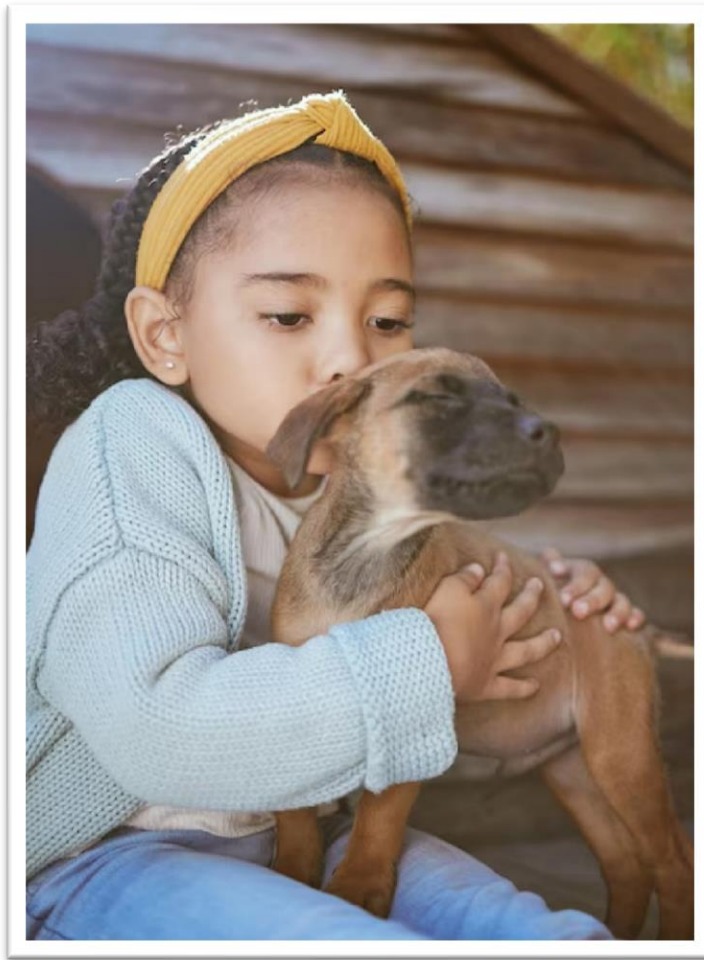
He said:

*"Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century. It must be the top, top priority for everyone, everywhere."*





To understand the vital role of  
empathy in the development of  
our children



please read on...



Extensive research at Teesside University shows how children are harmed by exposure to violence against an animal.

The harmful effect caused to a child who witnesses violence, includes a progressive desensitization of the child's innate capacity for empathy. Desensitization is an automatic defence mechanism which protects the child from the intensity of a sense of revulsion and dismay.

With progressive erosion of empathy, the normalisation of violence takes over.



Finally, the child takes aggression and the normalisation of violence into adulthood where he/she will perpetuate the cycle of emotional or physical violence against people, animals and property.

Herein in the fundamental motivation for the United Nations new ***Right of The Child*** to be protected from exposure to physical and/or psychological violence, be it domestic, societal or inflicted on an animal.

See GC26 on our website:

<https://www.naturebased.education/un-news>



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**Thank you.**