

## Obituary

# Shulamith Koenig 1930-2021

Many have been inspired by the work of human rights education advocate and activist Shulamith Koenig. All who encountered her recall her passion, whether or not they agreed with her approach. Below *Human Rights Education Review* includes an obituary written by respected human rights educator Nancy Flowers.

### Nancy Flowers

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In August 2021, human rights education lost one of its earliest and most passionate advocates with the passing of Shulamith Koenig, whom some have called ‘The Mother of Human Rights Education’ or human rights *learning*, as she preferred. When she founded the People’s Movement for HRE (PDHRE), in 1988, no other organisation in the world had made HRE its sole purpose and no other activist had envisioned its transformative power. Indeed, she was a rebel and a visionary, seeking what she called a ‘human rights revolution’.

Shula was the driving force behind a campaign advocating for worldwide human rights education that sparked the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004). As Executive Director of PDHRE, she conducted consultations and workshops with educators and community leaders in more than 60 countries. Under her leadership, PDHRE established ‘human rights cities’ on every continent. In 2003 the UN recognised her work with its prize in the Field of Human Rights.

Born in Jerusalem in 1930, Shula Koenig was an industrial engineer and fierce defender of the human rights of Palestinian activists, which led to her emigration to the USA in the 1960s. She developed that passion for social justice into a global vision of human rights as a way of life for all people. She was an inspiration and mentor to many. As activist Loretta Ross said of her, ‘She was not perfect, but she was perfectly Shula, a sculptress, artist, mentor, and the grandmother I wish I'd had’.

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As she said many times in many different ways: 'It is not enough to have human rights; it is essential that everyone owns them and are guided in their daily lives by the holistic human rights framework, enabling women and men to participate as equals in the decision-making process towards meaningful, sustainable economic and social transformation. There is no other option'.