

STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS FOR CHILDREN

Mid-Term Review of the UN Special Session on Children New York, 11-12 DEC 2007

In May 2002, the United Nations Special Session on Children brought together 69 Summit-level participants and 190 national level delegations, who agreed on a solemn declaration and plan of action to change the world for and with children. Despite these strong commitments, many challenges continue to hamper the full realization of the rights of the child. **We, Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children, call upon all those present at the Special Session mid decade review to urgently address the key issues that continue to threaten the development of children and the enjoyment of their rights.**

We welcome progress achieved, particularly at national level, but also recognize how much remains to be done. We must recommit ourselves to the achievement of the goals agreed in 2002. Five years later, we face significant new issues which must be addressed to protect children's rights.

Over the past five years, the world has witnessed widespread poverty and increased inequity between the wealthiest and the poorest, a growing insecurity, an increase in fundamentalism, neglected environmental imperatives with a serious impact on children especially due to climate change, and the advent of new technologies and their misuse. These issues call for joint efforts and urgent action. There are cross-border issues affecting children, including as a result of growing mobility of children and their families, trafficking of children, and child victimization through labour and sexual exploitation. These **challenges to children's rights cannot be addressed in isolation and require international cooperation and assistance.**

As Independent Human Rights institutions for Children, it is our duty to remind States of the importance of positive investment for children. We call on all governments to prioritize budgetary resources to the maximum extent of their own available resources to ensure implementation of the rights of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by almost every state, clearly imposes a duty on all States to enact the principles of universality, protection from discrimination, child participation in the best interests of the child. This obligation also demands commitment by international agencies and others, including private sector organizations, all of whom have a stake in ensuring respect for the rights of children now and preparing for the future.

In the past five years there has been an increase in the number of Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children worldwide. Existing networks like the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), Australasian Asia Pacific Association of Children's

Commissioners (AAPACC), and the recently formed Ibero-American Network of Ombuds for Children demonstrates institutional collaboration at the regional level. We encourage the development of similar networks in other regions to enable independent institutions to act as an interlocutor to regional and international organizations.

Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children promote, protect and monitor progress in the realization of the rights of the child (World Fit For Children 31 (b, c & d)). Moreover, they represent the agents that translate children’s experiences, perspectives and concerns into policy change.

Our institutional strength lies in our independence and our delivery of evidence, sound information and strategic advice to Parliaments and Governments. Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children also have access to knowledge and information on children and are uniquely positioned to conduct an objective assessment of children’s situations. Our powers include access to educational, health and other institutions where children spend time. As independent institutions, we can also make an independent submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and have a separate dialogue with the Committee. Our impact has been demonstrated at national level where our activities have contributed to changes in law, policy and practice aimed at the implementation of “A World Fit for Children”. Children are often a low political priority. **Our commitment is to ensure that children are central to the national and international agendas and to planning for the future.**

We strongly believe that there is a need to promote worldwide the establishment of structures and mechanisms, at national level, that will contribute to the development and constant monitoring of effective national policies and action plans to fulfill and protect children’s rights.

We welcome the research carried out by UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in this area. This research has been used to strengthen our role at national level, guide the establishment of new and effective institutions, and promote the development of regional networks of independent child rights institutions.

Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children, being close to children’s needs and voices, and holding a high standard of scientific knowledge in the field, can play a crucial role in advising Parliaments and Governments on the process and content of this task. To fully perform their task these institutions need to benefit from the support and resources they are entitled to. **Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children need to have the means to make a difference.**

This Special Session five year review of “A World Fit For Children” provides an opportunity to evaluate where we are now and what kind of world we want to build for the future. Children continue to suffer from failures to secure their rights to safety, health, education, participation and dignity. This was highlighted in the UN Secretary General’s World Report on Violence Against Children (2006).

We welcome the General Assembly decision to establish a Special Representative on Violence against Children. We urge you to accept and implement the recommendations included in the UN Report and especially the obligation to implement the right of children both as victims and witnesses to be free from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment in all settings.

We call on States to meet their obligations and implement in full the rights of the child. We need to act to ensure that children of today can access the rights to which they are entitled. We also need to act to influence our world. Children are integral to any agenda of sustainability and how we involve them now will steer our development here and now

We need to breathe life into an agenda on full implementation of children's rights which will require States and the international community to think and behave differently. It will require an understanding of the impact of our decisions on children and an ability to listen to and hear the voice of children. **We can assist in this task.**

We, the Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children from around the world, gathered together for the first time in 2002 to encourage the world to take children seriously. Five years later, what has happened is clearly not enough. **With our knowledge, experience and evidence-based work, we can support governments to undertake a renewed effort to make the world fit for children, with full respect for their rights.**

We call upon all of you present in the Special Session Review to redouble your efforts, and make use of our expertise, to decisively improve the situation of children over the next five years. **The enormity of the task we are confronted with and the obligations we have to children demands that we increase our efforts to achieve A World Fit for Children.**

Thank you.

Independent Human Rights Institutions for Children
(Ombudspersons for Children, Children's Advocates, Commissioners for Children, Defensores para niños, Défenseurs des Enfants, and others)
2nd Global meeting (New York, 2007)