

A commitment to innovation

25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

1 December 2014



As the global human rights community celebrated the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN General Assembly held a high-level meeting at UN Headquarters in New York on the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

A high-level panel discussion on the '25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: recalling its vision,' organized by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, was held at the United Nations in New York. Several missions did also hold side events.

In addition, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) held a musical celebration tomorrow morning at UN Headquarters to mark the anniversary of the Convention, as well as the 60th anniversary of the agency's Goodwill Ambassador Programme and the 35th anniversary of the Music for UNICEF concert. The occasion also served to launch the UNICEF #IMAGINE project, a musical and technological initiative to highlight the challenges children face the world over. The agency also used the opportunity of the occasion to launch its latest State of the World's Children report.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (commonly abbreviated as the CRC, CROC, or UNCRC) is a human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.

The Convention defines a child as any human being under the age of eighteen, unless the age of majority is attained earlier under a state's own domestic legislation.

Nations that ratify this convention are bound to it by international law. Compliance is monitored by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Sources: United Nations News Center, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Child Rights Connect, ChildFund Alliance, the NGO Committee on UNICEF, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages and World Vision. Photo: SOS Children's Villages Canada.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child lists different rights that children have and the different responsibilities Governments and others have to make them real.

This includes, among others:

- Making sure that children are equal, regardless of their or their parent's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (article 2).
- Children's best interests should be taken into account when any decision is made which affects them (article 3).
- Parent's rights and right to family life and to be cared for by them (article 5), unless if they are being abused at home and are not safe living there (articles 8 and 9).
- If they are separated from one or both of their parents, to have contact with them (article 9).
- For children who have parents living in different countries, the Government must make sure that they can stay in regular contact with both parents (article 10).
- Governments must give help to parents where this is necessary to help them care for children properly (article 18).
- Governments must make sure children are registered at birth with a name and a nationality (articles 7 and 8).
- Governments must make sure that children are not taken out of their country illegally (article 11).
- Children must be given the chance to give their opinion when decisions are made that affect them (article 12), and to be able to get and share information with others, as long as this does not damage them (article 13).
- Governments must make sure that the media includes programmes and information that are relevant to children and do not harm them (article 17).
- Governments must make sure that no one interferes with children's opinions and their ability to do things that they want to do because of their religion, as long as this doesn't cause them or anyone else any damage, or interferes with anyone else's rights, and parents are allowed to give them guidance on practicing their religion (article 14).
- Children must be able to gather together with other people and to join organisations, as long as this does not cause anyone harm, or interfere with other people's rights (article 15).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is the body of 18 Independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by its State parties. It also monitors implementation of two Optional Protocols to the Convention, on involvement of children in armed conflict and on sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

On 19 December 2011, the UN General Assembly approved a third Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, which will allow individual children to submit complaints regarding specific violations of their rights under the Convention and its first two optional protocols. The Protocol opened for signature in February 2012 and will enter into force upon ratification by 10 UN Member States.

All States parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights are being implemented. States must submit an initial report two years after acceding to the Convention and then periodic reports every five years. The Committee examines each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State party in the form of "concluding observations".

The Committee will soon be able to consider individual complaints by children. In the meantime, violations of child rights may be raised before other committees with competence to consider individual complaints.

The Committee meets in Geneva and normally holds three sessions per year consisting of a three-week plenary and a one-week pre-session working group. In 2010, the Committee considered reports in two parallel chambers of 9 members each, "as an exceptional and temporary measure", in order to clear the backlog of reports.

The Committee also publishes its interpretation of the content of human rights provisions, known as general comments on thematic issues and organizes days of general discussion.

- Governments must make sure that no one is able to interfere with children's privacy or attack their honor or reputation (article 16).
- Governments must make sure children are protected from any type of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation (article 19).
- Government must make sure children are able to get health care when they need it, to get clean wa-

ter, nutritious food and live in a healthy environment (article 24).

- Governments must make sure that children and their parents or carers can get financial help when needed (article 26).
- Children have the right to a standard of living that is necessary for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (article 27).

- Governments must make sure children get a good quality education (article 28) and that they can develop to their full potential and learn to respect human rights, their parents and the values, language and culture of their country and other countries (article 29), that they have rest and leisure time, and can be involved in cultural activities (article 31), and that they do not do any work that is harmful to them, or that interrupts their education (article 32).



Kirsten Sandberg, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, addresses the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 2014.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Stepping up the global effort to advance the rights of every child

We are pleased to share a statement issued jointly by UNICEF and civil society partners: Child Rights Connect, ChildFund Alliance, the NGO Committee on UNICEF, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages and World Vision.

When the international community adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child twenty-five years ago, we made this commitment to the world's chil-

drive and to thrive, to grow and to learn, to have their voices heard and heeded, and to be protected from discrimination and violence in all its manifestations. It was a commitment to be honored not only in times of peace and prosperity, but also, and especially, in times of conflict, crisis, and catastrophe.

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The commitment to realize the rights of all children was grounded in the conviction that it was both the right thing to do and the strategic thing to do. For by advancing the rights of children today, we help them become adults who will be able to assume responsibility for future generations – in turn, helping build a more prosperous, peaceful, and just world.

dren: that we would do everything in our power to promote and protect their rights.

The commitment was not only to some children, but to all children. It was not only to advance some of their rights, but all their rights – including their right to sur-

From this commitment and conviction, a global movement was born. With the Convention as its framework and foundation, and the best interests of children as its focus, it has brought together organizations and individuals, activists and governments, the private sector and private donors, religious and cultural

leaders, communities and families, individuals and children themselves.

Visionaries and pragmatists alike — including Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi, the two child rights champions who share this year's Nobel Peace Prize — they have helped change the world.

Twenty-five years since the Convention was adopted, progress is apparent in every region of the world. Infant mortality rates have declined, while school enrolment has risen. Today, the world is winning the battle against extreme poverty; and more than 2.1 billion people now have access to improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities.

What once was a shared value — making sure children are cared for — is now a legal obligation to act always in the best interests of children, considering child rights in every context and holding ourselves accountable for advancing those rights for every child. Where once eyes took no notice or turned away when violence scarred or took the life of a child, now voices are raised around the world to demand an end to violence against children whenever and wherever it occurs.

Celebrating this 25th anniversary today, we are inspired by the children who are growing up healthy, strong, and ready to realize the aspirations of the Con-

vention. At the same moment, we are engaged in global discussions on a new development agenda for the post-2015 years. These discussions are driven by a recognition of how much more must be done to reduce the inequities that endanger children today and threaten their hopes for the future.

terrorized; having babies when they are still children; dying in pregnancies and childbirths; unregistered and unvaccinated; without access to health services, adequate nutrition, and learning opportunities; discriminated against because of their gender or their religion, their ethnicity or disabilities, their color or their sexuality; living in poverty; living without parental care; living on society's margins. Their capabilities diminished and their choices limited. Their rights to survival, protection, freedom and identity violated.

We simply cannot — and will not leave these children behind. Because of what is at stake — the lives and futures of the world's children, and thus, the future of the world — we must find new ways to reach the children we have not yet reached.

There is hope to be found and nurtured, we are certain, in the human spirit that crosses and defies all divisions in its search for transformation. This is the spirit that speaks to us as we recommit our efforts to make the world a just and better place for all children.

The world has not stood still these past 25 years. There is new science to inform our interventions and our programs. New technologies that offer new opportunities for young people to know their world. Other innovations that change how we communicate and at what speed. A new accountability to children and young people and new expectations for transparency by governments and civil society.

But there are also new challenges — from the impact of climate change, to the ravages of conflict and crises, to the effects of population growth.

It is time for the international community to recommit itself to the immutable rights enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child — and to act, with urgency, to advance those rights, for every child.

Moving forward, we will challenge ourselves in country by country, city by city, village by village, to do even more for children through sustained political commitment, strategic investments, and actions that match our words. Thus our celebration on this anniversary day is a call — to those who have already done so much and those who have yet to join the cause: to speed up our efforts and expand our sphere of influence and our circle of activists. It is, most urgently, a call for innovation in what we do, how we do it, with whom and how quickly — so that, soon, all children everywhere will finally and fully enjoy their innate and inalienable rights.

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For even as we celebrate the progress, we cannot ignore the millions of children, in every country of the world, who are being left out and left behind. Trafficked, forced into early marriage, exploited, abducted,