

DRAFT CHAIRPERSON'S PROPOSALS ON 'A WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN'
A Position Paper from the Child Rights Caucus
22 April, 2002

The Child Rights Caucus is made up of more than 100 national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from around the world that are committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of children. This paper reflects the position of the Caucus on two issues of particular importance to the final negotiations of "A World Fit for Children:" the renewed commitment to the principles and standards of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the key framework for all actions for and with children, and the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

We urge all governments participating in the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children to reaffirm their commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis for national and international action on behalf of the children. Practicality and consistency require that the project of constructing a world fit for children continues to use the framework of legal obligations established by the Convention. In this regard, the Caucus finds the chairman's proposed text for certain paragraphs unacceptably weak. In particular, we have suggestions to strengthen the text in paragraphs 4, 8, 29, 30 and 56.

The Caucus proposes that governments should:

- **amend the text in paragraph 4 as follows: "We reaffirm our obligation to take action to promote and protect the rights of each child – every human being below the age of 18 years, including adolescents – and to secure, in all nations of the world, the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child." Additionally, the description of the Convention and its protocols as "standards of major importance" should be replaced by "the key framework for the realisation of children's rights."**
- **add to paragraph 8: "We recognize that the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and this Declaration and Plan of Action requires..."**
- **insist on previous language referring to the Convention and its protocols as "essential standards for building a world fit for children" (paragraph 29) and "the best normative framework for our actions" (paragraph 30);**
- **ensure that national and regional plans of action based on the outcome document also include explicit reference to full implementation of the Convention (paragraph 56).**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly on 20th November 1989. Since then it has been ratified by 191 countries, making it the most ratified human rights instrument in history. Only the US and Somalia have not ratified —and both have signed the Convention.

The Convention was the outcome of ten years of debate and discussion among governments, inter-governmental organisations and NGOs on the content and extent of children's rights. The rights it defines—such as the right to have a name and nationality; to live free from violence, abuse and avoidable disease; to be actively involved in the life of local communities; to have adequate nutrition and housing; to receive a good education; to be able to enjoy play and leisure—are surely what every society wishes for all of its children.

Why is the Convention so important?

- It has been almost universally ratified and provides an internationally agreed standard for governments and societies across the world with regard to children;
- It is the only comprehensive treaty that expresses the rights specific to every human being under 18 years of age;
- It has a monitoring mechanism (the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child) that ensures that governments regularly examine their actions with regard to children;
- It provides a comprehensive framework for countries to combat violations of children's rights – including trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation, lack of access to basic education and healthcare,

racial and ethnic discrimination, the use of children as soldiers in armed conflict, torture, and exposure to hazardous labour conditions;

- It has inspired significant changes in the way children are treated e.g. through the reform of outdated legislation; the creation of government bodies to co-ordinate policy towards children; support for children's involvement in the work of local and national government; budget reform to maximise the resources available to services for children; and the creation of new international standards such as ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour;
- It has become the basis for the work of UNICEF, key donors and a large number of national and international NGOs.

Adolescents' Sexual and Reproductive Rights

We urge governments participating in the Special Session on Children to reaffirm their ICPD, Beijing, ICPD+5, Beijing+5 and UNGASS on HIV/AIDS commitments regarding adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights. In particular, we urge them to reaffirm their commitment to:

- **ensure adolescents' access to comprehensive sexuality education and information on gender equality and human rights, contraception, prevention of HIV and STIs and of sexual violence;**
- **provide high quality, user-friendly, confidential sexual and reproductive health services, without discrimination.**

Worldwide, there are over one billion adolescents. At least 60 percent of adolescent girls in Asia (excluding China), Africa and Latin America are married; about 82 million girls currently aged 10-17 are expected to marry before 18 if current patterns continue.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the right of all children—including adolescents—to the highest attainable standard of health, to access to health facilities, to information and education, and to privacy. In practice, however, adolescents experience countless human rights violations, especially with regard to access to sexual health education and services. Sexual and reproductive health services for young people are often absent because of reluctance to address or acknowledge adolescent sexuality. Even where services do exist, health providers often discriminate on the basis of age, marital status, sex, parental or spousal consent. Young people often do not have access to sexuality education – because it is not provided at all, because it is only offered in schools, or because its content is severely limited for ideological reasons.

The failure to respect, protect and fulfil young people's sexual and reproductive rights results in lack of knowledge, lack of access to contraception, and vulnerability to sexual violence and abuse. It puts young people at high risk for unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and HIV/AIDS. For example:

- Girls aged 15–19 are twice as likely as women in their twenties to die from childbirth; girls under 15 are five times as likely to die.
- Every day, 7,000 young people around the world become infected with HIV, with girls at greatest risk.
- At least one-quarter of all unsafe abortions (estimated at 20 million/year) are to girls aged 15–19.
- Worldwide, two million girls are brought into the commercial sex market every year.

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as at recent international progress reviews (notably, ICPD +5 in 1999, Beijing +5 in 2000, and UNGASS on HIV/AIDS in 2001), governments agreed that adolescents have the right to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, and that access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services should be equitable and responsive to diversity. Enabling young women, in particular, to exercise greater control over their sexual and reproductive lives is an essential part of ensuring their future.

The Caucus has also prepared an "Alternative Text" to the Chairman's Draft Proposals, which recommends specific text revisions on paragraphs yet to be negotiated in the outcome document. These reflect inputs from more than 100 NGOs around the world. We urge governments to support these recommendations as part of their final negotiations.