



whom our responsibility lies should make child abuse less traumatic not only for ourselves but hopefully for the child and his family. The first priority should always be the safety of the child (Schmitt 1978). Helping the parents is the second priority; the third should be to reunite the family, although acknowledging that there will always be occasions when this will not be possible.

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THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD 20 YEARS AFTER: DREAM OR REALITY

By Mehr Kamal, Editor, UNICEF Information Bulletin

Anniversaries provide a convenient time to stop and look back on the event they commemorate, a time to take stock of what has been achieved and assess what remains to be done. November 20, 1979, will mark the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This year — the International Year of the Child — is particularly suited to this type of introspection. IYC has put the spotlight on the situation of children all over the world and provided an impetus for child-related research. Drawing upon some of the statistics available, let us measure the rights the United Nations affirmed for children 20 years ago against the reality of their lives today.

The Preamble of the Declaration states that children, because of their physical and mental immaturity, need special safeguards and care and that individuals and groups should strive to achieve children's rights by legislative and other means. Mankind, it says, owes to the child the best it has to give.

In 1975, more than one-third of the world's four billion people were children under the age of 15. If current projections hold, there will be nearly two billion children in the world in the year 2000.

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child affirms that all children are entitled to special protection and opportunities and facilities to grow in a healthy, normal manner in freedom and dignity. It states that children should have the right to a name and nationality, love, understanding and an atmosphere of affection and security. It entitles them to protection against all forms of neglect, cruelty, exploitation, racial, religious or other discrimination and to an upbringing in a spirit of peace and universal brotherhood.

Yet today, millions of children are discriminated against because of their race, religion, sex, or parents' political views. Millions of others are denied affection and security. These include abandoned children, "street" children who fend for themselves in the developing world's rapidly growing cities, and those children who have been forced to flee their homeland to live in refugee camps. The United Nations High Com-

missioner for Refugees estimates that there are over 10.5 million refugees under the care of UNHCR today — over half of them children under 15 years of age.

Many children have to start earning their living very early in life. The International Labour Organization estimated that in 1975, some 55 million children under the age of 15 were at work around the world. Most worked without pay to supply the extra hands needed for their families survival. Children labouring in small industries or as domestic servants usually received wages far below those of adults.

For handicapped and disaster-affected children, the Declaration affirms the right to special treatment, education and care, and prompt protection and relief.

An estimated 15 to 20 per cent of the world's children are physically handicapped in one way or another, with five per cent suffering severe disabilities. These children are the victims of birth defects, crippling diseases and impairments caused by the environment. They require special care, services and education. In developing countries 50-60 million children could benefit from special education.

The availability of help for the handicapped child depends largely on where the child lives. Many industrialized countries now have laws to support special education and other facilities. Developing countries, struggling to feed and shelter all their citizens, have a long way to go in caring for their handicapped — young or old.

About 80 per cent of the world's children live in developing countries, most of which are too poor to adequately feed, educate and protect the health of all their people. Thus, for the vast majority of children, the right to social security including adequate health care, nutrition, housing and education is far from being a reality.

Out of every 1000 babies born alive in developing countries, more than 140 die in infancy compared to 15-20 deaths per 1000 live births in industrialized countries. In many developing countries, 25 to 30 per cent of the children die before their fifth birthday. In some areas the child death rate is as high as 50 to 70 per cent.

Ninety per cent or more of these deaths could be prevented by simple measures such as the availability of basic health care, clean water and improved sanitation measures, better nutrition and health education.

Consider these statistics:

- More than 80 per cent of people in the rural areas and poorer urban neighbourhoods of developing countries do not have access to health services.
- Nearly 80 per cent of the people living in the rural areas of the developing world do not have access to a supply of safe water and 85 per cent lack sanitation.
- Up to one-third of all children born alive die from malnutrition and disease before they reach the age of five. Of those who survive, between one fourth, and

one-half suffer from severe or moderate protein-energy malnutrition in the poorest countries. Malnutrition in moderate or severe form affects one-fourth of all young children.

• While there is nearly universal primary school enrolment in the industrialized countries, only 62 per cent of children 6-11 years of age attended school in developing countries in 1975. Approximately half of those who attended primary school dropped out before completing four years of education. The result is that in some countries nine out of every ten rural children grow up unable to read or write. The situation is worse for girls. It is estimated that two-thirds of the world's 800 million illiterate adults in 1975 were women.

It is easy to become discouraged when confronted with such statistics. But it is important to remember that the tremendous technological and social gains of the industrialized countries have been made relatively recently and in a very short period of time. Electricity, which is now becoming commonplace even in Third World villages, came to many parts of the industrialized world only as recently as three or four decades ago. At the turn of this century, less than one in five people in the world could look forward to reaching their 75th birthday. Today this proportion is estimated to be around half.

Progress in the future could be even faster. IYC, with its sharp focus on children's problems, has provided a challenge for both industrialized and developing countries. In industrialized countries it has jolted people out of the complacent attitude that their children have few problems since most of them are properly fed, clothed and educated to an awareness that a great deal still needs to be done.

In developing countries IYC has helped to set in motion plans and actions which, together with other positive factors already at work, should improve the lives of all children. These factors include endorsement by Governments of several global targets for the provision of services such as health care and safe water supply; the increasing capacity of developing countries to prepare and implement development programmes; and the more effective support that international agencies are providing for these national efforts.

It is clear that the world already possesses the technical know-how to make the rights of the child a reality for all children rather than a distant dream for most. What many people do not realise is that the financial resources to do so are also very much at our command. The August/September issue of **Connections**, a development magazine published in Canada by the Ryerson Third World Centre, reports that a recent brief presented to the Saskatchewan Government noted that if the 18 richest nations were to maintain their wealth at present consumption levels and donate any increase to the poor, this "would allow the United Nations to achieve every one of its long-term economic goals for Third World development in one year."