

This indivisibility of rights is key to interpreting the Convention. Decisions with regard to any one right must be made in the light of all the other rights in the Convention. For example, it is not sufficient to ensure that a child receives immunization and health care, only for that child on reaching the age of 14 to be sold into bonded labour or conscripted into an army. It is not enough to guarantee the right to education, only to fail to ensure that all children are enrolled in school and can go to school equally, regardless of gender or economic class.

A new vision

The Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects a new vision of the child. Children are neither the property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity. They are human beings and are the subject of their own rights. The Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual *and* as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. By recognizing children's rights in this way, the Convention firmly sets the focus on the whole child.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child:

Reinforces fundamental human dignity. Because of its near-universal acceptance by the community of nations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has brought into sharp focus for the first time the fundamental human dignity of all children and the urgency of ensuring their well-being and development. Considered the most powerful legal instrument for the recognition and protection of children's human rights, the Convention draws on the following unique combination of strengths.

Highlights and defends the family's role in children's lives. In the preamble article 5, article 10 and article 18, the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically refers to the family as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of its members, particularly children. Under the Convention, States are obliged to respect parents' primary responsibility for providing care and guidance for their children and to support parents in this regard, providing material assistance and support programmes. States are also obliged to prevent children from being separated from their families unless the separation is judged necessary for the child's best interests.

Seeks respect for children - but not at the expense of the human rights or responsibilities of others. The Convention on the Rights of the Child confirms that children have a right to express their views and to have their views taken seriously and given due weight - but it does not state that children's views are the only ones to be considered. The Convention also explicitly states that children have a responsibility to respect the rights of others, especially those of parents. The Convention emphasizes the need to respect children's "evolving capacities," but does not give children the right to make decisions for themselves at too young an age. This is rooted in the common-sense concept that the child's path from total dependence to adulthood is gradual.

Endorses the principle of non-discrimination. The principle of non-discrimination is included in all the basic human rights instruments and has been carefully defined

by the bodies responsible for monitoring their implementation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states frequently that States need to identify the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children within their borders and take affirmative action to ensure that the rights of these children are realized and protected.

Establishes clear obligations. Prior to or shortly after ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States are required to bring their national legislation into line with its provisions - except where the national standards are already higher. In this way, child rights standards are no longer merely an aspiration but, rather, are nationally binding on States. Ratification also makes States publicly and internationally accountable for their actions through the process in which States report on the Convention's implementation. At the center of the monitoring process is the Committee on the Rights of the Child, an independent, elected committee whose members are of "high moral standing" and are experts in the field of human rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was carefully drafted over the course of 10 years (1979-1989) with the input of representatives from all societies, all religions and all cultures. A working group made up of members of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, independent experts and observer delegations of non-member governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies was charged with the drafting. NGOs involved in the drafting represented a range of issues - from various legal perspectives to concerns about the protection of the family.

The Convention reflects this global consensus and, in a very short period of time, it has become the most widely accepted human rights treaty ever. It has been ratified by 192 countries; .

Like all human rights treaties, the Convention on the Rights of the Child had first to be approved, or adopted, by the United Nations General Assembly. On 20 November 1989, the governments represented at the General Assembly agreed to adopt the Convention into international law.

When a government signed the Convention, it had to widely consult within the country on the standards in the Convention and begin identifying the national laws and practices that needed to be brought into conformity with these standards. Ratification was the next step, which formally bound the government on behalf of all people in the country to meet the obligations and responsibilities outlined in the Convention.

While the Convention is addressed to governments as representatives of the people, it actually addresses the responsibilities of all members of society. Overall, its standards can be realized only when respected by everyone - parents and members of the family and the community; professionals and others working in schools, in other public and private institutions, in services for children, in the courts and at all levels of government administration - and when each of these individuals carries out his or her unique role and function with respect to these standards.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child incorporates the full range of human

right is fulfilled and respected and serve as a constant reference for the implementation and monitoring of children's rights. The Convention's four guiding principles are as follows:

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Through its reviews of country reports, the Committee urges all levels of government to use the Convention as a guide in policy-making and implementation to:

- Develop a comprehensive national agenda for children.
- Develop permanent bodies or mechanisms to promote coordination, monitoring and evaluation of activities throughout all sectors of government.
- Ensure that all legislation is fully compatible with the Convention.
- Make children visible in policy development processes throughout government by introducing child impact assessments.
- Carry out adequate budget analysis to determine the portion of public funds spent on children and to ensure that these resources are being used effectively.
- Ensure that sufficient data are collected and used to improve the plight of all children in each jurisdiction.
- Raise awareness and disseminate information on the Convention by providing training to all those involved in government policy-making and working with or for children.
- Involve civil society - including children themselves - in the process of implementing and raising awareness of child rights.
- Set up independent statutory offices - ombudspersons, commissions and other institutions - to promote children's rights

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. It entered into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49.

Preamble

The States Parties to the present Convention, Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Bearing in mind that the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Recognizing that the United Nations has, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenants on Human Rights, proclaimed and agreed that