

# **Status of Children's Rights Around the World**

## **“Human Rights, An Endangered Concept: The United Nations and the Advancement of Human Rights”**

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**O**rganizations around the world have taken actions to address children's rights. UNICEF, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch are just a few of the many established alliances that support children's rights. Advocating for children's rights is done by governments, the community, the family, and the individual. Various actions can be taken that in the end leave children in better environments to help foster their growth.

**U**NICEF enforces the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by taking initiatives to prevent human rights violations, to help meet children's basic needs and to expand their opportunities.

### **Children's Rights Movement**

1912

The *United States Children's Bureau* was established. Julia Lathrop was the first director. She was concerned with child labour, infant and maternal mortality, child care, and the juvenile justice system.

1919

The inspiration for the organization, *Save the Children*, came from Eglantyne Jebb in England at the beginning of the children's rights movement. *Save the Children* is a member of the *International Save the Children Alliance*. The U.S. program focuses on the issues of literacy, emergency management, physical activity and nutrition, and early childhood education.

1959

The United Nation's General Assembly adopted the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*.

1973

During the Civil Rights Movement, the *Children's Defense Fund* emerged under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman. *Children's Defense Fund* is a private, nonprofit organization that advocates its *Leave No Child Behind* mission and focuses on the needs of poor, minority and disabled children.

1986

*The Declaration on Social and Legal principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children with special reference to fostering Placement and Adoption* nationally was adopted by the General Assembly.

1989

The General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

1990

The World Declaration on the *Survival Protection and Development of Welfare of the Child* was established.

The *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* was adopted.

1996

The *European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights* focuses on procedural rights for children in judicial situations.

## **Individual efforts succeed**

### History

At the age of 12, Craig Kielburger read an article about the murder of a boy brought into labour in Pakistan as a carpet weaver when he was four. When the boy spoke out against child labour, he was murdered; this story changed Kielburger's views on children's rights and he took a stance against it. In 1995, Kielburger founded *Free the Children*, a network of children helping children.

### Success

- Built more than 450 Free The Children schools around the world
- Shipped US \$11 million dollars in essential medical supplies to 40 countries
- Implemented alternative income projects

### Media Coverage

Educating people on the issues of child labour; and inspiring and involving youth to make a difference.

## Convention on the Rights of the Child

Outside the 54 articles under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, two Optional Protocols lay out further ways to fight growing abuse and exploitation:

### *Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography*

...sets out requirements to end abuse and protects children from being sold for non-sexual purposes. Specific rights pertaining to this protocol are clearly defined. The Protocol addresses the rights and interests of child victims: providing support and legal services. If it is needed, the Protocol calls for medical, psychological, logistical and financial support to aid their rehabilitation and reintegration. It became legally binding on January 18, 2002.

### *Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict*

...bans recruitment below the age of 18. Furthermore, it prohibits independent armed groups from using children under the age of 18. The Protocol calls for special protection for the children. If armies recruit children, they are obliged to provide safeguard. On 12 February 2002, this Protocol became legally binding.

### **Facts on Trafficking & Sexual Exploitation**

- Girls as young as 13 (mainly from Asia and Eastern Europe) are trafficked as “mail-order brides.” In most cases these girls and women are powerless and isolated and at great risk of violence.
- Large numbers of children are being trafficked in West and Central Africa, mainly for domestic work but also for sexual exploitation and to work in shops or on farms. Nearly 90 per cent of these trafficked domestic workers are girls.

### **Children and War**

*“They tell you, “Here you are going to kill.” ...when you arrive at the camp, the first thing they do is kill a guy, and if you are a recruit they call you over to prick at him, to chop off his hands and arms.”*

A., age twelve

*“When I was fighting, I enjoyed it—killing and destroying. I killed human being, many; young, old, anyone. The first one, an old lady, I shot from far away. I was very angry, so I shot her. Their families killed my people.”*

M., age unknown

## **Addressing Children's Rights in America**

### *Children's Rights*

Established in 1995, this national organization advocates action to help neglected and abused children in the United States. Through legal action and policy initiatives, the organization, *Children's Rights*, is able to help ensure child protection and foster and adoption services.

### *Finding a Solution to the Problem*

Children around the United States are dying due to abuse and neglect due to poverty, mental health disorders, substance abuse, domestic violence, etc. It is the Child Welfare System's responsibility to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect and provide services to improve the placement of children in foster homes.

### *Youth Violence*

Children deserve the right to a safe environment from youth violence that occurs in schools. Reports show that students avoid school because they feel unsafe. Peer pressure is a risk factor of youth violence that influences rejection to other peers and gang involvement. Protective measures need to be taken to ensure a positive educational setting. School environments should foster protective individual, family and school protective factors.

### *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services:*

#### *U.S. Administration for Children & Families*

*Administration for Children & Families (ACF)* monitors and makes sure federal programs promote the economic and social welfare of families, children, individuals, and communities: through assisting economic independence and productivity; partnerships with individuals, American Indian tribes, Native communities, and Congress; working with people with developmental disabilities, refugees, and migrants.

## **Taking a Stand**

The United Nations' Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children was conducted in 2001. It seeks to bring awareness of the issues and to propose recommendations for prevention against violence. On October 2006, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, who led the study, presented the final Study Report to the UN General Assembly.

Issues of disability, discrimination, economics, health, etc. add to the encompassing dilemmas. Take steps towards advocating and taking actions for children's rights.

Look more into the issues: [www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org), [www.crin.org.on](http://www.crin.org.on), [www.voices.org](http://www.voices.org), [www.acei.org](http://www.acei.org), [www.unicefusa.org/childrights](http://www.unicefusa.org/childrights), [www.childrightscampaign.org](http://www.childrightscampaign.org)