



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Nineteenth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by the Women's  
Federation for World Peace, International, a non-  
governmental organization in general consultative status, the  
Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association, the  
Universal Peace Federation, non-governmental organizations  
in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2012]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Ensuring protection for children in conflict zones in the central African region\*\***

On behalf of the Women's Federation for World Peace, International and our partners, the Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association International and the Universal Peace Federation, we thank you for this opportunity to address our shared concerns to the 19<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council. We are very appreciative of the considerable progress made towards the achievement of the MDGs until now and believe that it is very necessary to take time to give credit to those with exemplary results. Assessing however the aspect of children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation around the world, we note that with the MDG deadline only 3 years away, it would be important to shift more attention to the most marginalized and vulnerable of our population: children affected by violence, abuse, neglect and conflict. Our proud claim to the 1969 United Nations "Declaration of the Rights of the Child", that including the rallying phrase, "mankind owes to the child the best it has to give." and the 1989 near unanimous GA adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) can only really be measured by our commitment to alleviate the despair and neglect of those most vulnerable and marginalized.

WFWPI has seen first hand the effects of civil wars in many countries, but would like to bring your attention today to the conflicts in the central Africa sub-region and the threats posed to the realization of children's right to a dignified existence there. We have noted that the most significant gains have been made where there has been a strong and ongoing collaboration among diverse concerned parties- that spanned from initial programme design to the post implementation evaluation and adjustments- and indeed where women's voices have been heard. Where civil society, (including families, NGO's, the media, cultural and religious groups, donors, businesses, etc.) have been provided the safe space and basic resources to meet as partners with the International Organizations and governments, solutions have been most effective.

We recognize that the impact has not always been equitable to the investment. Children of this region find themselves in circumstances where their fundamental human rights to life, dignity and security are infringed upon in the most shocking ways, suffering both physical and psychological harm that has wide reaching and irreparable effects. Many children have been victims of sexual violence and child prostitution, kidnapping, forced recruitment into militias, displacement and loss of family, trafficking for financial gain or organ sales, hunger, malnutrition... unimaginable to most of us that anyone of these horrors would befall our children -with impunity and without recompense. And one hopes that we use that as a term of reference in our deliberations.

In DRC for instance, rape remains a dominant feature of the ongoing conflict. Children have no rights and those who violate their rights go unpunished. In the campaign to stop the spread of HIV by Save the Children in 2009, in DRC, 60% of the armed forces are estimated to be HIV positive. One can only imagine the impact of rape as a weapon of war on the spread of HIV/AIDS, not to mention the widespread rape perpetrated by combatants coming from other countries who are involved in this conflict. What can we do to protect innocent children from such life altering experiences?

According to UNAIDS, an estimated 34 million worldwide were living with HIV in 2010, of these 3.4 (1/10<sup>th</sup>) million were children under 15 years old- all victims of something they

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\*\* Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

couldn't understand or prevent. Stolen childhood, a critical stage of life as specified in the CRC, is a great handicap to a mature, contributory, fulfilled adulthood. Without the building blocks of having being nurtured and loved in a family environment, receiving life-skills education, learning of rights, responsibilities and citizenship (belonging) in a natural environment, as well as having time for leisure, sports, cultural activities. We are failing to provide the tools and protection to which our future society members are entitled.

Where statistics are available, and it is far too seldom, the calculation of only the financial costs to society of any child that assumes adulthood ill prepared, with anger, insecurity and unresolved resentments is tremendous. We are discovering here in Europe the huge costs of domestic violence to our social and legal systems. Shamefully, only then it seems do we find the will to invest in understanding the causes and consequences of this violation so rampant whose greatest disgrace is not the money it costs, but the violation of the dignity of men women and children in our human family who should be equipped to avoid that. The protective environment that is the mutual concern of all must not be an afterthought or a defense, but a proactive engagement that embraces all areas of life. Good family environment, legal frameworks, social services, responsible behavior minimize children's susceptibility to harm and can prevent many forms of violence, exploitation and abuse from occurring.

In order to promote and protect the rights of the children living in unprotected and fragile circumstances, such as in the central Africa sub-region, WFP and co-sponsors recommend the following actions:

- First, in accordance with the commitments made to the convention on the Rights of the Child, governments need to ensure full protection for all children, including the girl- child, Adequate-funding needs to be allotted for assessment of the situation of families and children so that effective protective and preventive action can be taken. The creation of safe havens where women can continue to influence their roles as mothers and where an uninterrupted education may be provided for children will bring immeasurable long-term benefit to the nations. There is an urgent need for proactive efforts to collaborate with local NGO's to build sectors that ensure that the law is translated into concrete actions for children's health, education, protection and participation in every community, reaching the most vulnerable children and families.
- Second, as the family assumes the primordial role in protecting children in unstable conflict and emergency situations, its integrity must be respected and supported by governments and other institutions. Community-based training for parents or entire families in preparedness for the outbreak of conflicts, war or even natural disasters would be very effective in avoiding additional hardship and instilling a mental and emotional offensiveness. All actors should support community based child protection networks and dialogue promoting a zero tolerance of all forms of violence against children.
- Third, governments should ensure a protective environment under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 for children in the zone of conflicts. In accordance with the best interest of the child's full development and sense of dignity and worth, appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures must be taken to promote a child's sense of belonging, most fundamentally, to a family, a community and a larger support system. The greatest efforts need to be made to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or exploitation.
- As with previous resolutions on the topic, the Human Rights Council has always condemned the use and recruitment of child soldiers. Everyone knows that

Resolutions are not enough to turn the situation around! The will can be generated only when the reality of 9-year-old boys being tricked into a life of desperation, exploitation and mutilation as a replacement for lost family ties, is felt as the crime against our humanity, my humanity that it is. Passing the blame onto the next only postpones solutions. We hope that we can rekindle some of the seriousness and commitment to making the necessary sacrifices that were shared at the time of the adoption of the MDG's, the CRC and other moments of consensus and lofty inspiration.

- The Security Council has noted the lack of progress in implementing SC Resolution 1539, which called for the creation of a monitoring system, eventually to impose sanctions against countries, which violate international law relating to children in armed conflict. This mechanism deserves to be boldly endorsed by governments. A systematic information gathering about the abuse of children should be made available, as well as the identification of funding sources and otherwise supporters of these practices. The WG on Children in Armed Conflict also deserves to be taken seriously and encouraged to fulfil its mandate.
- Fourth, Children and youth deserve a role in creating their own futures. Opportunities should be provided to engage all children in the issues that affect them, which is crucial for their empowerment as actors in their own protection and that of their community. There is a need to optimize child participation, especially in conflict zones, through life skills education, communication and mediation skills training -and other activities to prevent stigma as well as developing creative ways for their participating in legal process. NGO initiatives such as recreating governmental and intergovernmental fora for the youth to participate in mock policy making sessions have proven to generate enthusiasm for careers in politics, international relations, diplomacy and as a beneficial side effect, have discover their own personal capacities and self esteem. This applies to children in conflict zones as well.
- President Ellen Sirleaf- Johnson of Liberia recently announced an innovative programme that promises a new hope for healing and reconciliation in a nation crippled by violence in the 1990's through the engagement of youth. This and other best practice models should be disseminated for possible application elsewhere.
- Noteworthy is a program initiated by the Geneva Interfaith and Intercultural Alliance (GIIA) and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWPI) supported by the governments of Philippines and Indonesia and several UN bodies over its span of 8 events. This simulation of a hypothetical Interreligious Council as a new HL organ of the United Nations and that continues to meet several times a year, often in UN premises, to debate practical solutions to global concerns. Similar to a Model UN program, but with the difference being that the youth that are engaged as members of the "Interreligious Council" represent their various faiths and deliberate their solutions to real regional or country specific conflicts by pooling their wisdom and life experiences as the role-played leaders of the different religions that they represent- always taking decisions by consensus. These programs provide training and skills development in situations of multicultural/ religious/ ethnic tensions.
- Giving the space, time and resources to ensure protective environment under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 for children can allow meaningful child and youth participation in peace-building and preventive solutions, an incalculable investment for our future security.