

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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On November 20, 1989, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Resolution A/44/736). It took place exactly on the 30th anniversary of the passing by the General Assembly of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. The Convention was set out for signature at the UNO headquarters in New York on January 26, 1990. Poland was among the first States to sign it.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a new multi-lateral international agreement in the sphere of human rights ; it is also extensive, composed of 13 articles of the Preamble and 54 articles containing provisions. It is universal in nature, and provides for the possibility of negotiating regional agreements basing on that document. Also possible will be agreements concerning a specific aspect of the rights of the child, or a concrete right, e.g. to inter-country adoption.

The Convention provides a qualitative consolidation of promotion and protection of the rights of the child on the international plane. Included in its contents have been the former fragmentary international regulations of the rights of the child. First and foremost, however, it contains new rights of the child and expresses the new conceptions of interpreting the interests and rights of children. It is a specific universal constitution of the rights of the child. It contains the catalogue of the rights of the child as a human being that are recognized nowadays by the international community.

Until the early 20th century, the life and interests of the child failed to arouse a greater interest of the international community. In 1923, on

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the initiative of the International Help the Children Union, the so-called Geneva Declaration of the rights of the child was resolved. In 1924, the General Assembly of the League of Nations adopted that declaration and appealed to its member States to be guided by the contents of that document in matters related to protection of childhood.¹ The League became the coordinator of international cooperation in the sphere of protection of the rights of the child.

On November 20, 1959, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (Resolution 1386/XIV) assuming that due to his or her physical and mental immaturity, a child needs special safeguards and care, including an appropriate legal protection before as well as after birth.

The Declaration proclaimed grave values and principles of permanent and universal importance. Its contents is the achievement of the United Nations' moral consciousness. Yet the Declaration is not legally binding for States, and does not secure the child protection under international law. Instead, the Convention on the Rights of the Child became an international act legally binding for its States Parties.

So far, there has been no organized international supervision over the observance of the rights of the child ; the Convention provides for and establishes such supervision.

The Declaration of the rights of the child was proclaimed thirty years ago. The world has changed a great lot since that time. The present Convention is a new and modern act which takes into account the experience of the last three decades, and that of the International Child's Year, 1979, proclaimed by the United Nations, in particular.

The Convention is more extensive than the former Declaration : it regulates also matters which received nothing but a mention in the Declaration, as well as those not mentioned in it at all, such as e.g. protection of the child's identity, honour, or privacy, and his or her situation due to infringement of the penal law.

The Convention approaches human rights from the viewpoints of the interests and needs of the child. It treats the child not only as the object of protection but also and above all as the subject of rights and liberties. It exposes the child's personality. It also introduces the principle according to which the child who is capable of forming his or her own views should have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. Those views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

¹ See M. Balcerek, *Prawa dziecka [The Rights of the Child]*, Warsaw 1986, PWN, p. 114 and *passim*.

The Convention comprises an extensive consensus as to the duties of the family, the local community, the State, and international community in relation to the child. Admittedly, some of its provisions reflect the common realistic standard rather than highly ambitious objects. As a whole, however, it not only codifies but also significantly develops and enriches the international norms that apply to the child. At the same time, guided by reasons of caution, it contains a clause ensuring that its provisions cannot be interpreted as impairing the already existing obligations. Art. 41 provides that nothing in the Convention affects any provisions which are more conducive to the realization of the rights of the child and which may be contained in the law of a State Party or in international law in force for that State.

The Convention results from compromises. That, however, is not its weakness but an indication of wisdom and mutual understanding which prevailed in the process of adjustment of its provisions.

The Convention contains a complete catalogue of the rights of the child as a human being : the civil, cultural, social as well as political rights, all of which receive equal treatment in principle. No mention has been made of the economic rights as a child should learn and not work, play and not pursue the economic activities.

What the Convention has in view first and foremost are the interests and rights of a normal child living in a normal family in peaceful conditions. Attention has been given, however, also to the situation of those children who live in extremely difficult conditions, and who can be found in all countries of the world.

This concerns children deprived of their family environment, children of refugees, the physically or mentally handicapped children, children who are members of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities or of the aboriginal population, children who live in the area of armed conflicts, and also those who have infringed the penal law.

The Convention contains provisions addressed to all countries of the world, as children whose fate should and can be improved can be found in all those countries. It is a matter of course, however, that the economically developed countries will find it easier to meet the obligations imposed by the Convention than the developing ones. The provisions of the Convention have a greater regard to the situation of the latter than any of the previously adopted UN conventions on human rights. This fact results from the developing countries' active participation in the adjustment of the Convention's contents.

The Convention strictly connects the child's welfare with the fate and welfare of that child's family. It has been assumed that the family is the basic social group and the natural educational environment and source

of well-being of all its members, the children in particular. For that reason, the family should receive the necessary help and protection to be able to realize its responsibilities towards society to the full.

The Convention bases on the assumption that in all actions concerning children and undertaken by social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child should be of primary consideration.

The Convention assumes that the parents have a primary responsibility for their child. The State's duties in this sphere are subsidiary and limited to the extent that is necessary for the interests of the child. The State is obliged to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights established or recognized in the Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, the State is to undertake such measures to the maximum extent of its available resources, and also, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.

Discrimination of different categories of people was and still is one of the most severe afflictions and inequities. It is particularly repulsive if it affects the individuals who cannot defend themselves successfully. The children are among such individuals. For that reason, the Convention contains a number of provisions to exclude discrimination. This concerns above all discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic, or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. Discrimination is banned whether the above traits are those of the child or of his or her parent or legal guardian. The State is obliged to take the appropriate measures to protect the child against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members. The Convention does not draw any distinction between children born in or out of wedlock. This is not stated explicitly, however, despite the suggestions to introduce that statement. The reason of the adopted solution were the constitutional provisions of monarchies.

According to reliable data provided by different international organizations, dozens of millions of children suffer incessantly due to various forms of exploitation. The Convention protects the child against the most popular forms. The point here is first of all the protection of the child against economic exploitation, that is work likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, moral or social development. The Convention imposes on the States Parties the obligation to provide for a minimum age or ages for admissions to employment, for appropriate regulation of the

hours and conditions of employment, and for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to enforce the ban on child exploitation.

The Convention imposes on States Parties the duty to protect the child from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and also to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances. The State is also obliged to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. In particular, the State is to prevent the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity ; the exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices ; and the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials. The State should also take all measures to prevent the abduction, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form. Another State's duty is to protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.²

The Convention contains a long list of civil rights of the child. There is among them the inherent right to life, to survival, and to development to the maximum of that child's abilities. The point here is not that the State should resist killing the child but that it should do all that is most conducive to the child's life and development.

Every child should be registered immediately after birth : there are countries where this procedure has not been introduced yet. Every child has the right from birth to a name, and also the right to acquire a nationality. A child should not be stateless as only nationality can secure a full protection of that child. Moreover, every child has the right, as far as possible, to know and be cared for by his or her parents. The child has the right to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name, and family relations. The child should be protected against unlawful interference in his or her identity. This way, the child is to be protected against practices that consist in denationalization of children, their abduction from their own family, and unlawful changing of their names and first names. Important elements of the child's identity include the right to enjoy the child's own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, and to use his or her own language. This concerns also children belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. The latter applies to States where such minorities exist.

The child has the right not to be separated from his or her parents against their will. In cases where such separation takes place by force of

² For a broader discussion of this problem, see M. Lachs, "Kilka refleksji o prawach dziecka" [Some Remarks on the Rights of the Child], in : *Państwo, prawo, obywatel* [The State, the Law, the Citizen], Ossolineum 1989, pp. 552 - 553.

a decision taken by competent authorities, the child should have the right to maintain contacts with his or her parents on a regular basis. As has been mentioned before, the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting that child. The child also has the right to freedom of expression, that is the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers. The child may do that in the form of his or her own choice.

Moreover, the child has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as the right to privacy.

The Convention provides that the child should not be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment may be imposed on a child. Moreover, it is forbidden to deprive a child of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. Every child alleged, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law has the right to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth.

A child who has not attained the age of fifteen cannot be recruited into the armed forces. In recruiting among those who have attained the age of fifteen but not the age of eighteen, priority should be given to those who are oldest. According to some proposals, the minimum age of recruitment to the armed forces ought to have been at least 16. It proved impossible, however, to reach consensus as regards this issue.

The Convention secures the child the basic social rights. The child has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health care and to facilities for the treatment of any illness, as well as the right to rehabilitation of health. The State is obliged to strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her access to health care services.

Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his or her physical, mental, moral, and social development. That standard should be secured primarily by the child's parents or by other persons responsible for that child. The child also has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to his or her age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

A child who is victim of any form of neglect, exploitation or abuse, torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or of armed conflicts, has the right to physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration. Such recovery and reintegration should take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

The Convention secures the child definite cultural rights. First of all, the child is to have access to information and material from a diversity

of national and international sources. Concerned here are especially the information and material aimed at the promotion of the child's health, physical as well as spiritual and moral.

The Convention institutes the principle that both parents should have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Their responsibility in this sphere is primary in nature. Their basic concern should be the best interests of the child.

The child has the right to education. That right is to be achieved progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity. Primary education is to be made compulsory and available free for all. The Convention also provides for a list of the general human values at which education is to be directed.

The Convention provides that both the child and the adults should have the right to know its provisions. We deal here with an application of the general principle that each person has the right to know his or her human rights.

In principle, the exercise of political rights is not accessible for a child. The Convention, however, recognizes the fact that older children are able to discern and control their conduct. For that reason it has been provided that the child has the right to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly. The exercise of those rights should promote the child's full and harmonious development, the shaping of his or her personality, and should prepare the child to live in society.

The Convention provides that a child who is deprived of his or her family environment, or cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, has the right to special protection and assistance provided by the State. The State should ensure alternative care for such a child which can include adoption, placement in a suitable institution for the care of children, or another solution.

In relation to a child who is a refugee or is seeking refugee status, the State is obliged to ensure that that child receives appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance.

A mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, guaranteed by the State, in conditions of respect to the child's dignity which would facilitate his or her active participation in the community. Such child also has the right to special care which should be free of charge whenever possible.

Another State's duty is to ensure protection and care to a child who has been injured in an armed conflict.

All the above cases involve protection and care provided by the State with the aim to create equal opportunities for a child living in more difficult conditions or suffering more than other children.

Obviously, the child, like any other human being, is subject of all human rights specified by international conventions and declarations. The Convention on the Rights of the Child formulates some of those rights in a way that is more adequate to the child's needs and abilities. It provides a substantiation of human rights. At the same time, however, it grants to the child specific rights that apply to the child only, e.g. the right to play and recreational activities. It secures for the child an extent of protection from exploitation and discrimination that is not enjoyed by adults.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is subject to ratification, like other acts of this kind. It is to enter into force on the thirtieth day following the date of deposit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the twentieth instrument of ratification. It is expected that many States will ratify the Convention in rather a short time. The States Parties may submit reservations to some of the provisions. The only reservations that are inadmissible are those incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention.

The States Parties may also propose amendments to the Convention. A procedure of adopting such amendments has been provided for.

The Convention establishes the mechanism of international supervision of its observance by States Parties. It provides for the establishment of a Committee on the Rights of the Child to examine the progress made by States Parties in achieving the realization of the obligations that follow from the Convention. The Committee is to be elected by the States Parties. It is to consist of ten experts of high moral standing and recognized competence in the field covered by the Convention. Its members will be elected for a term of four years. The initial election is scheduled for no later than six months after the entry into force of the Convention. One half of the Committee's composition are to be exchanged every two years. The Committee will be financed from the United Nations regular budget. It is normally to meet annually for a period to be determined by States Parties, subject to the approval of the General Assembly.

The States Parties are to report on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized by the Convention, and on the progress in the field of enjoyment of those rights.

The first report should be made within two years of entry into force of the Convention for the State Party concerned. Thereafter, the reports are to be made every five years. The Committee will have the right to request from States Parties additional information about the implementation of the Convention. The reports should be made widely available to the public in the countries of States Parties. Every two years, the Committee will report to the General Assembly on its activities.

The Committee will be entitled to co-operate with UNICEF and other United Nations organs, and also to provide expert advice and technical assistance at request of the States Parties concerned. It will also have the right to initiate special studies on the separate issues related to the rights of the child, and to formulate suggestions and general recommendations based on information received. Such suggestions and recommendations would then be transmitted to the State Party concerned, and reported to the General Assembly together with comments, if any, from States Parties.

The nature of the Convention considered, it may be estimated that the mechanism of international supervision of its implementation, adopted in the Convention, will prove sufficient and effective.

The Convention fails to give a precise and explicit answer to the fundamental question, Who is a child ? At what moment does the child originate, and when does a human being change from a child into an adult ?

This subject was extensively, comprehensively, and repeatedly discussed by the working group appointed by the UN Commission on Human Rights to prepare the draft Convention. As a result, a compromise formula has been adopted which states that for the purposes of the Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

As regards, in turn, the question about the moment at which a child originates, there were two different views in principle : some were for deciding it was the moment of birth, others—of conception. Since it proved impossible to reach consensus on this point, the above-quoted formula was finally adopted. Its ambiguity is added to by the fragment, quoted in the Preamble, of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child which states that the child needs special legal protection “before as well as after birth.” Nevertheless, the whole of the contents of the Convention is aimed at promotion and protection of the rights of a child after birth. Thus the protection of a child conceived still remains an open question. It should be taken up eventually in a separate act of international law, and in close connection with the rights of the woman.

It has been an ambitious move to adopt the principle that a human being ceases being a child at the attainment of the age of 18. This solution is based mainly on the European and North-American standards. There are, however, many countries in the world where childhood ends at an earlier age. In order to meet their experiences half-way and to reach consensus, a flexible formula has been adopted which makes it possible to recognize the fact that childhood ends before the age of 18. Attempts were made to define the features basing on which one could estimate

whether maturity has been reached. For example, it was suggested to base on the following traits : the attainment of the age of legal employment ; of the age required to contract a marriage ; of the age of recruitment to the armed forces ; of the age of full responsibility for infringements of provisions of the penal law, etc. Also on this point, however, unanimity proved impossible. For that reason, the Convention makes no attempt at indicating the traits from which to conclude that a given person has attained maturity.

Yet despite the above-mentioned vagueness, the definition of the child included in Art. 1 of the Convention is useful and provides a rather clear definition of whose rights are protected.

In the United Nations, the works on the draft convention were initiated in 1978 at the 34th session of the Commission on Human Rights, and went on till the adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly at its 44th session on November 20, 1989, that is for 11 years. Nearly the whole of the draft was adjusted by the working group appointed to this aim by the Commission on Human Rights, annually from 1979 on. The text of the Convention was adopted by way of consensus to the exception of Art. 43 points 11 and 12. Only the issue of financing the Committee on the Rights of the Child, provided for by the Convention, from the United Nations regular budget was settled by voting at the Third Committee of the 44th session of the General Assembly. Also all resolutions concerning the Convention were adopted unanimously which had been submitted by the Commission on Human Rights, the Social and Economic Council,, and the General Assembly.

Secretary-General of the United Nations Javier Perez de Cuellar stated in his pronouncement made before the General Assembly after the adoption of the Convention : "The preparation of the draft convention was not an easy task [...] It was a model of how our organization may and should strive after achieving common aims."³ Secretary-General stressed the fact that the unproductive political confrontations had been put aside this time. Delegates from countries of different social and economic systems, representatives of a diversity of cultural, ethical and religious philosophies of life, co-operated with non-governmental organizations in the spirit of harmony and mutual respect, treating the best interests of the child as their chief aim. This opinion is a faithful characterization of the process of adjusting the Convention, and is well-earned indeed.

The works aimed at adjusting the draft convention proceeded in two

³Statement by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the adoption of the convention on the rights of the child, 20 November, 1989.

stages, so to say. The first one, the so-called first reading, ended in the spring of 1988 during the 44th session of the Commission on Human Rights. The second stage, or second reading, took place during a two-week session of the working group in November/December 1988 and the 45th session of the Commission on Human Rights in the spring of 1989. During the second reading, the contents of all provisions of the Convention were reviewed, additional proposals considered and some of them adopted, and the uniform order of articles and provisions and their sequential numbering settled (Report of the working group, E/CN4/1989/48).

Poland has special reasons to feel satisfied with the passing by the United Nations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1978, Poland suggested the passing of such a Convention, submitting a draft convention to the Commission on Human Rights E/CN4/1349). In 1980, with consideration to the opinions of Governments, international and extragovernmental organizations, Poland submitted to the Commission a revised and enriched draft (A/C.3/36/6). Poland also initiated draft resolutions and decisions taken with respect to the Convention by the Commission on Human Rights, the Social and Economic Council and the General Assembly. Each time, Poland managed to win over many co-authors of those drafts.⁴ The Polish delegation was always most active during the works on each fragment of the Convention. Finally, a Pole was each time elected chairman-reporter of the working group in which the text of the Convention was adjusted. Poland's experience in the sphere of promotion and protection of the rights of the child was taken to a most extensive account in provisions of the Convention. In this situation Poland will have no difficulties ratifying the Convention. Polish law's consistence with it was demonstrated by J. Musiol, Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice, in his paper delivered at the International Meeting of the Friends of Children in Warsaw on December 13 - 15, 1989.

Many delegations stressed the merits of Poland in the work on preparing the Convention in their pronouncements. Let me quote just a few of them. The US delegate H. Smith stated in his pronouncement made in November 1989 at the session of the Third Committee : "Polish

⁴ Poland's activity in the works on the draft convention has been well documented in the *Compilation on the On-going Work of the Drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Geneva 1987, prepared by the Swedish organization Rädde Barnen International. See also reports of the working group submitted to the Commission on Human Rights in the years 1979 - 1989. A significant document in this respect is also the account, prepared by Rädde Barnen International, of the debate over the draft convention on May 8, 1989 at a session of the Human Rights Commission. United Nations Draft Convention on the Rights, of the Child, Commission on Human Rights, Debate of March 8, 1989.

Government deserve a great deal of regard for contributing to the birth of the Convention. The version we now have before our eyes reflects many years of discussions and revisions as compared to the original Polish draft ; yet without that initiating effort ten years ago, we would not be discussing now the issue of passing the Convention on the Rights of the Child at this 44th session of the General Assembly.”⁵ Representative of the Holy See, Archbishop Renato R. Martino, included the following remark in his statement made on November 13, 1989 at the third Committee : “My delegation wishes to pay tribute to the Polish Government for its initiating effort and permanent support for the Convention.”⁶ Another person to pay tribute to Poland because of realization of the Convention was Secretary-General of the United Nations in his pronouncement quoted above.

Adopting the Convention, the General Assembly appealed at the same time for a constant improvement of the situation of children all over the world and the creation of conditions for their development and education in peace and security. The situation of children in many parts of the world still remains critical as a result of inadequate social conditions, natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation, illiteracy, hunger and disability. For improvement of the children’s fate, both national and international efforts are necessary. The General Assembly stressed the particularly grave role of UNICEF in activities for the well-being and development of children. It appealed at the same time to all States to sign, ratify, or accede to the Convention as promptly as possible. It also appealed to the agencies and organizations of the United Nations, and to international and non-governmental organizations, to intensify the efforts towards the propagation of information about the Convention and towards winning support for it.

According to J. Martenson, Under Secretary-General of the United Nations for human rights, the preparation and adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child “is no doubt the United Nations’ paramount achievement in the sphere of human rights this year, and possibly also for many years to come.”⁷ He expressed the opinion that implementation of the Convention will exert a long-range beneficial influence on the life of children in all parts of the world. Further, President of the General

⁵ Press release USUN 1944-(89), November 10, 1989.

⁶ Statement by Archbishop Renato R. Martino, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in the Third Committee on item 108, November 13, 1989.

⁷ Statement introducing agenda items 98, 106, 107, 108, 112, 114 and 115 by Jan Martenson, Under-Secretary-General for human rights, p. 13.

Assembly J. N. Garba estimated the passing of the Convention as the next crucial step towards consolidation of international protection of the rights of the child. "The rights of the child", he said, "passed from the sphere of declarations of intentions to what will become a binding part of the international legislation."⁸

The passing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is not an isolated event in the whole of activities of the United Nations for improvement of the child's situation. It is interpreted as continuation of the efforts made in this respect by the international community in the International Year of the Child, that is in 1979 according to the United Nations proclamation. On the initiative of Governments of Canada, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan and Sweden, a World Summit for children was held at the United Nations headquarters in New York on September 29-30, 1990. Leaders of over 100 States or heads of Governments had declared their intention to attend the Summit. The organizers were the Secretariate of the United Nations and UNICEF. The Summit made the chief leaders of States aware of the needs and interests of children, and promoted a higher position of the interests of the child in the hierarchy of political aims of the separate States. It was to make the heads of States or Governments aware of their great responsibility for the fates of children, that is for the future of their respective nations. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implementation were among the main items of the agenda of the Summit.⁹

On the initiative of Poland, the General Assembly proclaimed, in November 1989, the year 1994 as the International Family Year and defined the strategic aims the attainment of which should be promoted that year.¹⁰ Activities in support of the family are to be developed mainly on the local, regional, and national level. The programmes for the benefit of the family should be aimed at helping it in the performance of its functions. They should inform of the economic, social and demographic problems with which the family has to cope nowadays, and point to the rights and responsibilities of all family members. The problem of the interests and rights of the child will no doubt be included to a large extent in those programmes.

⁸ Statement by H. E. Major-General Joseph N. Gaba, CFR, FSS, President of the United Nations General Assembly to a Children's Assembly on the occasion of the adoption of the Convention on the rights of the child, N. Y., November 20, 1989.

⁹ The World Summit for Children adopted the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for implementing it.

¹⁰ Document A/44/407, *Preparation for and Observance of an International Family Year*.

The works on the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child and its eventual passing enlightened the leaders and Governments of many countries as to the fact, as Swedish Prime Minister I. Carlsson put it, that “a much greater effort must be made for the situation of children in the world to receive much more attention : it should be included in the agenda of politics much more actively”¹¹ Today’s children will be the adults of tomorrow. They will be the ones to shape our future. The traits we engraft in them today, and the living conditions we create for them, will determine the shape of the world in the next century.

¹¹ I. Carlsson, “The Importance of Children’s Rights,” in : *Making Reality of Children’s Rights*, a publication containing the proceedings of an international Conference on the Rights of the Child, organized in June 1989 in Stockholm, Rädda Barnen. *Swedish Save the Children*, p. 27.