



On the Record for Children

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From the AP Editorial Desk

Dangers Facing Female Children are Deep and Insidious, Panel is Told

Surprise and anger as Beijing Action goals are diluted

Their profile may be rising in international aid programs, but girls still have less chance than boys of surviving at birth, are less likely to complete school, are more likely to toil inside and outside their own households, and are more likely to experience sexual exploitation and abuse.

This was the bad news that was delivered without sugar coating at a PrepCom panel discussion on the girl child on Tuesday.

'Poverty plays a much larger role in the lives of girls than in the lives of boys,' said Mary Purcell, who co-founded a working group on girls for the NGO Committee on UNICEF. 'If the cost of education is high then it is boys who go to school. If food is limited it is boys who get fed first. If the mother is a single parent, it is girls who are expected to assume responsibility for domestic work.'

UNICEF has been a leading advocate of action on behalf of the girl child. But many feel the Outcome document, which UNICEF has helped to draft, is unacceptably vague on the crisis facing girls.

One young speaker who addressed the panel on behalf of the UNICEF/NGO Committee expressed astonishment that the draft Outcome document contains weaker language than Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action. (The UNICEF/NGO Committee takes an independent position from UNICEF on many issues while remaining in partnership with the agency. It is one of the sponsors of this publication).

The point being made in Section L of the Beijing Platform is that many of the threats to girls are a direct result of their gender. This why they are subjected to fetal sex selection, infanticide, harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation (which is still practiced on baby girls), sexual violence, and the lack of access to health information and services.

It seems astonishing that UNICEF could allow such core concepts to get diluted in the crucial Outcome document.

Tuesday's panel discussion may restore a sense of balance and a dose of reality. Ms. Kasama Veravam pointed out that girls are often left to care for younger siblings and fend for themselves.

As a result, they risk dropping out of school and falling into drugs, sex and criminal activities. While such behaviour in boys is forgiven, even condoned, girls are condemned, punished and further excluded.

Several speakers stressed the importance of collecting and disseminating gender-disaggregated data as a way of making discrimination against girls more visible. Dr. Croll, Head of Development Studies in Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, said that policy-makers often refuse to recognize that family resources can be unequal or acknowledge that girls are routinely undervalued by societies.

Girls themselves subscribe to gender stereotypes and see themselves as less worthy, said Dr. Croll, even though girls often carry the largest share of family support.

'The issues that get the most data get the most action. [When it comes to girls] we have the stories but not the statistics.'

The panel ended with a strong statement by Ms. Briskellia Alvarez of Venezuela, about the urgent need for the international community to respond to the violence, HIV/AIDS and inter-generational poverty suffered by girls and women with programs that promote life skills, self-esteem and leadership for girls.

Ms. Alvarez, who is President of the National Children and Youth Assembly in Caracas, brought the audience to their feet with her rousing exhortation:

'Not only must we mobilize political will to overcome poverty and discrimination and injustice against girls. We will!' But overall the mood was more sober than excited.

Rally to the Call Say UNICEF and NGOs

Governments to be Pressured by a Global Movement for Children

A 10-point 'Rallying Call for the Global Movement for Children' is to be unveiled by UNICEF and some of its NGO partners at the end of this week's PrepCom.

The purpose of the Rallying Call is to mobilize a grassroots campaign in support of children worldwide, according to UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director Kul Gautam. Talking to NGOs earlier in the week, Mr. Gautam said that the rallying called would be 'Say Yes To Children.' 'We hope it will send a strong message to leaders,' he said.

The initiative is being backed by UNICEF, Save the Children Fund, Plan International, World Vision, Netaid and BRAC, a leading Bangladeshi NGO. They hope that when the movement gets underway, hundreds of other organizations around the world will join.

'We want people and organizations all over the world to pick it up and run with it,' said UNICEF's Sally Bernheim. 'If the Special Session is to be successful, we need a groundswell of support to let governments know the world is watching, to make them accountable.'

Ms. Bernheim said that if a global movement is to succeed, people will need to know what it stands for.

'The Rallying Call provides that,' she said. 'The (ten) points are indisputable, easily understandable –(rather like) bumper-stickers.'

The 10 points are:

1. **Leave No Child Out:** Because every girl and boy is born free and equal in dignity and rights, all forms of discrimination and exclusion against children must end.
2. **Put Children First:** Governments must meet their obligations to children and young people. At the same time, everyone – including individuals, non-governmental organisations, religious groups, the private sector, and children and adolescents themselves – must recognise their responsibility to ensure that child rights are respected.
3. **Care for Every Child:** All children must enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, especially through immunization, good nutrition and diet, clean water and adequate sanitation, proper housing and a safe and healthy environment.
4. **Fight HIV/AIDS:** Children and adolescents and their families must be protected from the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS.
5. **Stop Harming and Exploiting Children:** The violence and abuse that children suffer must be stopped now. And the sexual and economic exploitation of children must end.
6. **Listen to Children:** Everyone must respect the right of children and young people to express themselves and to participate in decisions that affect them, consistent with their evolving capabilities. And we must listen and act.
7. **Educate Every Child:** All girls and boys must receive a compulsory, free primary education of good quality.

8. Protect Children from War: Children must be protected from the horrors of armed conflict.

9. Protect the Earth for Children: There must be urgent steps by every one of us including governments, civil society and the private sector to assure the well-being and security of future generations by safeguarding the environment at all levels.

10. Fight Poverty: Invest in Children: Because children suffer the most from poverty, the fight against it must begin with them. This includes investing in social services that benefit the poorest children and their families, such as basic health care and primary education. At the same time, the well-being of children must be a priority objective of debt relief programs, development assistance and government spending.

Give Us Our Vote!

Applause and skepticism as a German youth calls for voting age of 12 and 13

If children can be convicted of serious crimes they should also be allowed to vote, according to the chairperson of the German-based Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG).

Addressing a PrepCom panel discussion on the development of adolescents on Tuesday, Jörg Tremmel attacked the hypocrisy that forbids young teens from voting but holds them to a high level of responsibility – particularly when it comes to crimes.

He also reminded delegates that the right to vote is as important as the rights to free expression and free association in a democracy. 'Excluding youth from influencing decision-making processes which affect them discriminates against children on the basis of age.'

Mr. Tremmel's group is spearheading a movement in Germany to lower the voting age, and it has helped to file a lawsuit against the German government by three youths, ages 13, 14 and 16, who feel that they have been disenfranchised and prevented from participating in the last election. The case is pending in the German Supreme Court.

Under FRFG's proposed system, a young person who applied in person to a voting commission would be entitled to vote, regardless of their age. Mr. Tremmel said he predicted that most youth would begin registration around the ages of 13, 14 or 15.

Mr. Tremmel noted that the Florida courts recently convicted a 12 year-old boy, Lionel Tate, for first-degree murder. 'If one admits that a 12 year-old is capable of assuming responsibility for such an act, then you should admit that the same 12 year-old is capable of understanding the voting process.'

The idea of 12 year-olds voting would no doubt shock many adults and aging politicians – of whom there are plenty – but Mr. Tremmel said it was consistent with historical trends.

'Throughout history, we have succeeded in eliminating different forms of discrimination on the basis of wealth and gender. Before 1849 in Germany, people didn't have any voting rights, by

1918 women had won the right to vote and in 1996, some states lowered the age to 16 for local and state elections.

Abolishing fixed age limits signifies a serious commitment to youth participation.¹

Children and Sexual Exploitation

Over a million children are thought to have been sucked into prostitution or pornography. The problem is on the rise, but so is the campaign to end it. On the Record looks at some recent trends, with the help of Ms. Carol Smolenski and Ms. Wanda Collins from the US branch of ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes).

The problem:

Between 1 million and 2 million human beings are trafficked into the sex trade every year, and most are women and girls from countries that are impoverished or in crisis. They are lured to wealthy countries by promises of decent jobs, but end up by being forced into brothels or sweatshops.

The numbers are staggering. There are an estimated 400,000 child prostitutes in India, between 75,000 and 100,000 in the Philippines, and 40,000 in Venezuela. Over 200,000 women and girls have been smuggled into Pakistan in the past decade, and 2,000 boys are involved in the sex trade in Berlin.

What accounts for the surge? There are several factors:

- The sexualization of young children by the media;
- The spread of HIV/AIDS. (Prostitute-users) believe that teens are less likely to be infected;
- A culture that values material things over spiritual values, and forces young girls/boys to look for money.

Economic and social policies have eroded and impoverished families, forcing more and more children into prostitution. Open borders and globalisation make it easier to traffic children across international borders. They also allow sex exploiters – sex tourists, military personnel, businessmen and others – to go where their demands can be most easily met.

The Advocate:

Leading the international campaign has been ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes), an international NGO headquartered in Thailand, with affiliated groups in 50 countries in all regions of the world.

ECPAT grew out of a consultation held in 1990 at Chiang Mai, Thailand, at which activists for children's rights gathered to hear the results of a two-year study about the sale and trafficking of children for sexual purposes in Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The reports revealed a growing demand for younger children, much of it coming from tourists.

Initially focused only on child sex tourism in Asia, ECPAT has since expanded to all forms of commercial sexual exploitation in all countries of the world. The basis for all of ECPAT's work is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

ECPAT's initial efforts were aimed at passing strong national legislation against child commercial sexual exploitation and enforcement, including 'extraterritoriality' laws in 'tourist-sending' countries. These laws are now in force in two countries and they allow for the prosecution of nationals for abusing children even if the crime occurred on foreign soil. This is an important deterrent.

Another early goal of ECPAT was to educate the travel industry and obtain the support of agencies and airlines in informing travelers that child prostitution is a crime with victims.

Governments:

In Thailand, the police and NGOs have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to formalize their working relationships and cooperate when working on trafficked children. The police have undertaken to treat the children as victims, not as criminals.

In July 1999, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs distributed to all Swedish diplomatic missions a Circular letter which instructs staff on how to handle cases concerning sexual crimes against children. The Circular makes it clear that the protection of children should come first and offenders against children should not go unpunished.

The international community:

The First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm in 1996 was a landmark in the struggle against the sexual exploitation of children. It was co-sponsored by ECPAT, UNICEF, and the NGO Group on the CRC, and hosted by the government of Sweden.

The Agenda for Action was adopted by 120 governments. It called for national plans of action, and to date 29 governments have complied. The Second World Congress will take place in Yokohama, Japan in December 2001. Governments will be asked to renew and extend the commitments they made at the first meeting.

An encouraging case study – curbing sex tourism: Many 'sex tourists' deliberately travel abroad to have sex with children because they believe it is legal and culturally acceptable. But there is also hope in the fact that advocates like ECPAT have succeeded in engaging airlines, governments, and travel agencies in their work.

By 1995, international travel trade associations representing hotels and restaurants, travel agents and airlines had all passed resolutions condemning child sex tourism. In 1996, the World Tourism Organization established Child Prostitution and Tourism Watch, a task force involving the tourism industry, governments and NGOs to campaign against this terrible scourge.

Governments started to join in. The ministry of tourism in Brazil launched a very effective poster campaign. The Australian government distributed thousands of brochures advertising the laws against child sex tourism as a deterrent.

In France, the government and travel associations adapted the syllabus for tourism schools to include information about child sex tourism. In France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands a luggage tag condemning child sex tourism has been made widely available. In Italy, a similar high-profile campaign has gone forward with partners in government and the travel industry.

Tour operators in Europe and elsewhere in Europe are signing on to a code of conduct against child sex tourism, and Asian tour operators are receiving training in how to deal with the issue of child sex tourism when they are confronted with it. In the United States, the American Society of Travel Agents has signed on to the no-child-sex tourism campaign.

Among airlines, Air France has led the way by producing an in-flight video in conjunction with ECPAT that was shown on all long-haul flights. Lufthansa has also produced an in-flight video against child sex tourism. Now 11 European airlines (including Alitalia, Swiss Air, Finnair and Sabena) also show these in-flight videos.

Until now, no US airline has agreed to join the video campaign, in spite of appeals from NGOs, the President of Air France and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Prevention:

In an important project, ECPAT is currently working with five local organizations to prevent young people from entering the commercial sex industry in Northern Thailand. The project is funded by Taksvarki ry Dagsvereke of Finland, and the results are promising.

More and more communities in Northern Thailand are aware of the dangers. More children are aware of their rights and are starting to enforce them. No child followed by the partners as part of the Taksvarki project has entered the sex trade, and the small number that have left their communities for work stay in contact with their relatives.

Profile: Under Occupation

Mr. George Abu Al Zulof, Executive Director of the Palestine section of Defence for Children International (DCI), argues that the Outcome document must recognize the special needs of children living under occupation.

There has been much discussion at the PrepCom about the plight of children affected by armed conflict. But what about children who live in lands under occupation?

George Abu Al Zulof, Executive Director of Defence for Children International (DCI) notes Palestine insists that they have a special need for protection that must be specifically acknowledged by the Special Session.

He made the point repeatedly and convincingly, in an interview with On the Record. His organization is based in the West Bank town of Ramallah, and he gave an alarming description of what it means to be a Palestinian child in the Occupied Territories.

Since the latest Palestinian uprising began on September 28 last year, over one hundred Palestinian children have been killed and at least 3,000 injured. Several hundred of those injured will suffer permanent disabilities. Israeli nighttime shelling of Palestinian residential areas has destroyed hundreds of houses and killed parents and siblings - causing immense trauma to children.

With Palestine deprived of the opportunity to develop a strong economy, more than one quarter of its population lives in poverty. Health conditions are similar to those in the rest of the less-developed world. More than 22,000 Palestinian children work in Israeli factories, construction, and farm work.

Most Palestinian children have only known a state of occupation. Eighty percent of the Occupied Territories is still under Israeli control. Now some areas are under siege and surrounded by tanks. 'Israel is an occupying power that exists everywhere,' says Mr. Abu Al Zulof. 'They have military orders that allow the arrest of children from age 12, and some of them have been sentenced to six months in jail. They torture them. These are direct violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.'

Acknowledging the difficulty of keeping Palestinian children out of harm's way, Mr. Abu Al Zulof notes, 'This is a popular resistance, and 53% of Palestinians are children. You can't neutralize 53% of the population.' Nor can parents be told to keep their children away from school. Sixty per cent of Palestinian schools are in occupied areas. Some children, like 12-year-old Moa'yad Jawarish from the Ayda camp, have been shot while walking to school.

As a fledgling Palestinian government, the Palestine Authority presumably has a duty to protect the children of Palestine. But, says Mr. Abu Al Zulof, there is no juvenile justice system in the areas under Palestinian control. 'There is no juvenile court, no special police to deal with children, and the same Palestinian police who deal with adults, arrest and beat children. There is no juvenile justice administration. Children are interrogated until they confess. Then they go to court, no special courts.'

Not only are children treated as adults, but mistreatment of children by adult Palestinians is often overlooked. Mr. Abu Al Zulof says, 'There is also no legislation to protect children from violence. There is sexual abuse taking place within and outside of the family. No one who commits these abuses goes to court; they remain free.'

'A teacher beats a child severely, and nothing can be done about it legally. There are school regulations against beating, but no law, no court process. This is especially a problem in villages, where teachers sometimes carry billy clubs to school. The children think that the teachers are like police.'

In spite of this, Palestinian courts at least make an effort to rehabilitate rather than punish children that pass before them. Young offenders are sent to juvenile homes rather than to jails. There they receive counseling and rehabilitation. Mr. Abu Al Zulof noted that several government agencies – the Ministries of Social Affairs, Education, and Information, as well as the Children's Secretariat – are all working with NGOs such as Defence for Children International to shield children from being targeted by the Israelis.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Palestinian children are badly in need of more international protection. Mr. Abu Al Zulof feels that the Special Session can contribute by making a specific reference to children under occupation.

'The outcome document should mention children who live under occupation,' Mr. Abu Al Zulof told On the Record. 'It is not enough to simply refer to children (who are affected) by armed conflict between two countries.'

Children's Express - 'When We Left Farid We Had a Big Smile on Our Face'

In their second conference journal, our colleagues from Children's Express talk to young delegates about AIDS in Jamaica, street kids in Britain, and child sacrifice in Tanzania.

Tuesday's CE team: Rachel Falkenstein (18), Esme Rogers (10), and Stefan Weinberger (11)

Our first interview of the day was with the 18 year-old ambassador to Jamaica. He is perfect for the job because he has ties to youth so he can bring that experience in. Having a youth ambassador is a great way for adults to listen to what kids want and need. He was reporting back to Jamaica about the conference with information about how other countries are dealing with issues.

He told us that Jamaica has a big problem with AIDS, the second biggest next to Africa. He had a lot to say on the topic. In his country they're teaching kids about the virus through the schools but they haven't gotten an overwhelming response.

This seemed odd (although) when people come to our schools to talk about AIDS no one takes it to heart and it doesn't really sink in because it's usually adult experts talking to us, not peer-to-peer. Maybe that's what Jamaica needs. The ambassador was excited and enthusiastic about his work. He was very proud of his role.

Then we spoke to Cody Moloco, 16, who was there to give a presentation on kids in Canada. He was part of an Alberta-based youth group who ran a child election. It would be amazing if the US had an election run by kids (Bush would definitely not be president if that was the case). But our government wouldn't let that happen. They don't think we are intelligent enough.

According to Cody, the number one right the kids have is 'the right to belong to a family.' We're not sure what that meant. But it sounded positive. He told us that there was poverty in Canada. This surprised us because we thought the country was pretty stable. We thought they would have

more child protection laws than they have. Other issues important to his country include child pornography and under-representation of children.

After that, Faraja Kotta, 16, from Tanzania approached us. She was trying to get (her) government and UNICEF to cooperate to solve problems, including poverty, health, education, genital mutilation and child sacrifice. Child sacrifice is really creepy. Our culture is so different we couldn't imagine that happening here. Although they probably feel that sacrifice is necessary for religious reasons. But it still seems like maybe the US should interfere.

We also learned about the problems in Great Britain from Ben Hayhow. He was part of a Christian organization called Viva Network that links up organizations around the world. He works with at-risk children, those who work in sweatshops, have been sexually exploited or live on the streets. We wondered if he would help non-Christian children. What about the Jewish kids who need help in the UK?

Our last interview gave us the most hope. Farid Dadashev is an 11 year-old from Azerbaijan. He started a petition called Child to Child with the motto, 'If children need peace they must do something.' He got more than 1,000 signatures with his 'global movement for children.'

He is a great example to others, but it didn't seem like his grandmother thought so. She was there translating for him, but she was basically telling him what to say. Regardless, he was the classic example of children having their voices heard and taking action.

Even though he talked very softly and was very shy we thought he was courageous. It's so important that children take a stand like that. Not many kids would set an example like that. Many don't have the guts.

When we left Farid we had a big smile on our face.

- Following a technique that has been carefully developed, Children's Express teams record their interviews and work on them later in teams. They are making an exception for On the Record, and presenting their daily observations in the form of a diary in order to provide our readers with their immediate impressions and meet our deadline.