



On the Record for Children

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From the AP Editorial Desk

Peace Agreements Need Youth Involvement Says Plenary Panel by Rachel Watson

Countries that are emerging from a brutal war stand a much better chance of enjoying real peace if they engage young people in the peace process, and ensure that youth programs and interests are integrated into post-war development plans, according to a former youth guerrilla leader from El Salvador, and a young peace activist from Colombia.

Gencer Oswaldo Ceron, from Colombia, and Maria Marta Valladares from El Salvador made the comments to delegates at the PrepCom during a panel discussion on children affected by armed conflict.

'Adults must listen to the opinions of the youth movement and create spaces for children and youth in peace talks,' said Mr. Ceron, a young advocate from Colombia. 'We believe that we are capable of giving alternative solutions to armed conflict.'

The panel also heard from the head of the UN's department of peacekeeping operation (DPKO), Jean Gueheno, who said that 'child protection advisers' were appointed for two UN peacekeeping missions. Both missions were given a clear mandate to look at issues such as demobilizing child soldiers, rehabilitating children after conflicts and maintaining data on children as victims, witnesses and perpetrators of war.

Mr. Gueheno recommended setting up an inter-agency working group to look at lessons learned from previous conflicts.

This recommendation was enthusiastically received by Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative to the Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict, and other advocates.

During the panel, Mr. Ceron told delegates that there would never be peace in Colombia without the participation of young people, because so many young Colombians have been scarred in some way by the violence. In his home region of Putamayo, said Ceron, children were missing out on an education and on their childhood. This had produced a generation of aggressive and unhappy young people.

Maria Marta Valladares from El Salvador echoed Ceron's words. Now an adult parliamentarian, Valladares is a former guerrilla leader who joined the rebel movement in her teens. She was a signatory to El Salvador's peace agreement.

'In [El Salvador's] peace talks, the lack of comprehensive vision in negotiation and international mediation was such that the special situation of children was not taken into account,' she said.

El Salvador's decade-long civil war ended with a peace agreement in 1992 and as in Colombia today, children were the main victims of the war. They were recruited as child soldiers, saw their families murdered, were captured and held hostage. An estimated 2,500 children 'disappeared' during the conflict in El Salvador, never to reappear.

Ms. Valladares recommended that peace negotiators should use the Convention on the Rights of the Child to help set priorities for children. She also urged that youth concerns continue to be addressed in peacetime when the conflict is over.

Mr. Gueheno added that, 'We would be working from a position of greater strength if these issues were addressed in the peace negotiations leading up to a peace accord.'

Europeans to Discuss US Convention Proposal by On the Record Staff

The European Union will today discuss an American proposal on the way that the draft Outcome document should refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The precise wording of the US text is a closely-kept secret, but it could make or break this session of the PrepCom, and possibly even the Special Session itself.

The US has consistently said that it cannot accept language which refers to the Convention as the sole normative framework for the Action Plan. The EU has insisted on what one delegate described as a 'supreme role' for the Convention.

Conference sources tell *On the Record* that the US delegation is trying to be constructive, and that it desperately wants to avoid being seen as the spoiler at the PrepCom. In spite of this, sources also say that there has been no major concession on the core issue of the Convention's role in the document.

Meanwhile, the EU governments are said to be determined to insert language on the death penalty into the draft outcome document.

The EU, together with most NGOs, wants a prohibition on the use of the death penalty for crimes that were committed before the age of 18. The US has opposed this, and the current draft contains no reference to the death penalty.

Sources say that most EU governments would also like wording that would prohibit the use of corporal punishment against children, but that Britain is unwilling to accept this.

Delegations were meeting late Tuesday night in informal sessions, in an attempt to complete a detailed revision of the draft Outcome document. Some observers complained at what they described as an 'unnecessary' level of detail in the drafting process.

There was some confusion on Tuesday after NGOs were initially barred from attending the afternoon informals. They were only admitted after NGOs protested and appealed to Ambassador Durrant, who agreed that they should be allowed into the gallery.

12 Year Old Calls on Bush to Attend Special Session by Nazli Kfoury

It is imperative that US President George W. Bush attend the Special Session on the Rights of the Child in September, said Gregory R. Smith, a twelve-year-old junior at Randolph-Macon College. Yesterday, he sent a letter to Bush asking him to attend.

'It will be a great blow to this movement if Bush does not attend,' Gregory said. 'It will be as though the US is closing the door on these issues.'

Gregory is attending the PrepCom as a youth ambassador for the Christian Children's Fund and as a strong advocate of OneDay in Peace Campaign. His letter to Bush is only a small part of his lobbying efforts on behalf of children.

In an interview with *On the Record*, Gregory emphasized '[Bush] has such power in the international community, and such an amazing ability to bring about a new era. I hope he takes up his chance to give the children of our world what may be their only chance at hope.'

In his letter, Gregory also asked Bush to sign a bill which has already been passed unanimously by both houses of Congress. The bill states that January 1st of every year will be a day for the US to 'lead the world in every effort for peace.'

Like many of the youth attending the PrepCom, Gregory leads a very full life. After seeing images of children involved in conflict, in his own words, he has pledged his life to work for peace. At the same time he is working hard for peace, he is also studying mathematics, French, and history. He turned twelve just this week on June 9th.

President Bush would do well to listen to this dynamic and committed young crusader and attend the Special Session.

Viewpoint: Rights and Obligations

For the past year a quiet but important debate has been taking place that could have a major impact on the lives of the world's children over the next ten years. At issue are the promises that the leaders of the world will soon make to the children of the world about what will be done to advance and fulfill their rights.

Delegates from a number of nations, including those in the EU and the Rio Group, have consistently maintained that the final Declaration and Plan of Action be based on and promote the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. With the backing of NGOs in the Child Rights Caucus, these delegates have urged recognition and reaffirmation of the full range of children's rights, including economic rights, and have insisted that there be no retreat from the high standards established by the Convention.

Leading the opposition to a Convention-based Declaration has been the United States. As one of only two nations that have not ratified the Convention, and with one of the highest rates of child poverty in the developed world, the United States has been openly seeking to weaken the Outcome Document, particularly with respect to children's economic rights.

At the last PrepCom in January, U.S. Ambassador Michael Southwick said that:

'[I]t is wrong to assert an obligation to ratify [the Convention]... The United States does not accept obligations based on it, nor do we accept that it is the best or only framework for developing programs and policies to benefit children. We believe the text goes too far when it asserts entitlements based on the economic, social and cultural rights contained in the Convention. The human rights-based approach...poses significant problems as used in this text.'

The United States opposition to the recognition of children's rights, especially their economic rights, derives from an understanding that the Convention imposes obligations upon ratifying states. In a society with the resources of the United States, the right to the 'highest attainable standard of health' would obligate the government to ensure full access to the best health care for all children. The right to an adequate standard of living would require a re-ordering of the federal budget to secure the elimination of child poverty. Despite the appropriation by the Bush Administration of the Children's Defense Fund slogan 'leave no child behind', these are steps that

the United States clearly refuses to take. It should be noted, however, that the Administration has not been required to explain or defend its opposition to children's rights in a genuinely public manner.

The revised drafts that circulated through May indicate the headway made by the United States since January in securing adoption of its positions. Many references to the Convention and to children's rights were deleted, particularly those emphasizing the central importance of the Convention. Changes were made to remove any suggestions that the elimination of child poverty is an obligation based on the right of children to an adequate standard of living.

In recent days we have seen the reversal of a number of those changes and a significant strengthening of the rights-based approach to the Declaration and Plan. It is far from certain whether these changes will be retained or whether the final version of the Declaration will sustain and promote implementation of the Convention or represent a retreat from it. Some might point to the long litany of promises and commitments made and broken over the years and question whether any of this really matters. After all, one can identify any number of nations that have ratified the Convention but are still violating children's rights systematically, and with apparent impunity.

Clearly no promise, or commitment, or treaty or passage of law has the capacity, by itself, to make rights real. Making people aware of the promise, monitoring compliance with the commitment, implementing the treaty and enforcing the law – that is how we translate word into deed. But first we need the words. We need the recognition of rights and the acceptance of the obligations that issue from those rights. What the leaders of the world choose to say when they stand together in September does matter. The commitments they make will either expand or limit the potential for children – particularly those children living in poverty whose economic rights are being flagrantly violated – to realize their fundamental right to fully develop their human capacities in the decade ahead.

It is up to us to insist that the world's leaders – particularly those who control the greatest amount of the world's material resources – recognize their obligations under the UN Convention to respect children's rights by making a world, by a date certain, truly fit for all of its children.

- This viewpoint was submitted by Raymond Dooley who is Chief Executive of the Children's Rights Alliance of Ireland. The Children's Rights Alliance is a coalition of 67 Irish NGOs working to secure the implementation in Ireland of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

US Denies Visas to Young Nicaraguans, Angering NGOs by Jeremy Weissman

NGOs have criticized a decision by the United States Embassy in Nicaragua to deny visas to two young representatives of civil society who applied to attend the third PrepCom.

The two young women, ages 14 and 16, submitted their applications with a letter from UNICEF, after being designated as delegates by 'the Coordination' (Coordinadora), a group that represents

a large part of civil society in Nicaragua. On the Record was told by U.S. officials that they were denied visas because of the risk that they might seek to remain in the United States instead of returning to Nicaragua.

NGOs say that two young Nicaraguans on the country's government delegation successfully obtained visas. According to US officials, a third delegate from civil society was also allowed to travel to the PrepCom.

NGOs are making a big push to involve young people in the Special Session process and they are worried that the US could reject more young people who apply to attend the Special Session itself.

'It is important that UNICEF and other UN organizations consider what has happened in the case of these two girls,' said Mario Chamorro, a representative of CODENI, another Nicaraguan coordinating body for NGOs.

The young women had made arrangements to publish reports on the PrepCom in La Prensa, Nicaragua's second-largest newspaper. Both had backgrounds in journalism. They were chosen for the delegate positions from over 1,000 applicants from all over Nicaragua. Their rejection became a cause celebre in the Nicaragua.

Nicaraguan NGO representatives say the girls received no explanation for the rejection of their applications, but Christopher Lamora, spokesman for the Bureau of Consular Affairs at the U.S. State Department, told On the Record the girls could not demonstrate sufficient ties, or reasons to return to Nicaragua.

After the embassy's refusal, representatives for the girls appealed to UNICEF and other NGOs to intercede, according to Chamorro. Late last week the U.S. Consul-general in Nicaragua offered to consider visa applications for different candidates, but this was rejected by the Coordination in Nicaragua.

Mr. Chamorro said that the teenage girls had been selected through a democratic process, and that choosing new delegates would have subverted that process.

Half a Million Children at War, Says Global Campaign by Rachel Watson

More than half a million children worldwide are engaged in military service for national armies and rebel forces at any one time, a new survey of child soldiers reveals. Some of these children are as young as seven.

'A Global Survey of the Use of Child Soldiers' was launched Tuesday at the United Nations at a panel presentation which featured Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, and a former child soldier from Sierra Leone. The report was put together by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, and is a comprehensive overview of children in conflict in more than 180 countries.

'Children are being recruited because of their value as children-they are cheap, expendable and can be conditioned or drugged into committing the worst atrocities,' said Jo Becker, chair of the coalition, at the launch.

The report found that 300,000 children in 41 countries are active fighters. Some industrialised countries like the US and the UK have also recruited children under 18 and deployed them in combat zones, Becker said.

Even when armies are persuaded to demobilize their child soldiers, frequently no programmes are in place to help the youngsters deal with the trauma of their experiences and return to normal life. Ambassador Otunnu, recently visited the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the United Nations is asking the government and rebel groups to release child soldiers, but where no structures exist to accommodate new returnees.

'The capacity doesn't exist to demobilise and reintegrate a large legion of children used as soldiers,' he said. 'This is a challenge that should be taken seriously.'

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers praised the growing number of countries who have made a commitment not to recruit soldiers under the age of 18. It also noted that some armed rebel groups had also made promises to end child soldiers. This is significant, because some of these groups may eventually become governments, said Ms. Becker. She cited the example of the East Timorese who have just made 18 the minimum age for service in their new army.

A new optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict prohibits the use of children under the age of 18 in combat and puts an end to forced recruitment.

Put an End to War Says Former Child Soldier by John Meyers

The best way to stop children becoming soldiers is to prevent war, according to Ishmael Beah, a 19-year old former child soldier from Sierra Leone.

Ishmael spoke yesterday on the realities of children fighting in war at a panel about child soldiers. The panel included Rory Mungoven, Olara A. Otunnu and Jean-Claude Legrand.

Ishmael became a child soldier when he was only 14-years old and fought for three years. He expressed his feelings to On the Record about the ways we can stop the spread of child soldiers.

'One of the ways is to create an awareness for it so people can know it is happening. Then, the other way is actually try to stop the wars first and then rehabilitate the children and reunite them to society,' said Ishmael.

While he was in the war, Ishmael enjoyed belonging to a group that took him seriously and treated him fairly. But, looking back, he sees this is not the case. 'Now, that I am fully

rehabilitated, I think about it and realize it wasn't anything good. But at that time, I thought it was because it was the only thing I could belong to,' he told On the Record.

Disabled Parents Need Help in Raising Children Says Student Delegation by Vadim Pungulescu

Disabled parents are as good as any others, and they should be offered the chance to properly take care of their children according to a delegation from the United World Colleges. In order to do this, the governments should support these parents, and their children, giving them financial and psychological support.

The delegation comprises Michael Janda, from Australia, Julien House, from Canada, Louise Herhoff, from Denmark and Maria Chan Pinn Young from China.

The delegation has drafted an amendment to the draft Outcome document that calls for moral and financial support for parents with disabilities. Families should be kept intact at all times, and children should be taken away from them only in the case of extreme situations, like psychological, sexual or economical abuse.

The amendment would: 'provide adequate special assistance to parents in disadvantaged situations especially those with either physical or mental disabilities or illnesses as well as to adolescent indigenous and sole parents to ensure that these parents can properly care for their children.'

Discrimination and lack of money are the main causes to family breakdown, and the governments is responsible for supporting the institution of family and stop abandon of children at any costs

The delegation has also proposed amendments that would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation. This is absent from the current document and it should apply to both parents and children, say the student delegates.

Profile: Coca Cola Doesn't Belong in Milk Bottles by Peter Lippman

People attending the PrepCom call for the participation of children in the process of decision-making, but how sincere are they? Isn't it a bit far-fetched, the thought of children deciding what crops to plant, and with whom the next war should be fought? But the children of Ecuador, with the help of PLAN International, have demonstrated that they can speak eloquently about their needs.

Arturo Valdivieso, Nathaly Yepez, and Miryam Cunduri are three Ecuadorian children who were sent to the PrepCom by their government to represent the young people of Ecuador. They have brought with them a description of children's problems in their country. It is clear and simple enough.

The three identified problem areas for children in Ecuador: education, health, violence against children, discrimination against children, and children's participation. Arturo described some problems in education: 'Schools should be free, but they're not. Students have to pay for books, uniforms, and tuition.' In a country where 70% of the population lives below the poverty line (closer to 90% of the indigenous are poor), such expenses can cut short one's education early on. What's more, Arturo says, the teachers are often unqualified; some have only finished high school.

Silvia Mora is a staff member of PLAN International at its Quito branch. PLAN International channels funds from private donors worldwide into impoverished communities, for such infrastructure projects as health centers and schools. Ms. Mora is attending the PrepCom as a representative of PLAN International and also as chaperone to the Ecuadorian youth delegation. She commented on educational problems, noting that teachers are so badly paid that some of them unilaterally decide to teach only four or five months a year, so that they can go off and find other work. Ms. Mora points out, 'It is a problem that the people in the community don't know that they have the right to write a letter and complain about this.'

The result of these problems is that there are pupils in the fifth grade who cannot count, and don't understand why they should learn to multiply. All this, in the words of Arturo, adds up to a violation of children's right to education.

Nathaly and Arturo elaborated on health problems: There is no AIDS education in the schools, and children are very vulnerable to this problem. Drugs are also a danger: street children, child laborers, and poor children are very easy targets for sellers of drugs. On malnutrition, Arturo noted: 'We see that many parents don't have the information they need regarding what is good to feed their children. Many poor and indigenous parents are putting Coca-Cola in milk bottles.'

To address these problems, Arturo, Nathaly, and Miryam are asking for the chance to have input at government level. Arturo: 'We are asking for a space for participation. Who knows about our problems better than us? We have no vote, no voice. We want to change this now.'

PLAN International has organized an innovative forum for children to participate in matters that are important to them. The organization helped form children's councils at the community level in some of the localities where PLAN International is active. The children of these councils have come up with some main requests:

- That their parents not get drunk;
- That fathers not hit mothers;
- That parents spend more time with them on their homework.

Children are not involved with infrastructure projects; they are concerned with things much more immediate to their lives. Here, the children of Ecuador have spoken clearly about what they want. Arturo Valdivieso spoke of the 'right to be heard.' Now, will the adults of Ecuador listen?

Miryam Cunduri, age 10, is from a Quichua indigenous community in the Andes. She seems more serious than the average 20- or 30-year-old North American, although she has her lighthearted moments. She said, 'The politicians want to be seen with children, but they are not taking real action.' It may be a long time before the politicians of Ecuador, or for that matter politicians anywhere, will take the voice of children seriously. But when asked whether adults could be persuaded to listen to children, Arturo, Miryam, and Nathaly unanimously responded, 'They will if children unite.'

To this end, Arturo summed up the goals of his youth delegation: 'We want the work we are doing here to serve as a foundation for other children who are suffering in the world, so that they can unite with us. We want the right to study, and to live with others with affection, love, and protection, in a healthy environment. We want to live with dignity – and we want to be heard by adults.'

Draft is Weak on Birth Registration Warns Ugandan MP by Adam Frankel

The third revised draft Outcome document puts less pressure on governments to register unregistered children than the previous draft, according to a member of the Uganda parliament.

An estimated 40 million children worldwide are unregistered annually. This robs them of a legal identity, which means that they can be denied access to essential services like education, health and free food distribution.

The current Outcome document calls for the registration of newborn children, but does not adequately ensure registration for the millions of children already without registration.

'I think that should be included in the document,' said Bokoko-Bakoru Zoe, a Ugandan MP who has helped to launch one of the most successful registration programs in the world. Uganda has registered half a million children since May of last year, and plans to register another half million by September.

'We need to push our governments to include [stronger language],' said Ms. Bokoko-Bakuru.

Advocates see birth registration as a cornerstone of child rights, because it opens opportunities to children. 'Poverty is the absence of opportunities available to a person. If one is born without birth registration, one is born with poverty staring him right in the face,' said Opas Kaewwkao, Director, Registration Administration Bureau of Thailand.

Ms. Bakoko-Bakoru said that registration can also benefit governments because if a government knows how many children live in the country it can more efficiently allocate resources. Uganda has used registration to improve access to education, health, and other state services.

'Education people are interested [in ensuring birth registration], health people are interested, everyone is interested,' said Ms. Bakoko-Bakoru. 'It's all about efficiency.'

Uganda's success story was made possible by the engagement of President Museveni. Government leadership on birth registration is the only way to achieve long-term success, said Lisa Woll, Senior Advisor on Child Rights, PLAN International.

Uganda has also drawn heavily on civil society to spread the word about registration. Often people in rural areas are either unaware of the need. The government has tried to overcome this by making it easier to register at the community level. 'Parents and children have access [to registration] at the lowest levels of government,' said Bakoko-Bakuro. 'They don't have to travel great distances to get registered.'

Children are also involved in the registration process, according to Grace Banyana, Project Director for UNICEF in Uganda. 'We feel very strongly that children are an important resource to bring the message from schools [where registration is encouraged] to families,' said Banyana.

Computer databases are important to registration. Although computerization has proceeded more slowly in Africa than elsewhere, Uganda is beginning to use computer technology, said Kari Egge, Senior Program Officer at UNICEF. The Bureau of Statistics in Sweden has promised to help Uganda incorporate computers into the process of birth registration, according to Egge. The Dutch government, UNICEF, and other international NGOs are also assisting Uganda in birth registration.

Children's Rights Come Alive at UN by Rachel Steinberg

Peace and Children's rights were brought to life today by The Children's Theatre Company for participants of the Religions for Children panel discussion.

The cast members dramatized the need for equal rights through songs and expressions, performed by cast members aged 3-14. According to Kelly Bitter, whose daughters Sophia and Kristen are members of the group, Children's Theatre is unique in that it 'include[s] all religions and creeds as one'. This concept is seen and taught through songs with titles such as 'One World' and 'Spiritual Energy', and quotes from people and scriptures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and the Baha'I teachings.

'I found it very moving and effective, seeing children expressing themselves physically and emotionally, and making old concepts new again', was one of the reactions from audience members. The performance also leaves a large imprint on its cast. Laura, an eleven-year-old cast member, feels that she has learned some positive lessons from her participation in the group, and passes them on to her friends daily. 'A lot of people don't know about [equal rights and peaceful messages] so it wouldn't be fair if I didn't tell people about it.'

This group of young people is making a growing impact on both adults and children alike by leaving them with 'a positive feeling.' 'It's upbeat, it's uplifting, it's unity', was the consensus of several cast mothers.

The Children's Theatre Company, based in New York, has been in existence for five years. The group is currently under the direction of founders Mehr Mansouri and Roya Movafegh, and gives performances throughout the year.

Advocates Divided Over the Strategy for Preventing Teen Pregnancies **by Rachel Watson**

Advocates have disagreed sharply over whether abstinence or sex education is a more effective way of preventing teen pregnancies. The disagreement emerged at a panel discussion on Monday.

Several speakers thought that education and expanded reproductive health choices must be given more prominence in the Outcome Document. 'Adolescent girls become pregnant for a number of reasons; a lack of information, advice or cultural traditions and practices. Young people can be the best judges of what they need to avoid unwanted pregnancies and they should be involved at all levels,' said Danielle Belanger, from the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), hosting the panel.

Panelists from UNFPA and young Girl Scouts also expressed strong support for increased education as a way of avoiding early marriage, unwanted pregnancies and sexual diseases. They called on governments to improve access to reproductive health services and asked that the Outcome Document be strengthened to expand reproductive choice for adolescents.

'Sex education must be improved by governments since it's a safe way to save innocent girls and boys not just from pregnancies but from being infected by venereal diseases,' said Stephanie Hudson, a Girl Scout from Costa Rica.

On the other hand, a number of delegates expressed dismay that the panel did not present sexual abstinence as a viable alternative method of reducing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

'Young people think it is a disservice to say they can't control their sexuality because it's equating them to the level of an animal,' said Michael Ochieng, an NGO delegate from Kenya. 'If we have to inform them about reproductive health, about choices, it undermines the choices the parents have taught the children back home.'

Mr Ochieng and other delegates insisted that chastity must be mentioned in the outcome document as the only choice for young people, to which Girl Scout panelist Stephanie Hudson had her own reply.

'I think abstinence is the best, for me,' she said. 'It's my way. But there are many others who don't do this, so we have to promote safe sex for them.'

Youth Delegations Vary in their Views **by Mark Lent**

Youth delegates to the third Prepcom are in agreement that changes to the Outcome Document are necessary. They differ, however, on some of the specifics.

In sessions yesterday, it became apparent that different regional caucuses hold varying views on what the focus of change should be.

Members of the Latin American region felt that reform was needed to ensure government support at the local level for youth organizations that can monitor individual government actions. They also proposed that working children and working families should be paid more and that the foreign debt should be cancelled so that the governments can use the funds directly to combat child poverty.

The African delegation also felt that government debt was a crucial issue, but they identified problems concerning HIV as a primary concern. Like other regional delegates, they would like to make world leaders realize that their problems must be resolved and they demand to see results in relation to their hopes and dreams.

The Asian delegation focused on the document itself. They felt it is just too short and fails to supply enough information regarding such a serious issue such as children's rights. Some of the issues that they felt needed to be addressed at greater length were in regard to capital punishment, HIV and children with disabilities. They hope to see more detailed explanations about a whole number of important issues.

While the discussions that took place revealed different priorities, the goals were the same – to influence world leaders and to make the world a better and happier place for children.

These regional caucuses are showing that they are more than prepared to deliver argument in support of their issues and desired reforms.

Sexually Exploited Children Need Protection Not Punishment Says Plenary Panel by Sara Friedman

Commercially sexually exploited children need greater protection and less punishment, a plenary panel said on Tuesday.

The subject of the panel was the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC). It was intended draw attention to the 2nd World Congress against CSEC, to take place in Yokohama, Japan on December 17-21, 2001. The Yokohama Congress is being sponsored by the Government of Japan, UNICEF, ECPAT International and the NGO Group on the CRC. Cherry Kingsley, survivor of the child sex trade who has become an activist with Save the Children Canada spoke candidly about the degrading and disempowering life of sexually exploited children. She emphasized that laws should protect, not punish should and make it unprofitable to sell them (children).'

The sex trade is a multi-billion dollar industry that includes not only pimps but large reputable industries: hotels, restaurants, taxi and tour business. Children exiting the sex trade need support,

counseling and services in their own countries and those to which they are trafficked, said Ms. Kingsley.

Ms. Kingsley was a prostituted child for eight years before becoming an effective advocate. She has seen friends die from suicide, murder and drugs and she identifies with what makes them vulnerable: incest and abuse at home, need for money, love and basic survival, membership of a racial minority.

The panel heard that the sexual exploitation of children is on the rise in industrialised countries, even more in the home than in the commercial sector.

According to Claire Brisset, an advocate and EU delegate from France, rape and incest are particularly serious problems. 80 percent of all cases happen in families, and the rest in institutions, she said. Sexual abusers are mostly male, and 75 percent are married. 61 percent are from the middle class and 91 percent are religious believers.

Panel member Vitit Munthaborn from Thailand proposed a 10-point plan to address trafficking and sexual exploitation that includes using available human rights instruments, strong monitoring and follow-up of actions and prosecutions. Mr. Munthaborn is a former UN Rapporteur on Sexual Exploitation of Children and current University Professor.

Online Gallery of Prominent Refugees

An online Gallery of Prominent Refugees was recently launched by UNHCR in celebration of its 50th anniversary. The aim of the project is to underline the enormous positive potential refugees have brought to society at large. Currently there are over 150 portraits of refugees and former refugees on the site. The individual biographies reveal how national identity and cultural heritage are often formed by numerous resources that refugees bring with them as they seek refuge in a host country. The stories also tell how once refugees return to their home country they can contribute in the difficult phases of reconstruction and nation building.

UNHCR would like to encourage NGOs to nominate refugees to be profiled on this site. Questionnaires, which can be sent to candidates, are posted on the website. The Gallery is a work in progress and new cases are added online every week.