

# **FULLNESS OF LIFE AND DIGNITY OF CHILDREN IN THE MIDST OF GLOBALISATION**

*WITH A FOCUS ON STREET CHILDREN*

REPORT OF THE  
WCC/CCA INTER-REGIONAL CONSULTATION

Mumbai, India  
21 - 25 January 2004

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## INTRODUCTION

The World Council of Churches' 'Dignity of Children' programme aims to bring together and empower churches and church related organisations in their work with and support of children and children's rights and dignity. As part of this programme, in collaboration with the Christian Conference of Asia, an inter-regional Consultation on '*Affirming the Fullness of Life and Dignity of Children in the Midst of Globalisation*' with a focus on street children, was organised in Mumbai, India from 21<sup>st</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> January 2004 following with the World Social Forum 2004.

The **objectives** of this Consultation were to:

- deepen participants' understanding of the effects of globalisation on children and therefore empower Asian churches in their ministry with children, especially street children.
- facilitate the sharing of experiences
  - a. from other regions, such as Africa, Latin America, the Pacific, the Caribbean and Europe, especially regarding work with street children, in order to strengthen such work in Asia.
  - b. from within Asia, particularly from the National Networks in order to share national perspectives
  - c. from children themselves.
- explore the theological response to the Convention of the Rights of the Child.
- evolve strategies to equip church related organisations, institutions and children to address the issues of globalisation and the effects it has on children and, in particular, street children in their respective contexts in Asian countries.

The Consultation was attended by 47 participants in total. There were 20 delegates from 8 countries in Asia (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand), and 8 delegates from the following other regions: the Caribbean (1 from Anguilla), Africa (1 from Botswana), the Middle East (1 from Cyprus and 1 from Lebanon), Latin America (3 from Puerto Rico) and Eastern Europe (1 from Romania). In addition there were specific resource persons, representatives of international organisations and persons involved in organising the Consultation. Of the 20 delegates from Asia, 2 were former street children who presented their own stories, insights and thoughts to the other participants.

At the Consultation, several papers were presented on thematic theological, regional and perspectives concerning the phenomenon of street children, and children's dignity and rights in general. This report presents summaries of some of those presentations and also of the ensuing group and plenary discussions enriched the consultation. As an outcome of the Consultation, a recommended action plan for '**An Ecumenical Agenda to Promote the Dignity and Rights of Children**' was evolved.

We hope that the papers included in this publication will be useful for all those who work towards the promotion and protection of the dignity of children.

*WCC Asia Desk*



## THEMATIC ADDRESS

### ‘Affirming the Fullness of Life and Dignity of Children in the Midst of Globalisation’

- Mathews George Chunakara

In 1944 a 15 year old girl Anne M. Frank, who died in a Nazi concentration camp shortly before her death wrote: *"I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death, I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the suffering of millions, and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty, too, will end..."*

The situation today is not at all different from 60 years ago. What the world witnesses today is symmetrical of what was happening six decades back when Anne Frank wrote these lines. A study of UNICEF reveals the fact that *"for children, the world is now a more violent and volatile place than at any time since the Second World War. Children in many parts of the world face inhuman and degrading situations day by day. The happenings in day to day life indicate the reality that survival of the child in our world today is becoming extremely difficult for a large number of children."*

The reports that are being published and televised on stories related to the violation of the rights of children illustrate the magnitude of this problem. The Hindustan Times newspaper in India some time back reported certain tragic stories of the sale of children for food in a village of Orissa state in India. The front page news in the paper carried a headline, *"Nation's shame: Starving Orissa Family Sells Children."* The starving family who sold their two children for Rs. 1,100 and 15 kg rice, gave the following as a reason: *"we are unable to feed these two children as we do not have enough food for ourselves and our children"*

The simmering religious and cultural tensions in Northern Ireland find children as victims in this ongoing conflict. For example, it was reported that girls, some just 4 years old from the Roman Catholic community were stoned by Protestant residents of a working class neighbourhood in northern Belfast while walking to their first day of school. Television screens around the world showed the girls' tear stained terror-stricken faces. The report also said that those girls had been

facing the abuse every day for six weeks; many woke up at night with panic attacks and nightmares and had started wetting their beds. Some had been prescribed sedatives. Parents were worried that their daughters may suffer long term psychological damage. The reports on the war in Afghanistan and Iraq each day brought news about the tragic deaths of children in bombing and about their hunger, starvation and struggle for survival.

While reading these stories one may ask the question which part of the world is safe for a child? Whether it is in Iraq or in Ireland, the children of today, tomorrow's future, are living in extremely vulnerable situations. The pathetic plight of the children of today's world has been described in various ways:

The end-decade review of progress of children shows that there is still much work to be done. The scourges of civil war and armed insurgencies continue to wreak havoc on the world's children. Of the approximately 31 million refugees and displaced persons world-wide, the majority are children and women. Growing chasms between rich and poor have led to forced child labour, increased trafficking and sexual exploitation. In the decade since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, more than 2 million children have been killed and more than 6 million children have been injured or disabled in armed conflicts. Tens of thousands of children have been maimed by landmines and thousands have suffered in the upsurge of conflicts fuelled by a seemingly insatiable hunger for land and the natural bounties of gems and oil. The proliferation of light, inexpensive weapons has meant more child soldiers fighting adult wars. Countless others have been recruited as sex slaves or porters. More than 4.3 million children under the age of 15 have been killed by AIDS. More than 1.4 million under the age of 15 are living with HIV. Every minute, five young persons aged 15 to 24 are infected with HIV. That is 7,000 every day. Thirteen million have been orphaned by AIDS as their parents died of the disease. At the same time, at least 30 percent of the children under the age of five suffer from severe or moderate malnutrition. And even in the richest countries, 1 child in 10 is raised in a family



living below the poverty line. Despite the economic development that is taking place in the world and its rich resources, nearly 600 million children live in absolute poverty in families that earn less than a dollar a day and one quarter of these children are chronically malnourished. Even in the world's richest countries, about 47 million children, one in every six, live below national poverty lines. Despite the existence of vaccines and other measures that routinely protect children in the industrialised world against child-killer diseases, about 10 million children still die each year from diseases that could have been prevented. Despite a near-universal consensus on the life-affirming importance of education, more than 100 million children are not in schools, nearly 60 million of them girls.

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### **Impact of globalisation and economic liberalisation on children**

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The question, "will our children pay the price for globalisation", has begun to be raised by a large number of people in the developing countries and countries that are shifting to a market economy, and the answer they are finding is 'yes'. Parents talk now of how increasing costs of basic food, cuts in subsidies for food, health care and education and more over loosing of jobs force their children to work as additional bread winners. Globalisation and Foreign Direct Investment increased consumer choice, but the governments of the South forced to introduce subsidy cuts. Experiences across the world show that children are among the most vulnerable when local economies are opened up to global market forces without investing in and providing adequate safeguards for the poor. The negative impact of this process of globalisation is very much visible where basic needs such as water, health care and education facilities are commercialised. Incidences of parents withdrawing children from schools are reported from several developing countries such as Bangladesh, India, Kenya, etc, as a result of increasing costs of education. The privatisation of education from nursery schools to the higher education level denies opportunities for children coming from the lower income groups. Since India introduced economic, industrial and trade liberalisation policies in the early 1990s, the government spent a lower proportion of national income on social sectors than in the 1980s. About 60 percent of the people of India are dependent on agriculture. Most farmers in India for the past one decade suffered due to the higher costs of fertilisers, pesticides and seeds. On the other hand, the farmers get only fewer prices for the

agriculture products compared to the price of the same product a decade ago. At the same time food grain prices have shot up affecting the capacity to purchase basic food items in the market. This adds to hunger and malnutrition, where children are the most affected sector in society. The trend of a shift from casual jobs to contract labour also contributes to worsen the situation of children. Lack of regular employment opportunities for adults forces them to find a way to survive and in the end children end their education and start work to make up the gap in the falling income of the family. An example for this trend has been reported from an Indian State, Andhra Pradesh where about sixty percent of the 247,800 children working in cotton seed production had dropped out of school to replace the lost earnings of their parents when corporations consolidated family farms for cash crop plantation.

The mushrooming growth of private schools and the commercialisation of education have destroyed the public education systems of governments in the developing countries. The teachers are poorly paid, schools do not have adequate infrastructure, and in the end schools are being closed down under the pretext of non-performance. All these factors are clear examples for the neglect and vulnerability of children of developing world face in the midst of globalisation. Due to these vulnerable situations, a large number of children in today's world are being pushed on the street.

Despite a tremendous growth in economic activity and the globalisation of capital and trade, the penetration of transnational corporations into every corner of the world, the increase of productivity and the development of technology, the world's poor have not benefited and the children of these poor sectors bear the brunt of the negative impact of this much popularised development growth in today's world. A case study from Panama testifies this fact as when the economic growth rate of the country was recorded at 9.4 percent in the country, official reports stated that under-nourishment affected 24.4 percent of children. It has been proved that the new opportunities for economic growth and employment, through the globalisation of trade and investment and the liberalisation of markets, do not necessarily benefit children. Labour markets have become more deregulated. The countries that are trying to encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) may try to find competitive benefits over rival investment locations, by offering the lowest possible cost of production. This will require a cheap labour force and eventually an increasing number of child labourers being recruited.

International trade and technological changes have reduced the cost of unskilled labour, increasing the gap between high and low incomes. With the reduction of the wages of large numbers of workers, millions of children are forced into the labour market. In the new era of globalisation of the economy, liberalisation of trade and investment policies, large numbers of companies engaged in export sector industries have opened up their factories in developing countries. About 5 per cent of the world's child labour force is thought to be engaged in export sector industries. This has prompted discussion in the context of international trade negotiations, concerning the introduction of a social clause to international trade agreements. Such a clause would result in the imposition of penalties on countries or companies failing to observe core labour standards, such as the ILO Convention 138. The arguments for and against attempts to eradicate child labour through compulsory means might lead to unintended consequences. An example of this problem has been pointed out from the experience of Child Labour Deterrence Act of the U.S. Senate. In 1992 Tom Harkin, a U.S. Senator sponsored by a major trade union, put forward this Bill which sought to prohibit the import of goods manufactured wholly or in part by children under the age of 15. During 1993, although the Bill was still under discussion, over 50,000 Bangladeshi children, working in various factories were dismissed from their jobs by employers anxious not to lose lucrative export contracts. UNICEF and Save the Children Fund suggested that the majority of those children moved on to less well paid and more hazardous occupations, although some sources suggested that around 8,000 of them may subsequently enrolled in schools. The situation was particularly difficult for girls, who comprised around 80 per cent of the sacked workforce. The Harkin Bill deprived them of the opportunity to earn money, working with their mothers within the comparative protection of the factory gates, and the social mores prevalent in Bangladesh at that time denied them the possibility of education.

The Harkin Bill concerned unilateral action by one rich country and so is not truly analogous to the introduction of a social clause on a multilateral basis. Yet it does provide some indication of the unforeseen consequences that could arise from blanket international action that is insensitive to local needs. Whether the original intention of the Harkin Bill was humanitarian or protectionist, the consequences for children seems to have been predominantly negative.

The economic crisis and its impact have affected children in many ways. As unemployed parents cannot pay for the education of their children, many children are out on the streets in search of jobs in several Asian cities. In Jakarta more children sleep on the traffic islands now than ever before. In South Korea, where the number of unemployed reached 3 million after the economic crisis, some laid-off workers killed themselves and their families; others sent their children to orphanages.

There has been an alarming increase in the number of children born with physical and mental handicaps in Central Asia and Mongolia, the former socialist countries where the market oriented economic reforms have been introduced. The Asian Development Bank reckons this trend is due to inadequate food. In some areas of these countries more than half the women of reproductive age and their children suffer from iodine deficiency or anaemia. This is happening as a result of the withdrawal of food subsidies and the breakdown of distribution networks that had been in place for years under the socialist system.

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### **Increasing number of street children**

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Some years back UNICEF observed that *"Yesterday, street children were no more than a footnote. Today, street children are a major issue. Tomorrow, if present trends continue, they could be a blight on urban civilisation."* The problem of street children keeps growing in cities of the developing countries which have become magnets for poor families. In such a situation, street children are the mute testimony of economic recession, increasing poverty, the break-up of traditional patterns of social and economic life, family disruption, and the inability or unwillingness of governments to respond to the wellbeing of their people. The lives of children in any society are an indicator of the strength and weakness of those societies. If the youngest and most vulnerable are left to find their way alone, a country is neglecting its own future. Comprehensive early childhood care is key to creating a world characterised by hope and change rather than deprivation and despair.

The problem of street children is growing in the world especially over the past decade and studies and experiences show that globalisation and the market economy have contributed to this increase in the number of children forced to on to the street. A study on the problem of street children in Africa conducted by the University of Dar-Es-Salam,

Tanzania (Dr. Peter A. Kopoka) revealed the fact that *“the presence of large numbers of children sometimes as young as three years old on the streets in urban areas was virtually unheard of prior to the transition to a market economy”*.

Mongolia is another example to understand how globalisation and economic liberalisation have created a situation forcing more children to be on the streets. Ever since Mongolia embarked on a free market economy almost a decade ago and then formally renounced socialism in 1992, social workers say that the country's number of street children has been on the rise. Under the socialist system, there was a safety net that had taken care of people's education and medical needs, and had provided jobs. But government subsidies are no longer available; a change that has had a heavy toll on the weaker sections in society and the increasing number of street children is the by-product of this phenomenon. Economic changes have resulted in the closure of many industries, high levels of unemployment, and families moving in a downward spiral towards homelessness. Growing numbers of children have become separated from parents or stayed with families and worked on the streets. Mongolia's harsh winters force these children to take shelter in Ulaanbaatar's underground heating system.

The United Nations has estimated the population of street children world-wide at 150 million, with the number rising daily. Asia as a region has the largest number of street children. India has the largest population of street children in the world – 18 million children work and live on the streets of urban India. Street children are the casualties of economic growth, war, poverty, loss of traditional values, domestic violence, physical and mental abuse. Every street child has a reason for being on the street. The majority of street children are in such a situation as they have no other place to go or survive. In many countries, street children are named according to their main survival activities; for example, street vendors, street gangs, juvenile prostitutes, separated children, etc.

A street child may be a child of the street, or a child on the street or part of a street family. A child of the street, having no home but the streets as the family may have abandoned him or her or may have no family members left alive. Such a child has to struggle for survival and might move from friend to friend or live in shelters such as abandoned buildings. A child on the street, visiting his or her family regularly. The child might even return every night to sleep at home, but spends most days and some nights on the street due to poverty, starvation, sexual or physical abuse at

home. Some children live on the sidewalks of cities or towns with the rest of the family members. They are forced to live on the streets due to poverty, displacements, communal riots or conflicts. They move from one place to another when necessary. The Children in these street families work on the streets with other members of their families.

Various definitions have been formulated to denote different 'types' of street children:

- Children who work on the streets during the day, but who maintain links with the family and who usually return to their homes in the evening.
- Children who have some contact with their families and live permanently on the street
- Children who have lost all contact with their families and live permanently on the street
- Children who live on the street with their family or parents
- Children who have run away from homes because of poverty or cruel treatment and live on the street.

Whatever the definitions and categories, street children are poverty stricken and their needs and problems are a result of wanting to meet basic needs for survival. The reasons for the street children phenomenon are varied, and the direct causes are many. Any of the processes of children becoming separated from family may result in children living and working on the street at some point. Street children are easy targets for exploitation. They are young, small, poor, and ignorant of their rights and often have no family members who will come to their defence. Street children live in a vulnerable situation and get little or no sympathy. They sleep at dark corners of cities, on the verandas of shops, or on railway platforms. They tend to like darkness and that eventually leads them to the dark realities in life. They survive by begging or doing casual work. We see them on the roads when the traffic is blocked, as they approach begging, or in front of restaurants and hotels as they offer to polish people's shoes. Poverty, negligence, and broken families lead them to the city streets. The longer the children have been away from home or homeless, the more difficult it is to help them. They get used to the freedom and have problems readjusting to normal life. Many of these street children become alcohol or drug addicts at very early age. The freedom they enjoy and the company and influence of other children, who have already started their lives in the streets, influence the new comers also to follow the same path. They are not receiving anybody's love and care in life. These children living on the

streets of cities bring more problems to an increasingly violent society. Bénédicte Manier, a French journalist, uncovered a story of Cambodian street children which illustrates how in the cities, the children's begging hides a tragic reality: the youngest are taken under the wing of "big brothers", gang leaders around twenty years old, who terrorise them. The little beggars who don't bring back enough money in the evening are punished with cigarette burns or knife cuts. These delinquents also push the children to "sniff" glue, or even take them to Thailand where they oblige them to beg in the tourist areas.

Another story of Romanian street children, illustrates the facts of glue intoxication among street children. Most of them have a small plastic bag filled with glue in their pockets. It is placed over the nose and mouth, they breathe in-and the rest follows by itself. Their feeling of hunger disappears, together with all their worries. Now they can sleep even if the ground is hard and the night is cold. Contrary to other euphorants, glue is not habit-forming, but it is extremely effective and very dangerous. The intoxication happens because the glue cuts off the oxygen going to the brain. If the cut-off lasts too long, the person will die. The glue coats the lungs and long time abuse may lead to incurable brain damages. If, however, the glue sniffing is discontinued after a short period the lungs will eventually return to normal. Other drugs such as heroin and cocaine are too expensive and difficult to get. Therefore, glue is the most widespread stimulant among Romanian street children. In any garage or paint shop they can buy a can of glue for only 35 cents. Such a can may last a day or two. Glue intoxication is rather short-lived. An inhalation makes you high for one minute at the most. Therefore, the children are seen inhaling again and again, in order to stay high for as long as possible.

The substance used by street children is usually those which are cheap and most readily available. The WHO reported that in Guatemala as many as 9 out of 10 street children are thought to be dependent on paint thinner, cheap glue or more potent drugs. In South America, particularly in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, there have been a tremendous growth in the consumption of cigarettes laced with a low grade by-product of cocaine. This by-product, known as "*basuco*" (from the Spanish "*base de coca*") is especially toxic because it contains kerosene, sulphuric acid and other poisonous chemicals used in extracting cocaine from the coca leaf. Basuco causes an even stronger sense of euphoria than inhaling glue and

thus causes a more intense need for the user to continually seek a "fix".

A successful American company of the globalisation era, a Fortune 500 Company, H.B. Fuller Corporation hugely successful in manufacturing and marketing solvents has been attributed as the "legal drug trafficker" to Latin American street children. It was reported that, of the 40 million homeless kids in Latin America, an estimated half are addicted and their favourite is the Fuller's glue widely distributed in the market. This highly toxic, solvent based glue, usually toluene or cyclohexane based – cannot be so freely distributed and sold in Europe or North America as it is being done in Latin America. The two largest producers of this dangerous chemical substance used as a drug by street children are two multinationals- the American company H. B. Fuller based in Minnesota and the German company Henkel in Dusseldorf. This product is popular among street children and each child addict consumes an average of a gallon of this glue a month, leading to brain damage. H. B Fuller also made lead based paints in Central America, despite the fact that the same products had been banned in the US since 1978. How many millions of children have dormant lead poisoning because of corporate greed. This is another example for the negative impact of globalisation on children.

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## Child labour

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Child labour is a serious world-wide problem because of the often irreparable damage it does to the child. The impact of child labour affects the intellectual development of the child. Although many children combine their work and schooling, most of them do not go to school at all. Their physical and psychological development and their moral well-being are seriously compromised when they start working too young and are put at risk by the poor safety and health conditions in which they work. Child workers are also more vulnerable to extreme forms of violence and abuse. According to recent surveys carried out and the statistics available to the International Labour Organisation, (ILO) the number of working children, world-wide, aged between 5 and 14 years is 250 million, of which at least 120 million are working full time and doing work that is hazardous and exploitative. In addition, UNICEF suggests that there are a further 150 million children who undertake regular, but unpaid work such as helping with domestic activities. This suggests that world-wide, as many as 400 million children may be involved in some form of regular work or labour. Asia has

the largest number of child workers; about 61 per cent of child workers in the world are in the Asian region. Around 40 per cent of all African children, between the ages of 5 to 14 years are thought to be engaged in some form of work. This constitutes 32 per cent of the total workforce of children in Africa, and 7 per cent in Latin America. The ILO reported that child labour still exists in industrialised countries. In southern European countries a large number of children are found in paid employment, especially in activities of a seasonal nature, street trades, small workshops or domestic work. The problem has increased in central and eastern European countries as a result of the difficulties faced by large sectors of the population following transition from a centrally planned to a market economy. Another example given was the United States in which the number of children aged between 12 years to 17 years whose number is estimated to be 5.5 million or 27 percent of children in this age group. Millions of them are working in harmful and dangerous conditions.

Employing children to work costs hardly anything in terms of wages, particularly in the case of small-scale industries. Multinational companies also use children to work. Nike has been using children for sewing their footballs in Pakistan. Guess Jeans company uses child labourers in Honduras. In Haiti, Disney suppliers employ children for ten or more hours a day making toys for foreign children. According to Bruce Harris, Executive Director of Latin American programmes of Covenant House, there are some 250 million children who have to work in Latin America alone. Children subjected to the most intolerable forms of child labour generally come from population groups that are not only economically vulnerable, but also culturally and socially disadvantaged. According to UNICEF, children are also vulnerable, because of traditional or societal attitudes that maintain that it is somehow acceptable for the children of the poor and the disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, or different castes, to undertake hazardous and exploitative work.

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### **Poverty leads to early labour**

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Children are among the primary victims of growing poverty, often having no choice but to work to help keep their families alive. World Bank studies have shown that there is a close correlation between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and the incidence of child labour. In countries with a GDP per capita of U.S \$ 200, children make up over 10 percent of the total work force. At U.S \$

500 per capita the proportion falls to 5 per cent. At \$ 5,000 per capita the figure falls to around 2.5 per cent. This relationship is confirmed by the ILO, which has shown that the more elementary the nature of the economic activity undertaken within the country, the larger the relative size of the child labour force. Less industrialised countries tend to have a higher demand for agricultural and less skilled workers than do industrialised countries, and this demand may be readily met by the use of child labourers. The relationship between poverty and child labour is not a simple one. Issues such as income distribution, fertility, education, malnutrition, the status of women, together with the structure and framework of the economy can all affect the likely incidence of child labour. However, whilst the economic status of a country may create a climate that encourages child labour, basic human need provides the catalyst that causes families to send their children to work. According to the World Bank, more than 1.3 billion people currently live on less than U.S \$1 per day - the internationally defined poverty line. It is estimated that children contribute 20 to 25 per cent of the income of the families within this group. Given that in these families most of the income of the family is spent on basics such as food and shelter, it can be seen that here the child's contribution is a necessity, not a luxury.

In poor countries child workers are seen engaged in all kinds of work: child workers are visible in and around cities, towns and in the countryside in the developing countries, in brickyards, rubber plantations, paddy fields, fishing boats, garment factories, motor workshops, service stations, restaurants, etc.. They also work as domestic helpers in rich people's houses. It is common each morning on the outskirts of many cities and towns to see children rushing behind garbage trucks, trying to collect anything which can be recycled among the piles of rotten garbage. Hundreds of children wander the streets, offering shoe polishing or selling newspapers, peanuts or fruit, while others beg for money from tourists or foreign aid workers. All of these children, whether they work or beg, are from poor families and they do so to help support their impoverished families. It is an increasing phenomenon in poor countries that a large number of families are managed by single mothers where the children are obliged to work at a very early age.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 145 million of the world's children aged 6 to 11 years are not in school. In many countries, poor families cannot afford to pay for their children's

education. Many children live in communities where there are no schools and consequently they work. Children who do not complete their primary education are likely to remain illiterate and never acquire the knowledge required to obtain skilled employment. Thus it appears that child labour is a self-perpetuating process. It is important to recognise that the problem of child labour cannot be solved without efforts to tackle poverty itself.

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### **Sale and trafficking of children**

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The sale of children has been defined as *“the transfer of parental authority over and/or physical custody of a child to another, on a more or less permanent basis, in exchange for financial or other reward or consideration”*. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children adopted by the General Assembly resolution defines *“Sale of children means any act or transaction, whereby a child is transferred by any person or group of persons, to another for remuneration or any other consideration”* (article 2). The selling of children is a pernicious practice and a direct affront to the integrity and dignity of the child as a human being, thus reduced to become an article of trade or commerce. Children are being sold in many parts of the world. These sales of children are for different kinds of exploitation, like trafficking for sexual exploitation and slavery, for pornography, for forced labour, for war, for organ transplantation, etc.

Trafficking of children for slavery and labour is prevalent in different forms. Child slavery captured the attention of the world's news media early this year, when the suspected trafficking was discovered of a group of children between the age of 9 and 12 years from Benin to Gabon, aboard the ship *Etrireno* in Africa. Anti-Slavery International's study of child trafficking from Benin to Gabon found that nine out of ten children trafficked are girls, and 95 per cent of employers are women. Girls, in particular, are trafficked across borders to meet the demand for 'docile' and cheap foreign labour, and they can serve a dual role, working in the market and as domestic helpers. Boys are also trafficked for work in markets as well as on plantations and in fishing. Another form of child slavery exists in several countries through the child bonded labour practice. In India, this practice still exists in certain states. Children work to pay off debts or other obligations incurred by their family even before the child was born. There are also other less formal types of child slavery and forced labour by which rural

children are lured to the city with the false promise of work.

The International Labour Conference held in June 1999, adopted a new Convention and accompanying Recommendation concerning the Worst Forms of Child Labour. The new Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182) applies to all persons under the age of 18, corresponding to the definition of the term child in the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The scope of this ILO Convention is not limited to economic exploitation, although the title refers to child labour, but this convention covers, among other things: all forms of slavery and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.

The lack of legal mechanisms or will for implementing the laws against the culprits engaged in these heinous actions against children, leads to the creation of more child victims. International co-operation needs to be strengthened by multilateral, regional and bilateral arrangements for the prevention, detention, investigation, prosecution and punishment of those responsible for acts involving the sale of children.

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### **Sexual exploitation of children**

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The process of globalisation has opened up new avenues for intensifying the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking of children, has become a serious problem ever since a new era of globalisation. Sexual exploitation of children is on the increase globally and is a profitable industry, said to be netting an estimated five billion dollars annually. Several Asian countries have been experiencing a wave of sex tourism since economic reform and the globalisation of trade have been introduced in Asian countries as it attracts more tourists and provides foreign exchange. The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on Child Prostitution observed that *“any effort addressing child prostitution will not be complete without tackling the issue of sex tourism”*.

More specialised clientele of sex tourism are the paedophiles, who cause damage to a great number of children. Paedophilia is generally defined as abnormal attraction to young children. Paedophiles are big consumers - both of child prostitution and child pornography. Children fall victim to

exploitation both from within and without, that is both from their own countrymen as the consumers themselves or as the middlemen for others, including foreigners. Recent reports highlighted the growing problem of elaborate child exploitation rings which operate in Asia. Thousands of paedophiles continue to prey on vulnerable and impoverished youngsters in Asian countries. Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia offer a safe haven to paedophiles and their activities are getting harder to detect. East Asia is facing new challenges of child exploitation despite an economic boom. The increasing breakdown of the family system in South Korea and Japan acts as a push factor to drive children from the home and into sexual exploitation. According to UNICEF, more than a million children in Southeast Asia are subject to sexual exploitation, in a problem that has worsened with the onset of the HIV-AIDS epidemic. Several Western nations have adopted laws making it possible to prosecute offenders who commit sex crimes abroad, but because of lack of evidence allows culprits to escape.

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### **Children in armed conflict**

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The changing nature of armed conflict, characterised by rising intra-state conflict, loosely organised fighting groups, and a growing percentage of civilian casualties, has had a disproportionate impact on the lives of children. It destroys families and communities and undermines children's growth and development. On any given day, more than 20 armed conflicts are being fought around the world, mostly in poor countries. In the past decade alone two million children were slaughtered, six million were seriously injured or permanently disabled and 12 million were left homeless. It is estimated that between 80 percent and 90 percent of people who die or are injured in conflicts are civilians, mostly children and their mothers. In the last decade of the 20th century, over a million children were orphaned or separated from their families because of armed conflict. Surveys conducted by governmental and non-governmental organisations have shown that more than half the child population of Sri Lanka have become serious victims of war or malnutrition, or have disabilities, have dropped out of school or are living on the streets. The number of children directly oppressed by the war in the North and East of the country is about 500,000. Throughout Sri Lanka, 60,000 children do not attend school; and according to the reports of the Department of Education, 991 schools had been closed down by the end of the year 2000. Out of these schools, 187

schools were located in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Most of the school buildings are being used for refugee camps. Furthermore, an additional 5 to 60 percent of the school children in the Northern and Eastern provinces have been recruited by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for their armed forces. The war situation in Sri Lanka, going on for the past 20 years, has created a situation whereby the majority of the children in the country are starving.

UNICEF recognises that children are increasingly the first to suffer in a growing number of conflicts, most often within States, between political, ethnic or religious factions and that the proportion of civilian conflict victims has leaped in recent decades from 5 percent to over 90 percent. At least half of them are children. In the last decade, around 2 million children have died as a result of war, and around 6 million have been left physically disabled. Children are the first to feel the effects of war - poverty, malnutrition and trauma.

The use of children in warfare is increasing in many conflict affected countries, although the use of children by various rebel groups has come under severe criticism. The suffering of children in the context of armed conflict bears many faces. Children are being killed and maimed in as many as 50 countries around the world where war is still raging. There are 20 million children who have been displaced by wars within and outside their countries. Many have been left orphans, thousands raped, sexually abused or left traumatised. About 300,000 children below the age of 18 bear arms as child soldiers in over 30 countries. Many are recruited, others abducted. Some join these groups to survive and others out of fear. In Asia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Philippines have the largest number of child soldiers.

The Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu reported after his visit to Colombia in 2000 that throughout his visit he witnessed how much children have been disproportionately affected by the conflict, and observed the particular ways in which the past 40 years of violence have taken their toll on Colombian children. Children are victims, witnesses, and at times perpetrators of extreme violence. Increasingly they are drawn into combat as participants in the various armed groups. Whether for a lack of better alternatives or as a result of forced recruitment, these children are deprived of their childhood. Former child combatants risk detention and incarceration as well as reprisals and

threats in the event they decide to separate from an armed group.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of the Children in Armed Conflicts adopted and opened for signature and ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution condemned the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict and direct attacks on objects protected under international law, including places that generally have a significant number of children present, such as schools and hospitals. But in reality, in a war situation these rules or regulations have no place. The bombing of a children's hospital in Kabul was the typical example for this. While expressing concern about the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children and the long term consequences it has for durable peace, security and development, the Optional Protocol calls upon:

- State Parties to take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities;
- Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years.

Many children living in camps for refugees and internally displaced people are trapped in highly militarised environments, moving from there to these camps. It must be noted that the reasons that force children's participation in armed conflict are often the very causes of the conflict themselves: poverty, discrimination, displacement and marginalisation. Yet, this does not justify inaction.

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## Recognition of child rights

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The catastrophe caused by the World Wars and their callous impact on innocent people, especially the most susceptible sectors in society, children and women, led to a situation which stirred the international community to undertake legal measures concerning protection of the rights of children. In 1924 the League of Nations formulated and distributed a Declaration of the Rights of the Child with the aim of further developing it later with more legally binding standards. But this did not materialise, as the League of Nations collapsed and the Second World War broke out. The UDHR was proclaimed by new UNO in 1948 and laid down the principles of

equality and non-discrimination. It stated that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State (article 16.3). Article 25.2 states "*Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection*". These clauses in the declaration became an impetus for advancing the cause of the rights of the child. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) stipulated in Article 24 that:

1. Every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State.
2. Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name.
3. Every child has the right to acquire a nationality

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights article 10.3 stated: '*Special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. Children and young person should be protected from economic and social exploitation....*'

Concerned by the grave and inhuman situation of children in many parts of the world, the UN General Assembly in 1959 proclaimed a Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which called upon parents, individuals, voluntary organisations, local authorities and national governments to recognise the rights of the child and strive for their observance by legislative and other measures taken progressively, in accordance with the 10 principles outlined in the Declaration. These 10 principles cover rights that have to be protected. They include, non-discrimination, special protection, nationality, social security, protection of health and health care, special treatment for the physically, mentally and socially handicapped, the duties and responsibilities of parents and governments, the opportunity for education, play and recreation; protection against negligence, cruelty, and exploitation and trafficking, inculcating a spirit of understanding, tolerance, peace and universal brotherhood.

The 1959 Declaration provided the momentum for initiating a new phase in developing an international instrument which would be binding



upon the States signing and ratifying it, with appropriate measures and mechanisms for overseeing compliance. Thirty years later in 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN General Assembly and opened for signature, ratification and accession and entered into force on 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49. This was the end of a process that had begun with the preparations for the 1979 International Year of Child when discussions had started based on a draft Convention submitted by the Government of Poland.

Among all the international instruments existing now to protect and promote the rights of the child, the Convention of 1989, which has been ratified by 191 countries in the world, is considered to be the highest achievement. There are a number of other relevant instruments which have also been developed over the years, for the purpose of either implementing or complementing the 1989 Convention. These include, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and its corresponding Plan of Action for the 1990s approved by the World Summit of Heads of States and Governments, held in New York on 30 September 1990; the African charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child adopted by the Organisation of African Unity in July 1990, the first treaty to establish the human rights of the child across an entire region. (Progress has been very slow and it was not until November 1999 that it finally took force when it was ratified by sixteen African States); the European Charter of Rights of the Child, formulated by the European Parliament on 8 July 1992.

In addition to the emergence of these instruments, the most important influence of the 1989 Convention has been its visible application in many of the states that have signed and ratified it. Two other international instruments adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution are the Optional Protocols on the Rights of the Child on the sale of Children, Child Prostitution and the Child Pornography and on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts, both adopted by the General Assembly resolutions on 25 May 2000. (A/RES/54/263 25 May 2000). The U.N Security Council formally affirmed, through Resolution 1261 (1999), that protection and security of war-affected children is a peace-and-security concern that belongs in its agenda. It has now established an open debate on this issue. The U.N Security Council held its third open debate on the question of children and armed conflict, the first global

thematic issue it had discussed, on 26 July 2000. The Secretary General submitted a report on implementing the landmark Resolution 1261 on children and armed conflict, which has the potential to be a real step forward for children's rights, provided that its recommendations can be fully implemented. The Security Council reaffirmed in Resolution 1314 (2000) its readiness to include child protection in the mandates of all peacekeeping operations. It has already acted on this in the mandates for the missions in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A minimum age of eighteen years has also been established for all UN peacekeepers, and it has been agreed that all peacekeeping operations should include child rights advocates within their missions.

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## Convention on the Rights of the Child

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The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) establishes general principles such as equality and non-discrimination, primary considerations for the best interests of the child, including his/her economic, social and cultural rights "*to the maximum extent of available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation*"; and the obligation to respect the "*responsibilities, rights, and duties of parents, or where applicable, the members of the extended family*". Among these, the four principles formulated in particular, in article 2, 3, 6 and 12 are significant and are meant to help with the interpretation of the Convention as a whole and thereby guide national programmes of implementation:

### Article 2 - Non-discrimination:

States parties must ensure that all children within their jurisdiction enjoy their rights. No child should suffer discrimination. This applies to every child, *irrespective of the child's or his parents' or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status*. The essential message is equality of opportunity. Girls should be given the same opportunities as boys. Refugee children, children of foreign origin, children of indigenous or minority groups should have the same rights as all others. Children with disabilities should be given the same opportunity to enjoy an adequate standard of living.

### Article 3 - Best interests of the child:

When the authorities of a State take decisions which affect children, the best interests of the children themselves must be a primary consideration. This principle relates to decisions by courts of law, administrative authorities, legislative bodies and both public and private social-welfare institutions. This is, of course, a fundamental message of the convention, the implementation of which is a major challenge.

**Article 6 - Right to life, survival and development:**

The right-to-life article includes formulations about the right to survival and development, which should be ensured "*to the maximum extent possible*". The term development in this context should be interpreted in a broad sense, adding a qualitative dimension: not only physical health is intended, but also mental, cognitive, social and cultural development.

**Article 12 - The views of the child:**

Children should be free to have opinions in all matters affecting them, and those views should be given due weight "in accordance with the age and maturity of the child". The underlying idea is that children have the right to be heard and to have their views taken seriously, including in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting them.

The Convention recognised various types of rights and duties to protect and promote the rights of the child which are the highlights of the Convention. These are: the child's right to life and to survival; to a name and nationality and to know his parents, except when determined not to be necessary; to enter and to leave any country; to freedom of expression; to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly; to protection from interference with their privacy, family, home, and correspondence, and from attacks on their honour and reputation; to access to information; the right of the parents in the upbringing and development of the child; the right to protection from all forms of physical or mental abuse or harm; the right to special protection by the State for children in cases of abandonment or desertion; the right to adoption; the right to refugee status. These rights are included within the framework of civil and political rights which are illustrated in articles 6 to 22.

Articles 22 to 31 are dealt with in the framework of economic, social and cultural rights covering the child's right to health care services, especially for disabled or handicapped children; the right to the highest level of health possible and to medical services; the right to nutrition; to social security; to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development; the right to education at all levels and in all disciplines, directed to the development of the child's personality and the development of respect for human rights, peace, tolerance, equality and the natural environment; the rights of children of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities; the right to rest and leisure; rights concerning child labour.

The Rights of the Child in abnormal or dangerous circumstances and the duties of States to protect children in such situations are covered in article 32 to 39, specifying the child's right to protection from economic exploitation and hazardous work; protection from illegal use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances; protection from sexual abuse; protection from abduction, the sale or trafficking of children for any purpose; protection from torture and other cruel or inhuman treatment, or deprivation of liberty; the child's rights in situations of armed conflict.

Instruments and agents of protection concerning the rights of the child are categorised into:

- Primary and direct protection afforded by the family, or by other legal guardians and;
- Protection afforded by national and public authorities.

Moving from the national to the supranational level, the system of protection provided by the Convention is made up of the following: The establishment of a Committee on the Rights of the Child, composed of 10 experts of high moral standing and recognised competence in the field covered by the Convention, who are elected for a four-year term, with eligibility for re-election (article 43), and charged with supervisory and reporting functions regarding compliance of States Parties on their protective duties ( article 44 ), and with fostering effective implementation of the Convention, encouraging international co-operation, and formulating "suggestions and general recommendations" to the UN General Assembly, with the co-operation of the UN specialised agencies with the Committee in these areas, in particular, UNICEF and other competent UN bodies - ( article - 45).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a significant and important step in the efforts to promote the human dignity innate in every child and his or her equal and inalienable rights.

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### **Global Movement for Children**

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The entire world acknowledged as much when they embraced the Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1989. The global community has been participating in efforts to fulfil the goals envisaged by the World Summit for children held a decade ago. As these efforts need to continue in the new millennium, the global community needs to take further initiatives. The initiative and call for the Global Movement for Children offers a new impetus to strengthen that commitment to mobilise citizens of every nation, members of families, communities and civil society organisations of every kind to do more and more to protect the rights and meet the needs of all children. The Global Movement for Children is an unstoppable crusade to end, at long last, the poverty, ill health, violence and discrimination that have needlessly blighted and destroyed so many young lives. It reminds us of the truth that as members of the human family, each of us is responsible and all of us accountable. The Global Movement has ten imperatives relating to the many aspects of child rights protection:

- 1. Leave No Child Out:**  
End forms of discrimination and exclusion against children.
- 2. Put Children First:**  
It is the responsibility of everyone; governments, individuals, non-governmental organisations, religious groups, the private sector and children and adolescents themselves to ensure that children's rights are respected.
- 3. Care for Every Child:**  
Ensure all children the best possible start in life.
- 4. Fight HIV/AIDS:**  
Protect children, adolescents and their families.
- 5. Stop Harming and Exploiting Children:**  
Violence and abuse must be stopped now. And the sexual and economic exploitation of children must end.
- 6. Listen to Children:**  
Respect the rights of children and young people to express themselves and to participate in making the decisions that affect them.

#### **7. Educate Every Child:**

Every child –all girls and boys – must be allowed to learn.

#### **8. Protect children from War:**

No child should experience the horrors of armed conflict.

#### **9. Protect the Earth for Children:**

Safeguard the environment at global, national and local levels.

#### **10. Fight Poverty: Invest in Children:**

Invest in services that benefit the poorest children and their families, such as basic health care and primary education. Make the well-being of children a priority objective of debt relief programmes, development assistance and government spending.

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### **God's call to affirm fullness of life and human dignity of children**

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The desire for life in all its richness and fullness is perhaps the most powerful instinct in human beings. We share this with all forms of life. The profound concept of humanity is depicted in the story of creation in Genesis. The creation of humankind is placed as the very last act of God before resting. The human being thus represents the climax of the creation. The human creature therefore already occupies quite an elevated position in relation to the rest of creation. The Israelite concept of the human is further determined by their concept of God and also the concept of the human as being created in the image of God. (Gen.1: 1-27). The root of that deeply profound theological term - human dignity, is based on the fact that every human being is an image of God. The belief that every human being is created in the image of God is fundamental to the Christian faith and conviction.

Jurgen Moltmann's contribution to the wider debate on human rights proposes a Christian perspective on human dignity. Christian theology understands human dignity on the basis of biblical testimonies, the narratives of Israel and Jesus. These narratives describe human dignity which is based on God's claim to the creation. Human dignity is grounded in God's creativity, that is, God's power to call everything that is out of the power of the *nihil*. God's faithfulness to the creation is at the heart of human dignity, as is God's infinite readiness to suffer for the sake of the life of the creation. Christologically stated, the price God pays for God's right to all creatures is

"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Human dignity, then, is God's claim on human beings. It is not something created by human declaration. Human rights spring from human dignity and not vice versa. Human dignity, however, requires human rights for its embodiment, protection, and full flowering. Human rights are the concrete, indefeasible claim of human dignity. Without human rights, human dignity cannot be historically realised in action. According to Moltmann, human rights are plural, but human dignity exists only in the singular. Therefore, the dignity of human beings takes precedence over the many rights and duties which are bound up with being human. The dignity of the human being is not itself a human right but a source and grounding for all human rights, and all human rights promote respect for the singular worth of human beings. In order to convey the essence of the Christian faith on the dignity of humankind, Moltmann quotes St. Polten who was satisfied with a short confession: *"It is our conviction that the emphasis of the gospel is on the value of all human beings in the sight of God, on the atoning and redeeming work of Christ that has given to man his true dignity, on love as the motive for action, and on love for one's neighbour as the practical expression of an active faith in Christ. We are members one of another, and when one suffers all are hurt"*.

The Declaration of the Synod of Roman Catholic Bishops also reads quite similarly: *"The dignity of man has its roots in the fact that every human being is an image and reflection of God. As a result of this all men are equal one with one another in their essence. The entire personal unfolding of man is a manifestation of this picture of God in us... the mystery of the incarnation – the Son of God takes on human nature – throws new light upon the picture of man and his dignity as it is accessible to our natural understanding. For it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man is truly brought to light."*

Every person, including every child, is created in the image of God and called by God to participate in the unfolding of creation. Children are of no less value than adults. While children are entrusted to families for their care, they also have worth and dignity apart from other members of their families. Jesus moved a child from the edge to the centre to demonstrate the worth and significance of that child (Mathew 18: 1-5). He showed his concerns for them and acknowledged the importance of caring for them. Jesus loved children. He praised the greatness of children. He loved the sanity of childhood, reconciling the nature of children, and

their tendency to dream and hope for the future. He upheld the dignity of the child.

Dignity and fullness of life are God's gifts in life and children deserve them as equally as any other human being. According to Wesley Aria Rajah, one of the key meanings of being created in God's image and likeness is that by so creating us, God conferred on humankind a special dignity that contributed to the fullness of life. Every time that dignity is trampled upon, one tramples on the image and likeness of God. The restoration of human dignity is the second dimension of the fullness of life. The passage of John's Gospel (John 10.10) which describes fullness life illustrates the worth of every individual. The Shepherd never runs away in times of danger, and if needed would defend the life of the sheep with his own life, because he attaches "worth" to each of his sheep. In the parable of the hundred sheep, Jesus claims that despite the ninety-nine that have come home, the Shepherd will go out and look for the one lost sheep until he finds it. Such is the dignity and worth that God gives to humankind in creating them in God's image and likeness. The fullness of life is a promise to all. *"If fullness of life has to do with a life free from want, a life of dignity, a life in which justice is not denied, a life in reconciliation and peace, it is a promise that God has made to all"*.

Affirming this fullness of life, bringing about the fullness of life, which is lost, into everyone's life is true Christian witness. God calls us to be partners in His mission to restore the lost dignity of all human beings, to recognise their worth and importance and to affirm their fullness of life. As we are surrounded by millions of children who have lost their dignity and fullness life, God calls us to be the partners in His mission to restore the dignity and fullness of life to all his children.

## THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

### ‘Of Herods and of Bethlehems’

- Bishop Daniel C. Arichea, Jr.

This paper is based on the a passage from Matthew’s gospel, chapter 2, the story of the wise men, King Herod and his attempt to kill the baby Jesus, by killing all male children under the age of two years old in Bethlehem, and Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt with their child. King Herod loved his position of power and would not tolerate anyone to take his title the King of the Jews. He would hold on to power at any cost. He would kill, and he would kill innocent helpless children in order to accomplish his ambition.

#### Bethlehem

First we should consider Bethlehem. The passage contains a reference to Micah 5.2: The LORD says, “*Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel, whose family line goes back to ancient times.*” (Good News Bible)

Bethlehem is an appropriate place for the birth of the Christ child. Literally, Bethlehem means “house of bread,” and bread was the staple food of the Jews. So we can say that Bethlehem is the house of bread that gives life. Jesus talks about himself as “*the bread of life*,” which means not the living bread, but the bread that gives life.

However reading further on in chapter 2 of Matthew’s Gospel, we find that Bethlehem is not the place of the bread that gives life, but rather the place of death. Bethlehem is not the place of joy, but of sorrow, not the place of peace, but of violence. Often, we focus on the One Child who was spared by being taken to Egypt by his parents, and forget the hundreds of children who were in Bethlehem and who were massacred there.

One of the most famous Christmas carols runs like this:

*'O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie, Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by, Yet in thy dark street shineth the everlasting light, The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.'*

But in Matthew 2, Bethlehem is not silent: “*A sound is heard in Ramah, The sound of bitter*

*weeping. Rachel is crying for her children; she refuses to be comforted, for they are dead.*”

Those first children of Bethlehem – they died because of the Christ Child. In a sense, they died in place of the Christ Child, they suffered for the sake of the Christ Child. We might even say that they died, and in their dying, the Christ Child lived. In this sense, the blood of those children was the first blood shed for the sake of the Christ Child. They were the forerunners of thousands, even millions of people who have shed their blood for that One Child and for the Good News that that One Child has brought to the world.

In another sense, the Bethlehem children stand for the children of every day and age, including our own, who are victims of violence and oppression, who are orphaned because of AIDS and other causes, who are deprived of the bare necessities of life because of oppressive systems in operation throughout the world. That was Bethlehem then and there are Bethlehems now where children suffer and mothers weep. Bethlehem is very much with us, Bethlehem is around us; we are in Bethlehem!

#### Herod

how did Bethlehem, the place of the bread of life, become the place of the morsel of death? Because of Herod! At all costs, Herod wanted to hold on to his power as king, as absolute ruler. As it was the children who suffered because of Herod’s ambition for power. What cruelty! Can you feel the pain and the agony of these poor helpless human beings whose only fault was that they were young? And can you identify with their families whose hearts would be filled with such grief that they would welcome death as a great relief! And can you imagine the effect of such brutality on society as a whole?

There was Herod then and there are Herods today! Herods who want power and economic dominance. Who are the Herods of today? They could be economic giants who exploit

children in factories, working as slaves in order to satisfy the needs of giant conglomerates. Or today's Herods could be governments who could not care less what happens to the children entrusted to them, governments who fail to provide the necessary health care, nutrition, and education that children are entitled to. Or Herods of today could stand for religious groups, surrounded by misery and confronted with suffering people on every side, could not care less! And meanwhile, thousands of children die of malnutrition, millions go to bed hungry, and wake up to an unfriendly world. Or perhaps the Herods may be impersonal forces, systemic forces that support the welfare of the wealthy of this world rather than the poor. Perhaps globalisation is such a Herod and the institutions that undergird globalisation are the armies of Herod who are sent to slaughter the innocent children of this world.

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### Transforming Bethlehem

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Are we willing to identify with the children of Bethlehem, not just the one who was able to escape to Egypt, but the others who did not go anywhere and suffered the consequences of death? And are we willing to be involved in transforming our own Bethlehems into what they should be, namely as cities of life rather than cities of death? To transform Bethlehem is to make sure that children experience the life and joy they deserve rather than the suffering and even death that they don't deserve at all! To transform Bethlehem is to concretise our vision by seeing individual children, rather than a mass of children. To transform Bethlehem is to rescue the Bethlehem children from the Herods that victimise them, and to abolish the power of the Herods over them.

We cannot transform our Bethlehems by playing it safe by 'running to Egypt', where we are far away from the scene of suffering.

How then do we transform Bethlehem? For most of us it is to stay in Bethlehem and be involved in its life and transformation. Let us remember that every time we share in the sufferings of others, we are transforming our Bethlehems into what they should be.

But for some of us, transforming Bethlehem means leaving Bethlehem and going to Jerusalem, because the Herods of this world are not in Bethlehem, they are in Jerusalem. We must go to Jerusalem, the seat of Herod, of power and authority, to confront the Herods who sit on thrones and challenge their authority, and say to

them, in the name of God, no more! Enough is enough!

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### Modern Bethlehems and Jerusalems

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In concrete terms, these Bethlehems, Egypts and Jerusalems are Manila, New Delhi, Karachi, or Beijing. These places are where we come from and where we are going back to. These are the places of suffering, where modern day Herods sit on their thrones, and where innocent children are deprived the right to life and happiness. And perhaps we should be talking about Washington D.C., where the most powerful modern-day Herod sits on his throne! Dare we go back to our Bethlehems and Jerusalems and face the challenge? Or should we play it safe and go to Egypt.

In the first part of this paper, I made mention of Phillip Brooks' Christmas Carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and I noted that the stillness of Bethlehem is not reflected in the Biblical text. Now I do want to rescue this beautiful carol by stating that it is in fact a fitting carol for the transformed Bethlehem, because the transformed Bethlehem is indeed the place of Emmanuel, God with us. When Bethlehem is no longer the place of suffering and death, but the place of life and joy, then we can sing the Bethlehem carol and mean it.

But we don't just pray and work for a transformed Bethlehem. We also pray and hope for a transformed Jerusalem, a Jerusalem that is delivered from its Herod so that it becomes a city of peace, the city of the living God. Revelation 21:2-5 captures this vision:

*"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. <sup>3</sup> I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: "Now God's home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared." <sup>5</sup> Then the one who sits on the throne said, "And now I make all things new!"*

Dare we hope for a new Bethlehem? Dare we hope for a transformed Jerusalem? Yes, and yes again, for the sake of the children of the world!

## Sharing from Former Street Children

Poonam and Lakshmi, both from India and both 17–18 years old, participated in the Consultation and in the World Social Forum, sharing their stories and challenging the participants to do more for street children.

### Poonam's Story

Poonam lived with her alcoholic father on the street. Her father didn't have a job so she earned some money through picking rags from the street to sell. She dreamed of going to school to learn so she saved the little money that she had to buy a few books. Whilst living on the streets of Delhi with her father, Poonam came across an NGO called 'Butterflies' which was running some informal education for street children. Butterflies then requested that the NGO, the Delhi Brotherhood Society (DBS), admit Poonam into their Residential Home. DBS helped her with studies, shelter and vocational skills. Meeting the people there seemed like finding a new family, Poonam felt loved and also could realise her dreams of studying. With the support of DBS she entered Class I at the age of ten years old and as she was very good at her studies she was promoted to another grade in a couple of months and has continued to progress very well. She is also interested in dancing and singing and feels that it has helped her gain a lot of confidence. Now Poonam hopes either to be a pilot or to be a social worker to work with other children like herself.

Poonam said that when she was living on the street, she felt like a cat, full of fear and without any dignity. The Delhi Brotherhood Society gave her the support she needed to study, know what it is to have a family and to have dignity, they are also giving her the opportunity to take training in computers at their Vocational Technical Training Centre. She has been able to progress far. She spoke of how she had missed out on a lot of love but now she has received that doubly. She remembered the many children who do not have the opportunity that she has had. She said all have desires and dreams, many children are deprived of love and if they had got this love, the world would have been like heaven. She hopes that these children will be able to bloom like flowers as she has been able to. Poonam once met the President of India and got the impression that he did not have much time for her. She challenged the participants of the meeting to be different and to think hard about what they can do for street

children. She wants to shine out to other children and to help them to shine too but there are so many street children that much more effort is needed to help to build them a better future.

### Lakshmi's Story

Most people think that children who end up on the streets are children from poor families, however Lakshmi's story is an example of how this is not always the case. Lakshmi was born in a middle class family and lived with her father and mother. Her uncle also lived with them. However, her uncle killed her parents and as he was the next in kin and not yet suspected of their murder, Lakshmi began living with her uncle. One day, having taken all of her jewellery off her, Lakshmi's uncle put her on a train and told her to wait for him. He never returned and the train left. There was a family on the train who had seen what had happened and they took Lakshmi with them to their home where they made her work for them around their house and did not let her study. Some neighbours saw what was happening and put Lakshmi in touch with 'Childline' who were able to rescue her from this situation.

'Childline' is by the Delhi Brotherhood Society and so they were able to find a place for Lakshmi in one their Girls' Home in Delhi which is one of their Residential Homes for street, orphan and destitute children. Lakshmi could not speak Hindi when she arrived in Delhi, but she learnt Hindi in three months and studied hard. She was put in Class 1 but then immediately was put into Class V. Doing well at her studies gave her more self-confidence. She still misses her parents very badly but through living with other girls in a similar situation she feels that she is not alone in her situation and has realised that some girls have even been abandoned by parents who were still alive. She has enjoyed learning so many subjects and is the first girl to be asked to teach other children. Lakshmi shared that sometimes she feels that people exploit children for advocacy on children's issues but hoped that this meeting will be different and that the participants would really have the all children's best interests at heart. Children are the future but if this is the state of the children, then what, she asked, is the future?

### ‘An Indian Perspective’

- *Sanjana Das*

The daily child death toll in India is 10,000. This does not come from the disaster of an earthquake, cyclone or famine, but from the common and readily preventable and treatable diseases for which technologies exist and are affordable too. Two-thirds of India's children are under-nourished, their minds and bodies growing less than their God-given and genetic potential.

According to the statistics provided by the National Labour Institute, 92 million children are neither enrolled in schools nor accounted for in the labour force, they are just under a category of “nowhere children”. In the capital itself, over five lakh children scrounge around the streets for their survival with an estimated one lakh of them actually living on the streets.

India has the largest national population of street children. There are many reasons why many thousands of children live or work on the streets of India. Poverty and broken families are the main reasons. These children are helpless and bewildered because they may have no home or relatives or they may not want to live at home due to mistreatment, abuse, cruelty or indifference. They may have been sent out of the home by parents to sell things or to beg or may be trying to help their families get money

According to a survey conducted in 1995, Delhi alone had more than one lakh rag pickers working away at rubbish dumps. In Delhi, more than 55,000 shelter-less people were spotted in a survey conducted by *Ashray Adhikar Abhiyaan*, a NGO working on urban homelessness. Around 25%-30% of these were children. In *Azadpur Subzi Mandi* (a vegetable market in North Delhi) nearly 5000 children could be spotted sleeping on the carts or under them between 1.00 a.m. to 4.00 a.m. in the morning. We spoke to some of these children and heard them pouring out their hearts with stories related to torture and exploitation; of hunger and death and search for food; of broken homes, shattered dreams and a strange and unknown future.

Eight year old Babloo could no longer lead a life of hunger and acute poverty back in his village in Rajasthan. He came to Delhi with a hope to get a

“better life”. His dreams were first shattered when he was falsely accused of stealing in the first place of his employment in a tea shop. To extract confession, he was cruelly beaten and kicked by his employer, so much so that he collapsed following the torture.

Street children are often subject to all kinds of abuse – verbal, mental, physical, psychological and sexual. For children as young as eight or ten years, who come to the cities for a better life, and work as a help in domestic homes or shops, or in road side *dhabas* or tea-stalls, a cup of tea with no sugar in the morning and meagre left over meals is all that they “deserve”. Malnutrition, hard work, poor access to medical facilities, result in several illnesses, anaemia, fever, skin infections, stomach cramps. One of the greatest hazards for these children is sexual abuse, either by the employer, co-worker, peers or even the police.

Out of the country's total population which is above 1 billion, over 16 lakh children alone are involved in the most hazardous of industries, making bangles, fire crackers, match sticks, etc. At least 20 million children are employed in different factories and units across the country. Unofficially, the figure of total child labour is at least 40 million.

With India's ratification of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC]**, the pressing need to assure children their most basic rights of survival, health, nutrition, basic education and protection from exploitation is the responsibility of the State but it is certain that the State alone cannot address these issues. The Church cannot remain silent. Jesus' whole life and praxis was oriented towards the creation of a new humanity free of a life of without freedom and exploitation. With the hope of realising this, he committed his life and went about announcing the good news that God's Word had to come to satisfy their hunger for justice and confer on them the possession of the earth with all its riches. His empathy lay with the marginalised and the outcast of society namely the publicans and the sinners, who formed the privileged guests at his table (Mt 9:10-23). His heart went out to the broken hearted, the captives, the mourners, the faint hearted, the needy, the hungry and thirsty and the naked, the strangers, the sick, the labouring, the burdened, the least, the simple and the sinners (Lk. 4:14 Matt.25:31 Mk.10:31). To follow Jesus is both to live in solidarity with the marginalised as



he did in Judea and like him to stand and speak the truth with its liberative power.

The liberating spirit of Jesus continues to work among us today for the creation of a new society and history as well as the regeneration of humanity. To participate in the presence of the spirit, is both to discern his liberative power in the movements and struggles of our children for a fuller life and also be active agents of the socio political transformation of the world. It is in this “prophetic spirit” and “hope” that our fellowship is nourished. Jesus’ message and praxis goes straight to the root of all injustice and exploitation, straight to the root of the breach in friendship and love. This liberative dynamism inherent in the life and praxis of Jesus which created the ethos in the mind and hearts of his disciples and the church.

The **Church of North India** works with the government, non-governmental and international organisations in the endeavour to work together towards meeting the promises made to all of India’s children that comes from the ratification of the CRC. CNI envisions a world that lets a child live a life that s/he deserves – a world that provides an enabling environment for a child to be born, grow, develop and live – a world where a child can dream of a future life and get opportunities to fulfil them. CNI works in the following way with street and working children:

#### **Direct Action**

1. Rescue
2. Rehabilitative Measures;  
Shelter, Education, Vocational Training, Skill Training, Placement

#### **B. Indirect Action**

1. Marches & Rallies
2. Campaigns: Regional, National, International
3. Fora and Committees
4. Workshops and Seminars
5. Networking and Co-ordination
6. Training and orientation programme
7. Research and Documentation

**To conclude**, a story told by Mettanando Bhikkhu, a Buddhist monk from Thailand, illustrates the nature of our responsibility. A woman approached the Buddhist monk and said,

*“When I was twelve, my parents sold me to a brothel and I have had to do this work ever since. I beg for forgiveness from you.”* The monk replied, *“I must beg your forgiveness for me. It is I and the world who should beg your forgiveness, for we*

*have not done enough to protect you. Please forgive me and the world who have not done enough to protect you. Please forgive me and the world for having failed to protect you in the first place.”*

Indeed it is time for us to wake up and seek the forgiveness of those children who suffer, because we haven’t done enough and most importantly “do” what we should be doing, struggle to engage ourselves actively in breaking down barriers that come in way of restoring the dignity of God’s beautiful creation which is seen in children. Yes, let us join hands and affirm to restore them their lost childhood.

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### **‘A Malaysian Perspective’**

**- Clarissa Chang**

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The WCC/CCA Bangkok Consultation on Dignity of Children in November 2001 strengthened national Asian networks and helped deepen ecumenical bodies’ concerns for children’s dignity in churches to be more engaged in the ministry of promoting and protecting dignity of children in their own societies. As a result of this Consultation the Council of Churches of Malaysia formed a Children’s Commission, for advocating and reaching children ministry in churches and ecumenical bodies.

The **aims** of the Children’s Commission:

- a. To facilitate sharing and learning from each other for the purpose of enhancing and increasing the effectiveness of work with children
- b. To bring together a community of churches and Christians whose desire is to ensure that children receive holistic care and the opportunity to know the Gospel
- c. To cultivate Christian thinking and facilitate discussions towards issues prevailing upon children
- d. To encourage active participation from each other in the development of current children ministry
- e. To catalyse new strategy in programs for the benefits and protection of children

The **activities** of the CCM Children Commission are as follows:

**2002:** 1st National Consultation on Child Dignity and Protection

**2002:** Formation of the Christian Network for Children in South East Asia

**2003:** Awareness Workshop on Child Sexual Abuse via Christian Education for Church Pastors/Leaders/Ministers

**2003** Training of Trainers on Child Sexual Abuse for Church leaders and Children ministry leaders/workers and caregivers

**2004** Possible a 2nd National Consultation on Child Dignity and Protection focused on Migrant Children [September - still preliminary planning stage]

A South East Asia Christian Network for the Dignity of Children was established in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2002, initiated by the first representation of various countries from the Bangkok Consultation. The core working group was formulated in September 2002 comprise of the four (4) core countries. The following are Indonesia, Philippines, Timor Larosae and Malaysia. The network had its first meeting on 24 September 2002 after the 1<sup>st</sup> National Consultation on Dignity of Children in Malaysia.

The **aims** of the Network are:

- a. To build and strengthen the Network among the Christian NGOs and churches on the issues of children in South East Asia
- b. To share experiences, exchange resource and information in responding to the issues affecting children in South East Asia
- c. To analyse and reflect together by sharing on the current situation and concerns of children in South East Asia

The following are issues identified at our 1<sup>st</sup> National Consultation on Dignity of Children which are affecting children today:

- Child prostitution [sexual exploitation]
- Children of migrant and migrant workers
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Child in conflict with the Law
- Child with HIV / AIDS

The Church is seen as a viable instrument in promoting awareness on UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to the Christians and the community. We need to look into what child issues can influence the policy and decision-making that can impact and make a difference for protection for children. How can the Council of Churches of Malaysia strengthen rapport in participation in influencing decision-making at the local and national levels?

Social ministry for children in Malaysia is still “Charity Models” and needs based projects in the community. Churches response is only curative, not preventive to issues of children. There is a

need to strengthen church capacity in advocacy to the rights and protection of children. This will somehow help in preventing the increase of issues. We hope the churches will be the transition of “**Change Agent**” to propel all remedial programs to prevention programs for effective advocacy and to be the prophetic voice for the children.

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## ‘A Filipino Perspective’

*- Hazel Dizon*

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Anita, 10 years old, has been selling sampaguita garlands since she was 8 years old. She does this during the night. At day time she sells rugs or shines shoes of jeepney passengers in exchange for a few coins. Her family lives in one of Metro Manila's slum areas. Her mother sews the rugs that Anita sells, while her father is in construction work which is very seasonal. Their combined family income could not support Anita and her three siblings. She has stopped schooling since her family migrated to the city. Anita's parents were once farmers but the land they were tilling was converted into a golf course. Anita's story is just one among many showing the deplorable state of Filipino children. And the main culprit are the government's development programs and globalisation policies, mainly, trade liberalisation, industry deregulation and privatisation.

In the name of tourism and development, big tracts of lands are being converted into golf courses, resorts and malls. Farming families in hundreds of thousands are being evicted from the land, which generations of their families have tilled. Many migrate to the cities hoping to find jobs only to be confronted by massive lay-off and contractualisation of once regular jobs. Due to trade liberalisation, local firms are closing down in hundreds out-competed by their richer foreign counterparts. Its contractual policy and cheap labour are the government come-ons to foreign investors. Deregulation, particularly of the oil industry, has given oil firms the license to up the prices of oil commodities anytime. This has resulted in the continuous rise of oil prices which in turn is triggering increases in the price of other basic commodities. This is contrary to government propaganda that deregulation will bring down prices.

Better services was the promise of privatisation but the story of the privatisation of water has resulted in rates going beyond what the people can afford. And services remain unreliable and inefficient. Three out of every ten Filipinos still have no

access to safe drinking water while five out of ten do not have electricity. The privatisation of MWSS, the state-owned provider of water in Metro-Manila has likewise resulted in the lay-off of thousands of its workers, many of whom have been in the company for decades. Yet the government is bent on privatising even the badly needed social services thus depriving millions of Filipinos already bogged in poverty from badly needed health and education services. Thus yearly, government deliberately decreases its budget for health and education and even social services.

What is increasing is the military budget. Under the Pres. Macapagal Arroyo, curbing "terrorism" is the number one priority. This is in keeping with her government's pledge of allegiance to U.S. President Bush. In the name of anti-terrorism, government troops are sent to rural areas. The result is the displacement of thousands of families.

All of these decisions burden the Filipino children. Their parents' unemployment affect their survival. Landlessness and joblessness lead to hunger and pushes many children into anti-social and criminal activities or into exploitative conditions of work. Displacement from their place of residence and livelihood due to demolitions, land use conversion and militarisation are constant threats. In a situation like this Filipino children are pushed to the streets for survival. Filipino street children are the ones who beg and live on the streets alone or with their families. They are also the ones who work in the streets, thus, some street children are child labourers, too. They sell newspapers, leis, candies, cigarettes, and even their bodies. Some do car washing and shoe shining.

And as poverty intensifies, the lives of street children become complicated. Some children end up in jail for petty thefts committed to provide food for sick parents or younger siblings. Children street vendors, who in order to gain profit, have to sell their wares past until city curfews and are more often times being caught by the police and are charged of vagrancy. Some, to forget their hunger and poverty, are into substance abuse and if caught are charged of illegal use of substance. These children are not only locked-up in jail overnight but are also being beaten or robbed of their sales and peddled wares by the police.

Prostituted children, when chanced upon by the police are being caught instead of their pimps. Once they are in jail they are even sometimes sexually exploited by the police or by their jail mates. Some policemen have very little knowledge on how to deal with children who come

in conflict with the law. Once they are caught they should be turned over to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) wherein they should be housed until such time or rehabilitated if needed.

Thus, the lives of street children are not only lives of the deprived but also of the exploited and abused. The ones who are pledged to protect them are also the ones who violate their rights. Because of this constant threat of abuse, some street children join street gangs to protect themselves from abusive police. Some of these gangs are even syndicated. And once these children join these gangs and syndicates, they could be involved in well-planned burglaries, drug addiction and even murders.

Most of the children being caught by the law, either of petty crimes or high-profiled crimes should be turned over to DSWD, instead they are locked-up and share jail with the common criminals. So, either they are jailed because of petty crimes or they join syndicated gangs, it is not far if these children end up as hardened criminals or are influenced and grow up as ones.

**The Government's Response:** The government has a programme for street children which is Ahon Bata and is under the DSWD. If a street child roams, sleeps, or begs in the streets and is chanced upon by a social worker of the DSWD, this child would be housed and sent to the school for some time. After the DSWD has tracked down where the child's parents are they give back the child to his/her parents. The downside of this, if the parents are poor the child has nowhere to go but be back in the streets to help his/her family and relive the cycle of poverty.

**The Church's Response:** The Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches in the Philippines are more into outreach programs. Most of them give out old clothes, school supplies, and some food to street children and impoverished communities. Most of the time these happen when a calamity strikes. Christmas time means going to orphanages to give out old clothes and toys. Some church volunteers give tutorials to the children of the nearby urban poor community. Some have feeding programs for street children.

Aside from these outreaches, few churches like the Philippine Independent church and some churches of the National Churches of the Philippines (NCCP) also participate in tackling the social ills of the society, particularly the issue of globalisation and of war and peace. October of last

year while the government was preparing for the visit of US Pres. George Bush in the Philippines, the NCCP facilitated a workshop on peace with their Sunday school pupils as the participants.

**An NGO's Response:** There are many NGO's in the Philippines who handle children issues. Most of them are into the issues of sexually abused children, juvenile justice, and street children. They give psychosocial therapies, legal assistance, and some house or have reach-out programs for street children. Some NGO's, like Salinlahi, are more into advocacy, alliance-networking to put-up the concerted efforts of all children concerned organisations, lobbying, information dissemination and encouraging child participation in claiming their rights.

In Salinlahi, two of its members and another network organisation has a focus on street children. Every time there is an activity, it is made sure that these children are included in the workshops and consultations regarding issues affecting them. For the last five years, Salinlahi has been tackling the issue of globalisation and its effect on the Filipino child. In its 1998 and 2001 summer camps the theme was "Globalisation and its Effect on Children".

**In Conclusion,** globalisation cannot be dismissed as not affecting the lives of Filipino children. As poverty worsens, multitudes of children are driven out in the streets. Many are deprived of their rights. The different sectors of the society, the church, the NGO's, can only do so much. It is only from their concerted efforts, along with the participation of children, to push the government to rethink its policies of globalisation and provide some sound alternatives.

## African Perspective

- Emmanuel Motsamai

### Street children in Africa

Street children in Africa are facing adversity as the most abused and vulnerable sector of the human race. The problem of street children is long term and on a large scale, and it is becoming increasingly important to look at the long-term impact of street children on social, economic as well as psychological factors of individuals, communities and nations. The impact of being a street child is complex and affects the child's mental, health, and social energy and might further result in stunted development of emotional intelligence and life skills. Added to this, street children often have a lack of hope for the future and a low self-esteem. Presently it is difficult to make exact predication of the impact that these factors of street children's lives will have regarding community and national development. Longitudinal studies to determine such an impact are non-existent. We cannot afford to wait for results of such long-term impact studies, as by the time we have the results, it will be too late for sustainable and efficient interventions to avert the negative impact the large numbers of street children will have had on societies in Africa.

In Africa, we have a variety of programs for street children addressing issues of

- Education (formal/informal/vocational)
- Psycho-social support
- Feeding, clothing, shelter
- Advocacy, lobbying
- Health (youth friendly service clinics)
- Care and Support
- Re-union
- Job-Identification

In the year 2000 we had an estimated number of 3 million street children in Africa, many victims of the Aids pandemic, regarded as the "greatest social disaster in Africa since slavery".

The government of Botswana is committed to providing equal opportunities for sustainable growth and development of all children and along with 189 UN member states has pledged the following:

- 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2 Active universal primary education
- 3 Promote gender equality and empower children
- 4 Reduce child mortality
- 5 Improve maternal health

- 6 Participation of children on all issues that affect them including their rights and responsibilities as contained in the African Charter and Welfare of Child (ACRWC) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

### The 'Tsholofelong' model

The **Botswana Council of Churches (BCC)** through its programme is determined to create a realistic and effective solution to the problems of street children. In response to the needs of the street children, BCC opened a centre for them known as ***Tsholofelong***, which literally means a 'place of hope'.

The ***Tsholofelong*** objective is to support the social and economic re-integration of street children. They do that by:

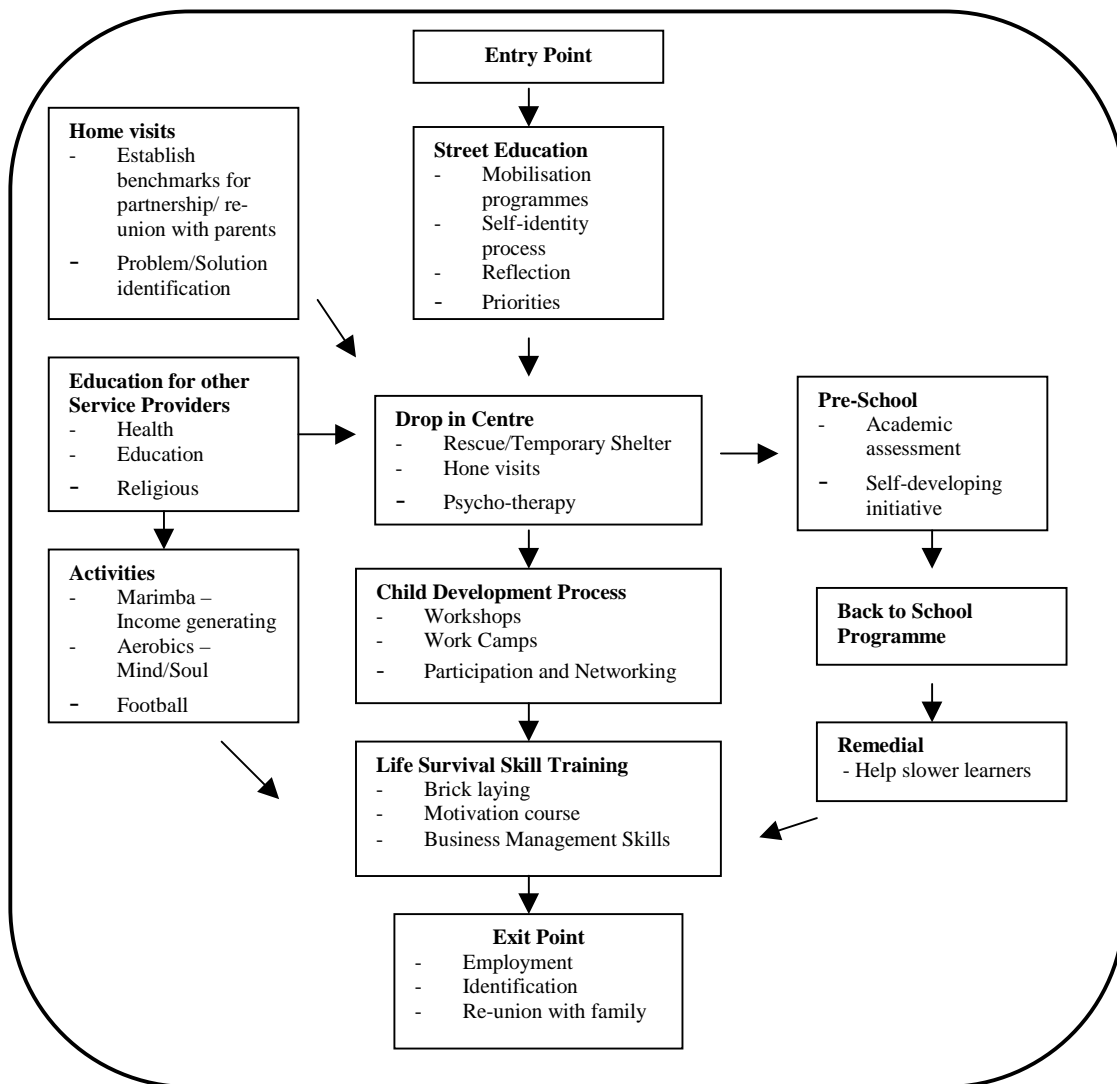
- reducing the multiple risk associated with children living and working on the street
- removing the children from the street
- rehabilitating the children
- providing the children with education

These objectives have been the guidelines of our activities covering three major components, which are:

- Rehabilitation
- Re-training
- Re-integration \Re-uniting with families

Below is the model used for the ***Tsholofelong*** programme which has made a change in the lives of many children who find themselves in very difficult circumstances and to which the communities that Botswana Council of Churches serves have responded very positively to regarding the services provided to these children.

Opposite is a graphic representation of the work with street children carried out through the ***Tsholofelong*** project:



**The 'Tsholofelong' model**

## Middle Eastern Perspective

- Alexa Abi Habib

### **'Child rights in the Middle East'**

Fifteen years have passed since the UN convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted and ratified by almost all world nations (November 1989). It was a revolution to accept children as entities and not as objects or subjects, to have all, but two, nations ratifying the convention and to consider children as equals to adults in all aspects of life. But how far have we gone to implementing the Rights of the Child in policies, legislation, attitudes and every-day life practices? Is there really the governmental understanding of and the political will to fully ensure the implementation of the Convention?

In the Middle East the concerns regarding children are common in most countries, in particular, the ratification of the UN Convention on the CRC but the consequent failure of the states to implement it. This is due to the lack of political will to place children on top of the political agenda and an ignorance as to what children's rights actually are. Budgeting for children is minimal, and social services, due to foreign economic and political intervention, fail to meet the real needs of children. Legislation has not been adequately amended and unified, and children are considered the 'property of their family, school and society. There is a general problem in the region of understanding the rights of children outside the rights of women or the rights of the family. There is first a need to acquire a perspective of the child as an individual and not as part of a family, particularly with regards to social services.

Poverty is a serious issue in most areas. The IMF and World Bank interventions in economics, globalisation and polarisation have not contributed to the well being of children, on the contrary, the policy of "less state" endorsement creates more inequality, unemployment and impoverishment. NGO's working for children often provide an excuse to governments to not do what is necessary for children. Countries in the region also face a lot of conflict of which children are often the victims. Under occupation, life and the exercising of their basic rights are even more difficult especially for children. Society needs to learn to understand the other and to try to protect children from violence and war.

The political and economic consequences of an effective implementation of the Convention are not yet realised and it is up to the civil society to raise awareness and achieve real change for the benefit of children.

### **Dignity and children's rights**

"Dignity" is the basis of all children's rights. No right can be implemented without respecting children as individuals, therefore, allowing the existence of street children in our countries constitutes a violation not only to their rights, but to their dignity and their very existence. At the same time, looking at dignity through 'church lenses', it is again the essence of existence and nobody can deny or deprive the dignity of a human being. As a conclusion of the different definitions of Human Dignity, in different theistic and non-theistic religions and in different cultures, we can say that human dignity is what brings respect and recognition. Despite diversities in terminology, notions of dignity and rights are present in and compatible with different religious and cultural traditions. This does not of course mean that the realisation of human dignity in society is automatic; it is violated grossly and systematically. In every society, community and organisation, the practice of realising human dignity is a complex process. Human dignity requires concerted action against violation in order to achieve structural enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights. A major resource for such action is people's perception and worldview, their cultures and religions.

### **The response to street children**

The term street children refers to children for whom the street more than their family has become their real home. It includes children who might not necessarily be homeless or without families, but who live in situations where there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults. Often highly mobile, street children can alternate between living on the streets and living with their families.

War, poverty, natural disasters, family disintegration, AIDS and violence are the major reasons why children live and work on the streets. They are particularly vulnerable to exploitation

and abuse, and have little opportunity to claim their rights. There is often a tendency to view street children as criminals, victims, or as free spirits but when working to improve the lives of street children, it is essential to work together with them to understand the reasons why they are on the streets or why they are at risk of finding themselves there.

Jesus set the agenda for adult/child relationships. He took children seriously, when his disciples were dismissive of them. Jesus had time for children in an age when children were to be seen but not heard. Children had no social importance, yet for Jesus they represented those most receptive to the kingdom of God. Jesus sees in the child eagerness, a sense of wonder, and an innate trust. Although children do not want to be the focus of sentimental feelings, they do want to be loved. The people we really love are the people we can really trust. Love is a real encounter between people, a real exchange. Those who work with street children also believe in the child, looking for positive qualities on which to build. This requires patience and true love: an attitude that is nothing less than the attitude of Jesus himself.

Approaches to improving the situation of street children, and sometimes also that of their families, range from the provision of basic services such as shelter, food and health, through to education and vocational training and to empowering the children through legal aid and other human rights-based interventions. NGOs, including religious organisations, are practically the only organisations that are trying to reach and help these children. However, these organisations, restricted by their financial resources, are generally able to offer only curative help. Many governments continue to respond with oppression and institutionalisation, although a few have set up special policies or departments to deal with street children. What is needed is a political commitment to improve the plight of street children, e.g. by ensuring the protection of their rights.

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### Case Study: Egypt

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Accounts given by street children themselves:

*"[The police officer] curses me and makes me stand while he hits me with a stick. When I fall to the ground he makes me stand again. He hits me all over my body-from my head to my feet."* Amal A., sixteen, Cairo, Egypt, July 17, 2002

*"The prosecutor took the police investigative report but didn't ask any questions. They didn't say what I was charged with. They just wanted to send me back to the countryside. I didn't see a judge. Only criminals see a judge."* Anwar R., fifteen, Cairo, Egypt, July 9, 2002

*"The children come in from the police stations beaten up, and tied together with ropes. They smell horrible-even the detention room downstairs smells bad and is filthy. [In the police stations] the police beat them and hang them from their feet and use electricity on them. I've seen a seven-year-old come in with his face swollen from the blows. When you ask the mukhbirin [low ranking police] who brought them about the children's condition they tell you: 'Those [children] deserve worse than that treatment. They run away and they lie.' If you ask the child, the child is afraid to talk about ill-treatment by the police because he knows he will be hit when he leaves [the social welfare experts' interview room]."* Social Welfare Expert, Cairo Juvenile Court, Cairo, Egypt, July 3, 2002

Egyptian police routinely arrest and detain children they consider "vulnerable to delinquency" or "vulnerable to danger." These children have not committed any criminal offence, and in many cases the very basis for their arrest-that they are begging, homeless, truants, or mentally ill-shows that they are in need of protection and assistance rather than punishment. In place of care they are subjected to police beatings and sexual abuse and violence; detained in unsanitary and dangerous conditions for days or weeks, often with adult criminal detainees who abuse them; and denied adequate food, water, bedding, and medical care.

The categories "vulnerable to delinquency" and "vulnerable to danger", set forth in Egypt's Child Law ostensibly to protect vulnerable children, have become a pretext for mass arrest campaigns to clear the streets of children, to obtain information from children about crimes, to force children to move on to different neighbourhoods, and to bring children in for questioning in the absence of evidence of criminal wrongdoing. The number of such arrests has sharply increased since 2000. There were more than 11,000 arrests of children on these charges in 2001 alone.

Concerted action to end abuses associated with the arrest and detention of children under these categories of the Child Law is lacking because children and their guardians have few avenues for effective legal recourse. Public prosecutors generally order children to be released without investigating police abuse and with only a cursory



review of their cases. In many instances parents don't learn their child has been arrested until the child's release; in other cases police simply return the child to the street.

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### **Case Study: Lebanon**

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Although the Government has raised the age of child employment from 8 to 13, many children, particularly in rural areas, take jobs at a young age to help support their families and often take jobs that jeopardise their safety, including in industry, car mechanic shops, and carpentry. Because of their ages, the wages earned by such children are not in conformity with labour regulations.

In lower income families, boys generally receive more education, while girls usually remain at home to perform housework. Illiteracy rates have reached 37.5 percent. In 1998 the Government enacted a law making education free and compulsory until the age of 12. However, public schools generally are inadequate, and the cost of private education is a significant problem for the middle and lower class.

There are hundreds of abandoned children in the streets nation-wide, some of whom survive by begging, others by working at low wages. In 1999 the first Centre for Street Children was opened to house and rehabilitate street children. The Centre has been active in gathering children from various regions and providing a home for them. The Centre places disabled children in institutions and refers children with police records to juvenile courts.

Juvenile delinquency is on the rise; many delinquents wait in ordinary prisons for trial and remain there after sentencing. Although their number is small, there is no adequate place to hold delinquent girls; therefore, they are held in the women's prison in Ba'abda Population under 18.

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### **MECC: Involvement in Lebanon**

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Street children in Lebanon started to be a serious social issue only at the beginning of the civil war (1975). This is when the churches felt more concerned about the problem. The Lebanese Evangelical Institute for Social Work and Development is one of few specialised church-related organisations which works with street children. The organisation gathers, with the help of security forces, all the children who are in conflict with the law, in trouble with the juvenile justice

system, homeless, street dwellers, inner city dwellers, desperately poor, or otherwise at risk have special needs for their well being. Their goals and objectives are:

- To provide children with a Home of Hope
- To improve dramatically their quality of life (health care, rehabilitation, education, skills training, cultural awareness and LOVE)
- To advocate and sponsor responsible public policy and legislation.
- To heighten awareness in society of our children's critical conditions.
- To lobby tirelessly the proper authorities that all articles of the Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Children are an intrinsic part of our laws.

A code of conduct is ruling the staff and volunteers working with street children. They are culturally sensitive to the backgrounds, needs, and preferences of street children and are committed to the highest ethical standards, excellence, professionalism and values of integrity perseverance, sacrifice, justice and equality.

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### **Churches should do more**

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Churches could do much more on this issue in areas such as:

1. Research
2. Day care centres providing food, laundry etc to street children
3. Shelters on a short term basis with simultaneous help for finding either foster homes or work that could support them
4. Educating parents and families on the matter and helping them sustain the care of their children -this could be either financial or moral help (the latter is as important!)
5. Pressing the governments towards taking measures through the social welfare systems to help street children in finding foster care or suitable jobs, protecting them against torture, exploitation etc.

No child chooses the street. The very existence of street children indicates political torpor. The United Nations Convention on CRC states (Article 39) that *'all children who have been neglected, abused or exploited should be assisted in their recovery and re-integration into society and that this should take place in an environment which fosters health, self-respect and dignity.'* Yet thousands continue to die every year.

- Joan Figueroa

### Globalisation: its impact on children

The globalisation phenomenon has already shown its effects in the lives of thousands of children. Opposite to what many of its defendants want to show, the truth is through this model poor people become poorer and the percentage of rich people becomes smaller. National gross production increases, but is kept only in a few hands. To eliminate poverty it is necessary to consider the problem not as a matter of available resources, but determined political intention to distribute them more rightfully. As in all power related issues the powerless turn out to be the most affected, and in society the least empowered sector is children. Children, without voting power, are victims of the consequences of decisions in which they can play no part.

### The neo-liberal model and children in Latin America

Organisations that promote neo-liberalism and globalisation, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, make recommendations to underprivileged countries that are focused on the reduction of the social cost. This means to reduce the State's expenses, for example, on education or health services, areas that have a direct effect on children's lives:

*"In neo-liberalism, health is a business and no longer a social service, much less a human right or a universal human need. Education and attention to children and the elderly are no longer social, public or state responsibility. The state is required to renounce social responsibility and withdraw from all functions and duties to citizens once derived from a sense of responsibility towards the common good. These social functions must now be attended to by efficient businesses that charge for their services and obtain profits from these services. The result is that the majority of people who do not have money to pay the high costs of the private health care are condemned to death; those human beings who for diverse reasons cannot pay for education or to obtain their own means of making a living are abandoned to their own fate".* (Latin American Council of Churches, CLAI. (2003). *A Voice from the Churches*. Faith, Economy and Society Program. Ecuador)

The real access that a child from a family in need has to education or health services is almost none and is worse if the child lives on the street. The excessive cost of medicines causes the death of many children. Pharmaceuticals keep patents in order to make more profits over medicines and eliminate the possibility of making generic ones at more affordable prices. The most impressive cases are the ones where very high cost medicines are needed for treatment or prevention of illnesses such as HIV/AIDS or cancer.

Another aspect of the neo-liberal system is the promotion of free-trade regions. In the Latin American experience, this has been tested between the United States, Canada and Mexico, resulting in more powerful transnational companies, and more fragile national economies. Family-owned businesses become bankrupt, parents become frequently unemployed and migrate as a solution. The number of one parent families grows and with that the amount of unattended children. The family has decayed because of the pressure that is exerted on it by globalisation and its neo-liberal political, social and economical system. Desperate parents are deceived, and with the promise of an amount of money, their children are taken away from home to "work", but later it is known that they have been induced to extremely dangerous, undignified or humiliating forms of work.. The violent situations inside and outside the family have a terrible effect on children, and make thousands of them children at risk. *"The result of all this is greater personal confinement, an individualism that is greater each day; a loss of the human values of shared living, mutual respect and solidarity that are so important in the life of a healthy society. The crisis of the family has much to do with all this. For parents, it is more difficult every day to show their children a way of life that is ethically coherent with the values of the Gospel"* (Idem)

Two of the most dramatic effects that can be seen in Latin America, are the sexual abuse and exploitation networks and the formation of juvenile gangs. The trafficking of children for sexual trade has become a modern type of slavery. The Internet promotes our countries as "excellent places" for sexual entertainment and the weak political determination that national governments have to restrain this situation makes them an easy target for sexual tourism. Nevertheless, what really make our children

vulnerable to sexual exploitation are the difficult situations at home which are produced by this model in different ways. Most of the children who living on streets have experienced some kind of violence in their own homes and have been abused by a family member or someone close leave home and are sexually exploited as teenagers. The Family environment is often a hazardous place to be and the street is seen as the only alternative.

Once in the street, there are many dangers that threaten children's lives. The juvenile gangs, in Central America called "maras", are an increasing trend in our Continent. The gangs provide to its members a sense of protection, belonging and identity, things that children are supposed to find at home. There are no appropriate investigations about the juvenile gangs' activities, but the worst outcomes reported are the extra-judicial execution cases. Many of these executions are done by unidentified persons, an easy reason to attribute them to confrontation among "maras" instead of the real perpetrators, sometimes civilians or police. The media gives a lot of exposure to this type of news, and causes the impression that the lack of security in the cities is a problem mainly caused by teenagers. Also, there is an explicit campaign against these groups. Some important people in Honduras have predisposed public opinion against these children, stating that the "maras" should be eliminated from society. These statements trivialise violence against these children and incite people, implicitly, to kill them as well. The truth is that there are juvenile gangs, but that does not justify extra-judicial executions by the police or any other civilian, and worst, to leave them unpunished. This phenomenon is typical of urban areas, and two of the largest cities in the world are located in Latin America, Sao Paulo and Mexico City.

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### **The Church's role**

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The Churches' work with children is a huge challenge. Many have a long experience trying to diminish adverse situations that street children experience every day through establishing nurseries, day care and after school services, health and nutritional services.

Churches are avid to learn effective ways to respond to children's issues. It is important to recognise that the perspective of making responses based on a state of rights, instead of on a state of charity, is something that Churches are increasingly developing. The World Council of Churches has made a great contribution in this

direction by making possible the exchange of information and experiences based on this perspective among Churches and social organisations. Church members are starting to go to seminars and workshops sponsored by the government in order to be more prepared to deal with the work. A theological interpretation of the Children's Rights Convention would help the Churches to find a connection between God's will and the dignity that all children should have. Also, it will help Churches to loose some existing "fears" of "outside Church" thinking. Some steps have been already taken in this respect. There have been initiatives toward this in our region through publications of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), and recently through a Consultation of Latin American Theologians to outline a framework toward a children's theology.

Churches can be helped to identify by themselves the resources they have available that can contribute to facilitating better living conditions for the children of its communities. The greatest asset that churches have is its human resource. Churches could empower this resource through capacity building and organisation. Other important resources that churches have are their physical facilities; many of them include areas big enough to have groups of children attend or to give workshops for the whole community. In one way or another, the churches have a direct contact with the communities where they are located. The next step could come in the sense of transforming that relationship into one of service based on the community's needs.

In general terms, churches can orient themselves better regarding the concepts that scaffold working with children from a rights' perspective. To be efficient and effective in a mission like that, it is necessary to focus our area of work. The UN identified four priority areas as the most important ones to improve in the coming years. Maybe churches do not have enough capacity to manage all of them at the same time, but, if it is agreed to put all necessary effort to improving at least one of them, we could see a great contribution *through* churches in behalf of children. It is used the term "*through*" and not "*from*" because this should be an effort of the whole community, including parents, extended family, educators, and children themselves.

## Street Children and Juvenile Justice Reform

- Anees Jillani

The street children phenomenon has become an integral part of the urban scene in most developing countries. Rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, urban and rural poverty and socio-economic pressure are the major causes for the growth of street children problems. Street children are those for whom the street, more than their family has become their real home. UNICEF has categorised street children under three categories:

- -Children on the street with continuous family contact
- -Children on the street with occasional contact with families
- -Children who live on the street on their own (the abandoned and orphaned children).

Although one, or a combination of propelling factors, such as ill treatment by a parent or an adversity like seasonal drought, may have forced a child onto the streets, this reaction at the micro level is the result of numerous causes at the macro level. Larger social, economic and political forces combine to marginalise children and bring them to a city's streets: an economic atmosphere which pushes a section of our society to the edges, a political agenda that is based on tokenism and a strata of society, which is increasingly splintering in the course of its struggle for survival. Developing states have approached the concept of development with a restricted focus on urbanisation which leads to a breakdown of the family structure, social tensions and upheavals driving children to urban streets. Street children are a result of this breakdown. They represent a critique of the way society is structured, challenging a development model that views some people as dispensable.

### Means of sustenance

Street children are employed in the informal sector. Their main occupations are picking rag/scrap, carrying loads, and unloading lorries, casual labour, vending goods, shoe shining and other such jobs requiring little or no skills. Their working hours show wide fluctuations: some occupations being possible only in the early mornings or late evenings, e.g. selling newspaper, flowers, etc. Most street children however work fairly long hours (8 to 10 hours). The occupational mobility of street children is limited due to a lack of education, skills, training, finance or even

guidance and help. Street children are not only without a childhood but have limited prospects of a better future.

Street children's earnings are not regular. Engaged in a day-to-day survival scenario, street children develop the resourcefulness, self-reliance, independence and survival skills in an unfriendly and unsupportive street and general environment. They hardly have any savings and do not usually keep money on themselves for fear of losing it to the older boys. Therefore, they prefer to spend most of what they earn. An alarming majority of runaway children are either turning to or are forced into prostitution.

### Convention on the Rights of the Child

The CRC is the most widely signed and ratified Convention in the world. The very act of ratification entails the acceptance by the State to conform with the CRC and to modify its policies and laws to be in harmony with the spirit and the provisions of the Convention. With the CRC, the concept of child rights evolved beyond the basic concept of protection into a much broader spectrum of civil, economic, social and cultural rights. It was the first time that the international community was able to lay a bridge across the ideological gap that has traditionally separated civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights on the other. In the interest of children, East-West and North-South differences regarding these two sets of rights were overcome and consensus language found to accommodate different views regarding the responsibilities of the State, the community, the family and the individual towards the young. This holistic view underlines the indivisibility of children's rights.

States Parties to the CRC are bound to enforce its provisions. The majority of the states have unfortunately failed to do so in spite of the fact that sincere implementation could bring about revolutionary changes in the lives of not only the children but also the adults.

Although the whole of the CRC is relevant to an extent for purposes of discussing street children, Article 4 particularly requires State Parties to undertake all appropriate legislative,

administrative, and other measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation. Article 19 is particularly relevant in that it requires State Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Articles 23 of the CRC recognises that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. In this regard, it emphasises the importance of the spirit of international co-operation, the exchange of appropriate information in the field of preventive health care and of medical, psychological and functional treatment of disabled children, including dissemination of and access to information concerning methods of rehabilitation, education and vocational services, with the aim of enabling State Parties to improve their capabilities and skills and to widen their experience in these areas.

Furthermore, the CRC gives every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and to take the necessary measures to achieve the full realisation of this right in accordance with their national law. However, the benefits should, where appropriate, be granted, taking into account the resources and the circumstances of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child, as well as any other consideration relevant to an application for benefits made by or on behalf of the child.

Article 27 also recognises the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. There is no doubt that parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development. However, the CRC expects the States Parties in accordance with national conditions and within their means, to take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and in case of need provide material assistance and support programs, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Article 32, which can be said to deal directly with child labour, requires the State to protect the child from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Article 36 reinforces this stipulation by laying down that the States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

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### **Domestic law and street children**

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The British during their colonial rule in the Indian Subcontinent brought their legal norms with them. South Asia being one of the poorest regions of the world has an enormous number of homeless wanderers without means of livelihood. The British introduced the European Vagrancy Act as early as 1874. The most important provision that remains in force in Pakistan and continues to be widely used is Section 55 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898 (Act No V). It authorises any officer-in-charge of a police station (SHO) to arrest:

- (a) *any person found taking precautions to conceal his presence within the limits of such station, under circumstances which afford reason to believe that he is taking such precautions with a view to committing a cognisable offence; or*
- (b) *any person within the limits of such station who has no ostensible means of subsistence, or who cannot give a satisfactory account of himself.*

This is a sweeping power given to the police authorities to pick up any poor person roaming on the streets of Pakistan. Sections 109 and 110(f) of the Code of Criminal Procedure give similar power to a District Magistrate, Sub-Divisional Magistrate or Magistrate of the First Class. This law was enacted more than a century ago and the lawmakers were obviously colonial masters. There was nothing stopping them from revising both of the above harsh provisions but no one has ever bothered. Laws such as this result in street children becoming mostly victims of extortion; and verbal and physical harassment. The police are the most commonly mentioned negative figures that create difficulties for these street people in some form or the other. Young women and girls also claimed to be harassed by passer-byes or customers. During research done by SPARC recently, only a few children mentioned being

taken to a police station, but none discussed any charge inflicted on them.

In two cases, one young boy and the other an older woman disclosed being sent to jail without any charge and being kept in illegal confinement for more than a week. There was a general consensus that in such cases, the police are not interested in pressing charges, but are blatant in extorting cash from their victims. A female beggar thus said that *"policemen, probably think that we have lots of money, that is why they catch us. I think another problem is that they want to prove their power to us."* In one incident, a young beggar woman narrated an incident regarding her encounter with the police when *"three policemen picked me up and took me to the police station. They made me stark naked first, and then raped me until the evening. Then they released me. I can never forget this and nor can I ever forget their faces."*

A significant number of interviewed children had also spent nights in police stations because they or their families did not have sufficient cash to get them released. Some others claimed that their families had had to borrow from money lenders to get out of such situations. This borrowed amount is loaned at high profit rates, which becomes a life long burden for the family which is unable to pay it back for years. A young beggar had to spend four days in the police station. *"They put me in with other adult inmates, who kept asking me to massage them. My father managed to get me released on the fourth day after paying the police, which he borrowed from a money lender. We are still trying to repay the amount"*, the boy said with tears in his eyes.

Besides snatching cash, other common forms of police harassment include physical violence, humiliating attitude and foul language. It is a common complaint by almost all that the police take away the street folks' money and also beat them up. It is a general impression among the persons interviewed by SPARC that police do not press any charges against the vagrants and usually only catch them to extort money. *"Police only likes bribes. If one does not bribe them, they not only beat us up, but can also send us to jail,"* a young vendor told one of our interviewers. Many a times, the police force comes into action whenever there is an operation 'clean-up' that requires the city streets to be cleaned from all menace. Sometimes, the regular police staff are assisted by a special police force.

The more street-wise, those exposed to the street culture for a considerable length of time, either

adapt or resign themselves to the atrocities committed by the police or other such obstacles. Children on the streets generally avoid contact with the police and run away or conceal themselves somewhere as soon as they see a policeman at close range. Otherwise, left with no option, the majority handle it quite practically. If the policeman comes and asks for tea, he is given cash and he usually leaves the subject alone. Some young boys interviewed by SPARC narrated stories of resistance that resulted in painful consequences, leaving the victim with a lesson for lifetime. *"A policeman caught me in a bazaar and demanded money. I refused to give him my money; in return he beat me up brutally. I did not go to work for three or four days. Since then, I have never resisted a policeman's demand,"* a young balloon seller told SPARC.

It is no wonder that not one single child that SPARC has ever talked to has anything positive to say about the police or its attitude. The police are perceived as corrupt and unreasonable, with the sole aim of extorting money from their victims. The police, on the other hand, justify their actions on the pretext that working on the streets is the first step towards crime. The reason for inflicting charges on such people, according to the law-enforcers, is that they are the prime suspects for pick pocketing, theft, drug trafficking and prostitution. Anyone who tries to avoid contact with police can be a suspect for having intentions of creating a law and order situation on the streets.

SPARC's interviews with the police authorities reveal that as a rule, people detained under section 55 of the Code of Criminal Procedure do not require a FIR (First Information Report). They are instead booked under a *Qalandra* which is a charge sheet for reporting purposes, as a prevention measure and a warning to the detained person. The *Qalandra* is presented to the Magistrate who can give a warning to the detainee and release him or her after getting the necessary bonds executed; if the person concerned is ordered to execute bail bonds and he or she is unable to secure the necessary sureties, which incidentally is likely to happen in the case of almost all poor children, then the person concerned is sent to jail. Once in jail, the incarcerated persons then have to wait for the Deputy Commissioner's orders given every fortnightly or so to release all those prisoners who have been arrested for petty crimes or on vagrancy charges. For children under 14 years, usually a warning is given by the police official in charge and they are discharged from the station and no further action is carried out in such cases. However, in many cases, they have also been sent

in jail and can be seen in several prisons in the country.

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## Lessons and recommendations

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To strike the balance between the needs of law enforcement on the one hand and the protection of the citizen from oppression and injustice at the hands of the law enforcement machinery on the other, is a perennial problem of statecraft. The number of poverty-stricken masses in developing countries is increasing on a daily basis. It is obviously not feasible for the State to abolish poverty overnight. The least it can do, however, is to ease the suffering the poor. Laws like sections 55, 109 and 110(f) of the Code of Criminal Procedure should be abolished.

A child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual nature as well as nurture revolves around its access to the basic needs of health, shelter, education, recreation and protection. Being essential for the child's growth, basic needs have been recognised by some development workers as human rights. This truism is now universally acknowledged by the CRC. Street children by this measure are the most marginalised section of society as they often fall outside the remit of the State's delivery system for education, health and legislative protection. The elevation of basic needs to human rights means that a dual role, of welfare doers and transformative agents, has to be played out. Street children have to be empowered to articulate their requirements and determine the procedures to attain them. It will mark the difference between empty posturing of rights through sit-ins, marches and the like and a genuine rights philosophy that inheres in the socio-political economic scenario and demands accountability from the State.

The absence of support systems arises due to the street child's defiance of adult order and consistency in living independently. The State and society answers this challenge to conventional norms through punitive action. Street children are confined to institutions whose prison-like conditions embitter them and make them susceptible to criminalising tendencies. Night-shelters, halfway homes, and drop-in centres run by NGOs are models which demonstrate to the State how to treat street children humanely. Shelters create a space, where the mobile street child can stay momentarily, by acting as a contact point. It then expands in response to the child's needs of education, health, vocational training over a period of time. To give them a stake in the

shelter, contributions in cash for the services offered to street children are encouraged by some NGOs to reaffirm their independence. The need for discipline can be met by consensus group decision-making on the running of the shelter.

Cultural norms legitimise the existence of child labour and the State often desists from intervening, placing its onus on the family. In this scenario, campaigns and movements to eradicate child labour should treat street children as a separate category of child labourers. Children of the street, shifting constantly to flee police abuse and victimisation by street gangs are forced to undertake whatever job is available, like rag picking or shoe shining, which brings intermittent earnings. This insecurity affects their saving capacity and money is spent on food, drugs, movies and commercial sex. Children on the street but with living with their families and with a support system to fall upon are more likely to be able to access education while labouring for their families, who see them as marketable. Street children fall prey to bonded conditions in the unregulated, informal, unorganised sector where they must submit to long hours of work in suffocating surroundings without wages or holidays. The fulfilment of street children's rights to a better quality of life will necessitate the initiative to eradicate child labour.

Children of the street are more likely to initially prefer education in terms of contact, skills and information for daily survival, but on growing older they may opt for formal/night schooling and even higher education. A plan of action should be wary of creating an inducement for child labour while offering education in combination with vocational training. In order to pre-empt disintegration of the family, the bonds between the child, family and community must be strengthened. They can be counselled on the benefits of education and the formal school system's rigid rules of admission could be relaxed. Street children should be made aware of the link between child labour and future adult unemployment arising from physical debilitation and lack of skills. Attaining this goal would entail, besides interacting directly with street children, the lobbying of the State to actualise its commitments and a change in public perception of child labour as a natural concomitant of childhood. NGOs should liaise with the media and government agencies, and network effectively with urban and rural groups to integrate development programmes to fulfil the Rights of the Child.

As a top priority, it is vitally important to establish a universal age and then treat all people below that age as children, regardless of their vocation, social status, geographical location and other variables. The dilemma of a uniform age limit for children needs to be settled urgently for it has profound consequences. In the long term it will help in gradually improving the attitude of adults. As a signatory to the CRC, the State has a fundamental duty and bears the primary responsibility to protect children from being on the street. Much legal framework does not guarantee street children the child friendly, gender sensitive approach and treatment necessary to prevent further trauma and abuse.

- Existing laws should be reviewed in the light of the CRC and other relevant international instruments, where necessary revisions should be undertaken and new laws should be introduced.
- In addition to legal reform, efforts at effective law enforcement should be strengthened and adequate financial resources should be allocated for effectual implementation of laws.
- There is a need for a code of conduct for shelters.
- Laws need to be put in place to restrict child labour in areas, which remain outside existing legislation.
- Police must be made to register cases of missing children reported to them, so that records exist for future reference.
- A strategy should be developed to mobilise communities to develop their own vigilance systems for preventing children from working on streets and to provide them alternatives.
- Every child must be provided compulsory primary education and health cover.
- Raising awareness amongst the public at large through media about the rights of children, violations of their rights and the risks to which street children are exposed.
- Awareness raising through traditional and performing arts.
- Maximise opportunities for quality education as means for improving children's status and ability to secure their future.
- Allocation for better funds and social services for street children.
- Invest in strengthening economic security of poor and marginalised families, in order to offer viable alternative sources of income.



## **Towards an Ecumenical Agenda to Promote the Dignity and Rights of Children**

*- Josef P. Widyatmadja*

### **The situation of children in Asia**

Abject poverty and malnutrition, sexual abuse, child labour, the trafficking of children, drugs and substance abuse, armed conflicts, violence against children, HIV-AIDS, lack of legal protection mechanisms, etc., are all problems which confront Asia's children today. The negative impact of globalisation, especially the process of economic globalisation, the liberalisation of markets, and the trade and investment policies of different Asian governments accelerate these present miseries of Asian children. The Asian economic crisis that erupted in 1997 impacted the life of children in manifold ways. As Asian countries continue to face economic turmoil and are plunged into increasing foreign debts, Asian children also continue to suffer from government policies which withdraw food, health and educational subsidies.

Poverty and ignorance are considered to be the most important factors that drive children in Asia into the sex market. Many children are sexually exploited and trafficked in the Asian region. The number of children who are spending their childhood in the streets is also increasing in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and China. The sale and trafficking of children for sexual exploitation, pornography and forced labour have also become serious concerns. Asia has become a safe haven for thousands of paedophiles from developed countries who target children in countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia.

The ethnic, religious and communal conflict and civil war in countries such as Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Philippines, Indonesia, and Myanmar have affected the future of millions of children. The bombing in Afghanistan and Iraq has killed and maimed thousands of innocent children. More than half of the population of children in Sri Lanka have also become victims of the on-going civil war. The conflict at Mindanao in the Philippines, and the increasing militarisation in Indonesia, India Nepal and Pakistan, have displaced and traumatised thousands of children. Compounding to these acts of cruelty, the use of children in active war has increased in several

Asian nations including Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Philippines.

Although all Asian governments have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, they continued to join the bandwagon of the globalisation process, thus depriving the rights of the future generation. Many churches in Asia have been silent when it comes to the point of addressing the issues of children. On the other hand, those who are concerned have minimised their approach to acts of charity alone in order to address the problems of children. The charity approach however has proved to be a failure to address the grave situations that children face and thus there is an urgent need for the churches and ecumenical agencies to rethink their traditional approach of charity in order to be engaged in a relevant mission to respond to the cries of millions of Asian children. The creation of a relevant mission approach for children is an urgent priority of the Asian churches and ecumenical movement.

### **Church's response**

The global ecumenical movement has been addressing the issues facing children in different ways. Since the 1998 WCC Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, the ability of member churches and other ecumenical organisations to mobilise themselves on the issue of children has become more evident.

In Asia, the Christian Conference of Asia in association with the World Council of Churches organised a Consultation on 'Affirming Fullness of Life and Dignity of Children in Asia', which was held in Bangkok in November 2001. Representatives of various churches, and ecumenical organisations in Asia who are particularly concerned about issues related to the rights and dignity of children attended this consultation. The consultation was held in the context of the growing uncertainties and fearful anxieties regarding the future of millions of children brought about by the global crisis. The participants shared their concerns, and analysed the situation of children in different Asian countries. Stories revealed that children living in extreme conditions are not an anomaly of certain nations, but a general feature of both the so-called

developed and the developing world. In addition, during 2002-2003 CCA/WCC in co-operation with National Councils in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have conducted National Consultations on the Dignity of Children.

The Bangkok Consultation on the Dignity of Children in Asia adopted plans and programmes to expand activities at the national and sub-regional level. The *Communiqué* of the Consultation said: *"We have heard of all these problems children in Asia are faced with. The day to day life situation of these children destroys their dignity and fullness of life."* The Bangkok Consultation decided to empower Asian churches on the crucial issues affecting the future generation. In order to achieve the objectives, the consultation formulated several programmes and made plans to mobilise the Asian churches and ecumenical bodies to address the issues related with children. Some of the recommendations of the consultation are:

- to empower churches to reflect upon the rights of children and to implement appropriate measures to work especially with marginalised children,
- to find creative ways for member churches and ecumenical organisations to advocate the rights of children within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- to develop appropriate national and regional structures to work with children by incorporating such experiences at local, national and sub-regional levels.
- to analyse the recent developments with regard to children in the light of the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children.

The Mission of the Church needs to be informed by the demand to provide a rightful place for children. It is not only because they create the history of tomorrow but civility is defined by one's attitude to the weaker and minority sections of society.

The network is already being built, but the ecumenical movements shall identify many ways to construct it. We could build our network through communication, sharing information, exchange experience and personnel, solidarity and action together. We need to use our network where children or children's organisations may make their voices heard in churches and society. Mission based on people's perspective should expand their focus from an exclusive approach for children of one's own church or community to children of one nation, region and the whole globe.

In Kuala Lumpur, the South-East Asia Christian Network for the Dignity of Children was established in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia in 2002. Other sub regions need to be encouraged in the future. We need to develop and strengthen this network in coming future.

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### Challenge to the churches

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In the coming future, the situation of children especially children in Asia will become more vulnerable. Impacts of debt, social adjustment policy, liberation of the market, war on terror and religious conflict will bring more children to become social victims. The scarcity of resources also becomes a stumbling block to serve street children. The number of street children and child labourers will increase in the coming future due to the ideology of development. Economic growth sacrifices children as in the engine of development. Many governments have ignored the rights of street children to assess education, health and social right. Only by organising a world campaign and local action initiatives could we bring a better future for street children. Churches need to work together in responding to the cry of children through:

1. Giving priority to the comprehensive service to children in need at local and national level.
2. Educating congregations and communities on the dignity and rights of children especially that children are the future generation of churches and country
3. Working closely with NGOs from different back-grounds in uplifting the dignity and rights of children.
4. Strengthening an ecumenical network on the dignity of children at national, sub regional, regional and global through exchange resources and visits, training and advocacy.
5. Developing theological and Biblical reflections on the dignity of children
6. Allocating a special ecumenical fund and task force for the dignity and rights of children for better future at all levels.

## GROUP SESSIONS

Participants were split up into three groups to look at the topic of '*Globalisation and its Impact on the Rights of Children*' with each group exploring a different entry point into this topic. Summaries of the group discussions and each group's action plan proposals are below:

1. **The Right to Protection** - lead by Godsen Mohandoss with Clarissa Chang
2. **The Right to Survival** – lead by John Eter with Linda Banks
3. **The Right to Development** – lead by David Maidment with Belinda Bennet

### Group One – The Right to Protection

This group divided its initial discussions into three areas:

#### A. How/Who

The group looked at how street children's right to protection is violated such as during the following: discrimination, abuse and emergency situations. They discussed who should make certain that children's rights are upheld, which included families, civil society, the state and the child his/herself.

#### B. Causes

The group listed the following as causes for a child's right to protection being violated:

1. Poverty
2. AIDS
3. Illiteracy
4. Ill Treatment
5. Dysfunctional Families
6. Teachers' Attitudes
7. Neglected Children
8. State Policies
9. Gender Inequalities

#### C. Approaches

Thirdly this group began to discuss possible approaches and strategies to aim at affirming the right of children to protection in a globalising world. They summarised these as follows:

1. Prevention
2. Intervention
3. CRC Documentation
4. National Policies
5. Church/Religious Policies
6. Gender Empowerment

### Action Plan Summary (Group 1)

#### Local Level

- Resource mobilisation
- Awareness raising of Child Rights
- Formation of peer groups
- Skills training on street children for police/armed forces
- Legal aid for street children
- Counselling centres
- Mobile vans/ Shelters

#### National/International Level

- Resource and mass mobilisation
- Evolve Church child rights policies
- National lobbying (e.g. through INGOs)
- Advocacy campaign for sensitisation
- National alternative reports for CRC
- Gender Empowerment
- Consultations on Street Children
- Networking of churches, movements, organisations

### Group Two – The Right to Survival

The group discussed a definition for survival and found that it was more than simply providing for a child's physical needs. They looked particularly at six factors which are listed by the UN as the essential for a child's survival which will put the child in a position to develop. The participants in the group wished to add another category – spirituality as they felt that none of the other categories sufficiently covered this. The group discussed the meaning of each category and gave examples of what was needed to make sure this area of the right to survival was upheld. The following is a summary of these discussions:

#### Action Plan Summary (Group 2)

##### Local

- Week of Prayer
- Family Enrichment
- Networking
- Emergency Fund
- Encounters and Exposure
- CRC Awareness
- Involve Congregations

##### National

- Policy Development
- Peers Workers' Groups
- Lobbying Governments
- Data and research
- Consultations for: children
- Theological Awareness

##### Regional/Global

- Networking
- Resource Sharing
- Financing
- Compiling materials
- Best practices
- Providing trainers for national level training

1. **Physical** - access to food, air, shelter, water, medical care, clothing, good hygiene, touch, sleep and exercise.
2. **Mental** - the need for mental space, acceptance, confidence, an identity and security, the acknowledgement of a child's resilience (see Brother James' presentation)
3. **Emotional** - being able to adopt to different situations
4. **Cognitive** - schooling/education/intellectual development
5. **Social** - family, other relationships outside the family, leisure, recreation, community
6. **Cultural** - leisure, nationality, ethnicity, religion
- (7. **Spiritual** - added by the group as some thought that it should be a separate category and should include in its definition aspects of faith, hope, values, inner-strength)

The group realised that it became difficult to define those areas towards the end of the list and there was much overlap

as to what should go where. They observed that it was rare to think of other areas of street children's survival apart from physical needs. Street children were probably very developed emotionally but that in other aspects their right to survival was usually being violated.

## Group Three - The Right to Development

This group considered the following questions. Their responses are summarised below:

### ***1. Is the Church, through ignorance or prejudice, inhibiting any of the development rights for street children?***

The group felt that there was prejudice against street children as the Church is often too inward-looking and needs to recognise the potential of each street child and their rights. There is a lack of human rights orientation in the Church and churches tend to support 'projects', but without long term development support or principles. In other words, the Church needs to move from a protectionist approach to a more inter-dependent approach, rather than a dependent one.

### ***2. Which development rights might the Church have special responsibility for?***

Sunday Schools are not enough, but many Church communities do not do anything outside of Sunday Schools. More emphasis needed to be put on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and that the Church should work more on a theological framework for child rights. They were also wary that discussions at a high level often did not reach the grass roots level and so suggested training in theological colleges, of pastors and Sunday School teachers etc. as a key to advocating the rights of children.

### ***3. How do we mobilise the world Church to care? Can we engage idealism of other children?***

The Church should use young people to educate/sensitise adults on such issues. Work on children's issues should be carried out with families and communities. The group suggested that Christians should be stimulated to seek vocations in secular jobs that influence children's development, such as the police, social work, businesses etc. There was the urge for the Church to be seen as an active advocate for children's rights both on an international and local level.

### ***4. Can we work together with other faiths on this issue? How?***

The group identified this as a big challenge for the Church and felt that the Church often works together FOR other people but not WITH others. They questioned how 'communal' the Church actually is and whether the Christian community's prime motivation for working with children was a genuine concern for children or the wish to promote its faith? The Church should learn from the best practices of other faiths.

### ***5. How do we persuade governments to make these rights real for street children?***

It was also observed that to challenge governments, there needs to be deep knowledge of existing laws and constitutions. Thorough data and research needs to be carried out in order to make a good argument. It was also suggested that the Church play a role in making the children's agenda a priority at election times. Work with the government does not necessarily need to be confrontational but a co-operational approach is also an option. The group suggested that networking with secular like-minded NGOs on this issue was important. There was discussion about the possible use of 'cost-benefit' analysis as an advocacy tool for lobbying governments to run good development programmes for children. There was also the suggestion that some positive aspects of globalisation could be used when lobbying for the realisation of child rights, such as the existence of and access to widespread knowledge and the possibility of international networking.

### **Action Plan Summary (Group 3)**

- 1. Awareness Raising**
  - A. Through training for pastors, youth workers, Sunday School teachers etc by:**
    - Research/Gathering existing materials
    - A Team to prepare new materials
    - Preparing a syllabus on child rights
    - Including stories of street children
  - B. Best Practices**
    - Churches should look at each others' best practices
- 2. Special Day/Week for Child Rights**
  - Fact Sheets
  - Prayers
  - Readings/Sermons/Sunday School Lessons etc.
  - Possible Christmas Theme
  - Media Activity for publicity and awareness of issues
- 3. Twinning of Churches**
  - North/South Dialogue or within region
- 4. Research Other Faith Perspectives on Child Rights**
  - Find common ground
  - Joint programmes/ advocacy
- 5. WCC to Provide a Monitoring Mechanism to take the Action Plans from this Consultation Forward**
  - resources, deadlines, personnel etc.

## ACTION PLAN

During a plenary session, the participants discussed the suggestions from the three groups and formulated with the following **action plan for an ecumenical agenda to promote the dignity and rights of children**.

Please note that this action plan as presented below is a **recommendation** and that further follow-up and consideration will be needed for it to be effectively incorporated into the actual programmatic plans of the ecumenical bodies concerned. As a result the action plan is presented in a general, global way and is expected to be adapted to regional and organisational specifics in the future. The 'specific action points' are more detailed suggestions for the implementation of each proposed section of the action plan and tend to refer to the **WCC 'Dignity of Children' Programme**, implemented through the WCC Regional Desks which are part of the WCC Diakonia and Solidarity Team.

### A. Advocacy on Children's Rights and Dignity Issues

**MAIN AIM** –to deepen ecumenical understanding and awareness of children's rights issues

1. **Observance of a 'Day' or 'Week'** by ecumenical bodies in order to highlight and raise awareness on a specific issue related to children's rights and dignity each year.
2. **Resource mobilisation** through
  - a. research/gathering existing materials on child rights and CRC
  - b. compilation and distribution of materials to ecumenical network
  - c. preparation of new materials/syllabi on child rights e.g. Bible studies
3. **Child rights training with a theological emphasis** through
  - a. national level training for pastors/youth workers/Sunday School teachers on child rights issues and CRC
  - b. distribution of materials on child rights e.g. for Bible studies
4. **Child rights policies** for churches

#### **SPECIFIC ACTION POINTS for 2004 :**

1. After research and consultation with other ecumenical bodies, WCC to decide on a 'day'/'week' for the ecumenical network to support (such as November 20<sup>th</sup> – UN Children's Day). The WCC will then produce materials to facilitate world wide ecumenical involvement advocacy 'day'/'week'.
2. WCC and regional and national ecumenical bodies to encourage and support member NCCs and churches to develop child rights policies.
3. Through networks (see action point B), WCC to research existing materials for use by churches on child rights, programme best practices and the CRC with the view to compiling it and distributing it to ecumenical partners with a view to national networks to organising child rights training events and to promote the use of child rights materials.

### B. Networking

**MAIN AIM** –to strengthen and empower ecumenical involvement in affirming children's dignity and rights

1. Between **churches, NGOs and other ecumenical bodies** through
  - a. national, regional, sub-regional and inter-regional consultations.
  - b. information and resource sharing, e.g. of examples of best practices
2. With **inter-faith organisations** through
  - a. increased involvement with the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC)
  - b. finding common ground to increase number of joint programmes and advocacy/lobbying
  - c. facilitating together a seminar at WSF 2005 on children's rights from an inter-faith perspective to build on seminar held in WSF 2004

3. With the **UN and other INGOs** through
  - a. strengthening the link between ecumenical bodies and the UN CRC process through increased participation in the NGO Group on the CRC
  - b. identifying INGOs who work on similar issues of interest in view of joining them in lobbying governments on implementing the CRC

**SPECIFIC ACTION POINTS for 2004:**

1. WCC to support current 'Dignity of Children' networks by:
  - a. organising current national and regional 'Dignity of Children' network consultations
  - b. an inter-regional consultation
  - c. continuing and expanding e-mail information distribution lists and to publish Asian mapping project with a view to doing a similar project in other regions
2. WCC and regional ecumenical bodies to look in to setting up new ecumenical regional networks, such as in Eastern Europe and Africa.
3. WCC to be part of facilitating an inter-faith seminar at WSF 2005
4. WCC to become more involved in the NGO Group on the CRC to deepen ecumenical participation in the CRC process both internationally and nationally

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## C. Self-Advocacy for Children

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**MAIN AIM** –to empower children to advocate for their rights and to empower the ecumenical movement to support children in this role

1. **Resource mobilisation** through
  - a. research/compilation/distribution of exiting Sunday School material and materials on how to involve children ethically in advocacy
  - b. preparation of new materials for Sunday Schools, school classes and for best practices in involving children in advocacy etc.
2. **Consultations for children** such as
  - a. national, regional, sub-regional and inter-regional consultations
  - b. enlisting the expertise of relevant NCCs/INGOs etc, in facilitating these consultations, for example encouraging children to be involved in work with GNRC

**SPECIFIC ACTION POINTS for 2004 :**

1. WCC/CCA to encourage and support member NCCs and churches to compile, disseminate and prepare Sunday School materials on children's rights
2. NCCs, national networks, churches and local NGOs to organise child rights consultations specifically for children and to encourage meaningful participation of children in other consultations on children's issues.

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## D. Follow-up of Action Plan

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**MAIN AIM** – to provide a mechanism to ensure monitoring and follow-up of this Consultation and Action Plan

**SPECIFIC ACTION POINTS for 2004 :**

1. WCC to write report of Consultation to be distributed to participants and the wider ecumenical network
2. WCC to implement, and monitor such implementation, of the recommendations in this Action Plan.
3. Conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Action Plan at the Inter-Regional Consultation in 2005.

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