



United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child  
**Day of General Discussion on**  
**“Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood”**  
17 September 2004

**Introductory Remarks**  
**María Francisca Ize-Charrin, OHCHR**

Mr. Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentleman,

I am grateful to the Committee on the Rights of the Child for organizing this day of general discussion on the theme of “Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood”. The High Commissioner, Ms. Arbour, deeply regrets that she is not able to open herself the proceedings of such an important event as she is currently out of Geneva.

Allow me to say a few words on today’s event. This is the 14th general discussion day that this Committee has organized. I am impressed by the impact of these thematic debates, which have generated many new activities and important decisions. These include the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and, more recently, the UN Study on Violence against Children and four general comments, two of which are being drafted at the moment. I am convinced that today’s debate will again result in valuable and creative recommendations that will be used by States parties, UN agencies and bodies, NGOs and others to advance the cause of the human rights of children. The willingness of this Committee to work in tandem with a wide spectrum of partners is widely appreciated particularly as it makes its work dynamic and deeply anchored in the concrete realities of daily life.

In this regard, this day of general discussion provides an opportunity to further reinforce the links between the work of human rights treaty bodies, the Office of the High Commissioner, “sister” UN Agencies: especially UNICEF and WHO, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation -- a foundation dedicated to early childhood development and which has been a partner in the organization of this day of discussion -- as well as a wide spectrum of NGOs, and other inter-governmental organizations, in particular the Council of Europe and the OECD, which are all represented in this room. Today’s discussions offer a unique opportunity for human rights experts, education and child development specialists, researchers, parents, policy makers and Government representatives to exchange ideas, experiences and perspectives on early childhood development policies. In order to allow for plenty of time for you to speak and listen to each other in the working groups, only a few keynote speeches will be given by colleagues from UNICEF, WHO and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation.



## HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Convention on the rights of the child not only protects the rights of every human being below the age of eighteen, including infants and young children but also provides guidance on how children should be raised and educated. Interestingly, the Convention contains an article on the aims of education (art. 29). The Committee has given further explanation on what this article entails in its general comment on the aims of education of 2001 (CRC/GC/2001/1): education shall be directed to, notably, “the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. This is one of the themes which you will discuss today. It was also the focus of the discussions a group of experts who met earlier this week at the Graduate Institute for Development Studies -- just next door -- to draft a Plan of Action for the World Programme for Human Rights Education to begin on 1 January 2005. The first phase of the Programme focuses on the primary and secondary school systems, as requested by the 60<sup>th</sup> Commission on Human Rights. The definition and principles of human rights education contained in the draft plan of action draw largely on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and related literature. «Human Rights Education within the school system, it says, should be understood as a process which includes both “*human rights through education*” and “*human rights in education*” ». Participatory rights of the children, for example, are an inherent part of the draft Plan of Action.

Even though the first phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education deals only with human rights education in primary and secondary school, the draft Plan stresses that “education requires a human rights approach that implements human rights throughout the whole education system and in all learning environments.” This is where you, your discussions, your submissions to the Committee and the Recommendations that the Committee will adopt following this day of debate will most probably remind us that even the youngest children have the right to be sensitized to human rights education and to grow-up in an environment of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, as specified in the Convention.

I wish you a very fruitful day.