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Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood Day of General Discussion 17 September 2004

Steps for Implementing the Child's Right to Health (Art. 24* of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

**"States Parties recognise the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health"*

Introduction

EACH – European Association for Children in Hospital – is the umbrella organisation for member associations involved in the welfare of all children before, during or after a hospital stay. Presently 18 associations from fifteen European countries and one from Japan are members of EACH.

Many of the member associations of EACH started their activities in the 60ies and 70ies, and they are exchanging their rich experiences with hospital professionals, parents and authorities with the goal to reach equal quality standards in all European countries. Health services for children in Europe differ from country to country and reflect the public recognition of the needs of children and their families in a particular country and its society.

In 1988 Child and Hospital Initiatives from then 12 countries met for their first European Conference in Leiden/The Netherlands. At this conference the European Charter for Children in Hospital was worked out (hereafter "EACH Charter"). In 2002 the EACH Charter was complemented by Annotations, in order to show the lasting impact of the Charter in the context of new developments in the paediatric field and in complex situations.

EACH and its member associations are active in most Western European Countries and Japan. We are networking with organisations who have similar goals in the US, Australia and HongKong. Our contacts with persons from Middle and Eastern European countries are increasing. We are convinced that the principles of the EACH Charter are an efficient tool for implementing art. 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter "UN Convention") and that the work we have initiated in Europe will encourage similar movements elsewhere in the world.

Children need their parents in the first place

Implementing child rights in early childhood is invariably linked to the protection of the rights of families. If the vital physical, emotional and economic needs of a family are not respected and safeguarded, the rights of children are impaired from the very beginning.

Creating an environment, which allows the child "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health", consequently asks for the implementation of all other points of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which are putting weight on and strengthen the position of the family.

Support and advice to mothers from the very first day

The child's right to health starts with the necessary support and advice to the mother during pregnancy. The conduct of childbirth is to be organized in a way that enhances the building of a deep mother-child relationship from the very first moment. The principles of family centred care are to be equally applied if the newborn child needs neonatal or intensive care. Information and support to the parents has to be ensured with regard to the proper tending of the child (including advice on breastfeeding, vaccination programs, healthy nutrition and other preventive health care measures). And it requires well functioning health care systems in- and outside of hospitals during the entire childhood.

The touchstone for a child's right to health is the quality of the health care system

The child's right to health is a legal right that must be evaluated in the context of the health care services accessible to children in their home country. While there is no dispute about the child's right to health as a theoretical good, the focus of our observations must be what kind of health care governments are willing to provide for children who suffer from illness, injuries or disabilities. There simply is no pretext or excuse for countries which declare to be unable to provide health care for children or for countries which neglect their responsibilities with regard to child health. It is even more unacceptable when the governments of rich countries regard proper health services for all people as unaffordable.

The EACH Charter – a measuring tool for the rights of children in health services

- **We suggest to the Commission on the Rights of the Child to use the EACH Charter as a measuring tool when States Parties present their reports on the implementation of articles of the UN Convention related to the child's right to health.**

The 10 articles of the EACH Charter with comments on achievements and non-achievements as well as references to the relevant articles of the UN Convention are attached hereto as a separate document.

Basic steps for mainstreaming the right to health in early childhood

The implementation of the child's right to the highest attainable standard of health depends on

- The full recognition of the parent's role in a stable physical, emotional and psychological development of the child
- Full involvement of the family and the necessary social and financial support when their child gets sick, injured or is suffering from a disability
- A hospital environment that provides the space and infrastructure for children of different ages and developmental stages and for their parents
- A hospital environment designed, furnished, staffed and equipped to meet the needs of children
- Doctors, nurses, and other professionals involved in the care of children who are trained and have the skills to respond to the physical, emotional and developmental needs of children and families
- Governments who are willing to provide the legal framework for adequate health care services inside and outside of hospitals and provide the financial means to fulfil the above requirements.

Today, thanks to medical progress, preventive measures and better public health information many illnesses and disabilities of small children can be remedied. No child should die or suffer from lifelong disabilities due to inadequate health care services in early childhood. Children who are

given full opportunities to evolve their talents and capabilities are the basis for the future of our societies. Investments in the health of our children are therefore to the benefit of all of us.

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Attachments:

- The 10 points of the EACH Charter and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Resolution of the 8th EACH Conference in Lisbon in March 2004 requesting the application of the EACH Charter also in maternity wards, and in neonatal and intensive care units

Note:

- EACH is a member of the Sub-Group Health of the NGO Group for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Geneva