

1989-2009 20th anniversary of the United Nations
Convention on the Rights of the Child

WORLD APPEAL
to a new
mobilization
FOR CHILDHOOD

An illustration of two hands, one large and one small, overlapping. The large hand is a dark orange color, and the small hand is white. The hands are positioned in the lower half of the page, with the small hand resting on the palm of the large hand. The background is a solid yellow color.

Geneva 2009

Mrs Marguerite Barankitse

Sponsor of the World Appeal to a New Mobilization for Childhood



« Children must learn how to write other lines than the ones of bitterness and violence. They must become hope-builders. »

Marguerite Barankitse

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

On 25 October 1993, one of the worst days of the interethnic conflict in Burundi, Marguerite Barankitse hosts 25 children saving their life. In 1994, in Ruyigi, in a space offered by the Bishop, she sets up a school that will be transformed in a shelter for children, "Maison Shalom". In the aftermath, she organizes a network that has already supported more than 20 000 Hutu and Tutsi children. The scale of her action, her courage and her constant concern to promote the dignity and the rights of the child have granted her wide recognition, including:

>1998 : Human Rights Prize by the French government

>2003 : World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child

>2004 : Voices of Courage Award

>2004 : Nansen Prize for Refugees.

WORLD APPEAL to a new mobilization FOR CHILDHOOD

« *The mankind owes the child the best that it has to give* »

Eglantyne Jebb, Geneva Declaration 1924

- 1** On the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** by the UN General Assembly we, the signatories of the following document¹ launch with gravity an urgent Appeal to a new mobilization for childhood².
- 2** The Convention has marked a historic moment. It has generated a new vision of the child. Since its promulgation and its almost universal ratification, children³ must be considered fully as human beings, true right-holders, entitled to enjoy human rights in an inalienable way and without discrimination. At the same time, because they are fragile and growing, they need protection.
- 3** According to the Appeal's signatory organizations, experts, and personalities, the translation of the provisions contained in the Convention into domestic laws and into implemented policies have allowed real progress.
- 4** **Unfortunately, subscribed engagements are still very far from being respected worldwide.** Too often, children continue to be viewed as objects of assistance, or as beneficiaries of certain rights that they receive as charity. Around the world, too many children are deprived of their rights, sometimes even the most fundamental ones.
- 5** Child soldiers, children working in hazardous and dangerous conditions, children abused, raped, objects of all forms of violence, children obliged to flee incessantly away with or without their family due to wars, famines, natural disasters, children abandoned and rejected by all, forced to live in the street, "sorcerers" children, without education, without a country, with no papers...
- 6** Children, who are even more vulnerable due to families becoming fragile, massive urbanization, environmental degradation, globalization that deepens inequalities. Moreover, nowadays, a wide-spreading **economic crisis at the planet level** increases threats on millions of them.

It is urgent to act.

1- The International Catholic Child Bureau (Bice) has taken the initiative of this document. Founded in 1948, Bice has actively participated in drafting the Convention in the eighties and since then it has constantly followed its implementation in the field and in Geneva to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

2- A Reference Document accompanies and completes the Appeal. It can be consulted and downloaded from Bice web site: www.bice.org or www.biceinternational.org.

3- In accordance with article 1 of the Convention, a child means "every human being below the age of eighteen years".

7 All these children have something in common: they have been **uprooted**. Physical uprooting, sometimes brutal, from their country or the place they were supposed to grow up; but also psychosocial uprooting - more intimate - causing an even deeper choc when they are not loved, not listened to, when they live at the margin of a family or the society, when they are no more part of a continuum, heir of a human community attached to its culture and history. These children are uprooted from an indispensable human living space, the possibility to grow-up stably in an affectionate and truly respectful environment.

8 **This uprooting must seriously question us; it must be better understood, better studied in its causes and grave consequences for present and future humanity.**

9 Such situations are neither exceptional nor reserved to such or such a country. Worldwide, millions of children live the dramatic loss of landmarks, which inevitably ends up in denying their rights.

10 **We propose to adopt a renewed approach of the child based on his/her deeper needs as well as on his/her right to life and to an integral development, including in its spiritual dimension.**

11 Despite the somber reality of uprooted children, we are often surprised: some children manifest vitality and some energy enabling them to resist, stand up again and overcome in a positive way the grave challenges that life carries with it. We call this capacity, which is inside them resilience. **Resilience** also increases their chances to have their rights respected because it empowers children to fight for them.

12 To bring all its fruits, resilience gains in being developed and supported by different elements:

- The insertion in a genuine family and community caring environment, which is also perceived by the child as such.
- Quality education both at school and within families and communities.
- Being part of an even very modestly self-sufficient family.
- A true solidarity experienced domestically and in the community, which opens children to generosity and to the hope of always finding somebody who will be able to help them.

13 The respect and the promotion of the cultural background also provide **indispensable landmarks** so that children can structure themselves and positively accede to other cultures. Their life becomes meaningful. The **religious dimension** that children may have received earlier must be preserved and developed while respecting their freedom -as it constitutes a deep resource during their life.

14 It is also desirable to favor children's **participation**, their responsibilities, their duties, their solidarity; they become, then, protagonists of their life; contribute efficiently in evolving adults' traditional behaviors and are the best child-rights ambassadors to their peers.

15 Such an approach directly associates children to the promotion and the defense of their rights. Wherever we have been able to put it into practice, it has showed us its efficiency.

16 **This new approach of the child calls upon our mobilization especially on some issues.**

Among the ten issues⁴ that we have identified, we would like to highlight specifically:

- *To fight against all forms of violence against children* should it be extreme poverty or violence during armed conflicts, at school, in the work place, in the cyberspace or domestically; it is indeed within families where violence is mostly widespread.

- *To guarantee quality education for all children* so that they are not condemned to perpetual poverty and marginalization. In particular, we have experimented that the intervention of educators-mediators capable to help uprooted children to move gradually towards new cultural references by rising and supporting their resilience, favors their insertion and their development, and allows fighting efficiently against early school leaving.

- *To support weakened families*, namely monoparental families, in order to promote inside them a climate of well-being and strengthen parental educational capabilities.

- *To humanize juvenile justice* and the assistance to young people in conflict with the law. Confronted with the intensification of criminal laws in many countries, we would like to recall that juvenile justice must primarily aim at education and reintegration.

17 **We need to implement in an effective and urgent manner what is required by international human rights treaties and more specifically by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

18 **We, the signatories of this document urge States to:**

a) Ratify, for those who have not yet done so, the Convention as well as the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, withdraw reservations that would limit the scope of the law or affect the objectives of the Convention and pursue the harmonization of domestic law with the Convention.

b) Respect undertaken commitments, namely by adopting public policies for children and families, which additionally presuppose priority and sufficient budgetary allocations as well as a firm political will.

c) Cooperate fully with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN human rights monitoring mechanisms as well as with independent institutions (child defenders, ...) and specialized NGOs in order to guarantee children the full enjoyment of their rights.

4- The Reference Document speaks about TEN ISSUES:

- 1/. To respect the right to life, 2/. To fight against poverty,
 3/. To fight violence against children, 4/. To support families,
 5/. To take into account working children, 6/. To guarantee quality education to each child,
 7/. To guarantee the right to health, 8/. To give their place to disabled children,
 9/. To humanize juvenile justice, 10/. To put new technologies at the service of children.

19 We call upon the international community as a whole to:

- a) Facilitate verification, evaluation and control systems of the Convention, guarantee to the Committee and to the UN system of special procedures, designed to promote and protect human rights, adequate means to fulfill their mandate.
- b) Implement a new world governance, namely to deal with transnational questions concerning children (migration, human trafficking, child pornography networks, sale of organs...).
- c) Strengthen a human rights-based approach within international cooperation.
- d) Require firmly that States respect their commitment to allocate 0.7% of their GDP to developing countries.
- e) Favor an equitable production, distribution and trade of necessary goods in view of guaranteeing to families an income resulting from decent work.

20 We call upon the media to:

- a) Introduce in their ethics and professional committees a reflection on childhood and adolescence in order to give a dignified and respectful image of them.
- b) Highlight the value of cultural diversity and facilitate the dialogue among human beings, generations, and communities.
- c) Contribute to diffusing a child-rights culture by training professionals of their sector and by issuing and disseminating publications that target children in view of their development.

21 We call upon moral and religious leaders to:

- a) Enforce, wherever they are active, the respect of the dignity and the rights of the child.
- b) Contribute jointly with young people to the intercultural and interreligious dialogue in order to prevent divisions, recognize diversity as well as the equal dignity of everyone.
- c) Be more and more concerned to educate to the values guaranteeing a worthy human and spiritual life.
- d) Show the value of each human being by clarifying the links between their ethical and religious message with human rights.

22 We call upon civil society organizations to:

- a) Diffuse the principles of the Convention and the Convention itself while preserving and developing a real culture of childhood in society.

- b) Strengthen networking, ensure a more efficient coordination of their actions, share their good practices and exercise jointly pressure on public authorities so that they apply more coherent child-oriented policies,
- c) Design their initiatives in a way to include a listening approach to children and their needs in view of strengthening children's participation in social and public life.
- d) Realize multidisciplinary studies on childhood and inspire new researches in a perspective of creative experimentation.
- e) Issue *an annual report on the status of the rights of the child* worldwide taking into account the most remarkable achievements and the most serious violations.
- f) Be watchful to respect the dignity and the rights of the child wherever they operate.

23 **We call upon all men and women of good will to:**

- a) Actively monitor that every child and all children can grow up in dignified conditions and in the full respect of their rights.
- b) Give the example of solidarity so that each child can experience altruism, generosity and be able to contribute to the common good.
- c) Require from public authorities that they fulfill their obligations towards families and children and that they constantly improve their policies in this area.

24 **The child, each child is a present for humanity.** A present that is part of a history and opens new horizons. He/she surprises and amazes us while, on other hand, he/she should be amazed by the world that he/she will inherit.

In order that this world keeps a human face, we have to **respect the child**, to measure up to the child:

Geneva, June 2009

«You say: to take care of children is exhausting. You are right. You add: because we have to measure up to them. To go down, to bend down, to bow, to shrink. Here, you are wrong. This is not as tiring as to be obliged to rise in order as to measure up to their feelings. To reach up to them, to stretch, to stand on our tiptoes. In order not to hurt them.»⁵

Janusz Korczak⁶

5- Prologue of *When I am little again*, French Association Janus Korczak (AFJK), revised translation in 2007.

6- Janusz Korczak (1878-1942), a famous Polish pedo-psychiatrist, writer, pedagogue, tireless child defender, died in Treblinka where he has been deported with the children of his orphanage that he refused to abandon.



www.bice.org - www.biceinternational.org

