

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Day of General Discussion

Friday, 17 September 2004 – OHCHR (Palais Wilson, Geneva)

Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood

Starting sound practices early

Submission by the “Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII” Association



The “Community of Pope John XXIII” Association

The “Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII” (Community of Pope John XXIII) is an International Association of the Faithful of Pontifical Right, recognised by the Italian Government in 1972. The members of the Association are committed to sharing their life directly with the poor and the least and, as a result of this, to trying to remove the causes of injustice, social exclusion, neglect of human rights and conflicts of various kinds. The Association is based in Italy and is also present in: Albania, Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Croatia, Kenya, Moldova, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Venezuela and Zambia. It carries out a wide range of projects and has centres of various kinds which work in favour of: children, adolescents and adults in difficulty; unborn babies; orphans; children and adults with disabilities; substance abusers; alcoholics; homeless people, the elderly, prisoners; nomads; people affected by HIV/AIDS; women enslaved for the purpose of sexual exploitation; immigrants; refugees; victims of war and activists and defenders of peace.

Methodology and Good Practice

‘Sharing life directly’. The methodology of the Community of Pope John XXIII is characterised by the life shared directly with the marginalised, oppressed and least in society. This leads to the disappearance of the distinction between the receiver and giver of assistance, since everybody – associated members, people in need, volunteers, operators and others — share in their own abilities and difficulties and, in this way, help build a community which deeply renews relationships among people. Therefore, the “Community of Pope John XXIII” Association, and all the juridical bodies which it promotes, does not act *for* the poor but *with* the poor, enabling them to be full participators in their liberation. The Association’s nonviolent political and social action springs from this shared life and is carried out wherever the Association is present around the world, in order to be ‘the voice of the voiceless’ and to remove the causes of injustice and oppression.

A grass-roots level approach. Planning of interventions and projects, carried out through a dialogic and participatory methodology, always starts from a deep listening and, when possible, with the participation of the target people involved. Daily life shared together with them provides precious elements and data for the elaboration of effective answers to their needs. Where possible, the implementation and development of projects is entrusted to local populations.

Safeguarding of children’s rights – the Association’s projects and centres. Sharing life with children implies the guaranteeing and safeguarding of their rights. It also implies helping the child to develop individual awareness, self-determination abilities, positive relationships and reciprocal solidarity. Through its methodology, particularly with reference to children, the Association has developed different forms of interventions through the years. Some of those have been widely experimented with and can be considered to be ‘exportable models of intervention’ which can be implemented in different parts of the world. These are:

- *Family-Homes:* A family-home is a residential and educational community which is organised just like a family. It is characterised by the continual and stable presence of parental figures who become –

temporarily or permanently – father and mother to people with different kinds of needs. This welcoming of people is characterised by the complementarity of the different typologies of people welcomed.

- Open families: These are families which, besides taking care of their own children, are ‘open’ to welcoming other children in need for a limited or permanent period of time.
- Day Centres: Where children and teenagers are welcomed during the day. Recreational and educational activities are carried out in order to develop their abilities and social skills and to increase their self-esteem. These centres have also proved to be an effective way to support families in difficulty.
- Specific projects in developing countries: These aim to give both short term support to meet urgent needs and long term answers to help with self development. Examples of these are:
 - *Rainbow Project*, a model of care on a large scale for vulnerable children which provides nutritional and educational support and encourages foster care through the traditional, ‘extended family’ system;
 - ‘*Long Distance Adoption*’, which gives children the chance to go to school and continue to live in their own families;
 - ‘*One Meal a Day*’, which aims to give a quick response to children in immediate need of food.
- Prevention of and fight against human trafficking: this also applies to children who are enslaved for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

In these different ways, the Association welcomes about 500 children and gives support to at least 20,000 every year.

Table of projects related to early childhood

COUNTRY	PROJECTS	CRC articles of reference	In cooperation with
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Long distance adoption 	6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic Church and local bishops
Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Education and health support • School insertion of outcaste children • Long distance adoption 	14, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xaverian missionaries
Bolivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Street kids assistance • Education and professional training • Health assistance • Support of single mothers and unborn babies • Long distance adoption 	6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Union • World Food Program • Apostolic Nunciature • Embassy of Italy
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Professional training • Educational activities • Welcoming of minors as an alternative to their prison sentence 	6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic Church and local bishops

COUNTRY	PROJECTS	CRC articles of reference	In cooperation with
Chile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Abuse prevention and assistance of abused • Welcoming of minors as an alternative to their prison sentence • Educational activities • Psychological support • Nutritional support • Long distance adoption 	6, 9, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENAME (National Service for Minors) • Catholic Church and local bishops
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Foster care • Support of families in difficulty • Protection and safeguard of pregnant women and unborn babies • Advocacy • Legal support • Liberation of minors who are in a state of sexual slavery 	6, 9, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Health Service • Ministry of Welfare • Forum delle Associazioni Familiari (Forum of Family Associations) • Local bodies
Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of street kids • Educational support • Nutritional support • Long distance adoption 	6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic Church of Kahawa, Nairobi • Various missionary bodies
Russian Federation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Support and welcoming of single mothers • Promotion of foster care • School integration of children with disabilities • Long distance adoption 	6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic Church and local bishops • Russian “Caritas”
Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Nutritional support • Promotion of foster care • Support of the extended family system • Advocacy 	6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic Diocese of Iringa • Allamano HIV/AIDS-Centre of Consolata Missionaries
Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming of children and adults into our homes and centres • Support and welcoming of street kids • Education and professional training • Schooling support • Health assistance • Nutritional assistance • Advocacy 	6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LARC (Link Association for the Relief of Children) • CHIN (Children in Need) national network • UNICEF • ILO • Care International • Ndola Catholic Diocese • Ministry of Education and Sport • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Agriculture • Ndola Council

Focusing on the rights to survival and development in early childhood

Safeguarding unborn children. A social pattern which favours a gigantic 'I' against a fragile 'us', a general culture which does not defend life, a precarious economic and emotional/psychological situation, personal loneliness, lack of institutional support and legalisation of methods for the suppression of life lead many women to regard abortion as the only possible solution to an unwanted pregnancy. There are also hundreds of thousands of abandoned human embryos, produced by the desire to have a baby at any cost. In order to save them from certain death, we recommend that they are welcomed by their biological parents or by others willing to give their availability. The Community of Pope John XXIII recommends and is committed to:

- giving psychological, economic and emotional support to pregnant women and single mothers in difficulty; if necessary, they are welcomed into our families or protected centres;
- promoting a culture in favour of unborn children, even when they are not perfectly healthy.

The life of unborn children is a wonderful gift of God which, if safeguarded, can benefit all of humanity.

Right to survival. Structural poverty, denial of access to basic needs such as water, food and medicine, and globalisation, which increases inequality, are a threat to the survival of many children. The complexity of this situation demands intervention at many levels (local, national and international) as well as both short and long term strategies. The Association carries out and believes to be effective the following:

Short term strategies : • Direct food assistance through nutrition centres • Food distribution • Education in the nutrition of young children • Long distance support • Micro-credit for the self support of families.

Long term strategies: • Micro-credit for the self development of families • Awareness raising and advocacy for children's rights, at all levels, in social, economic and political spheres.

Right to development. The serene, balanced and harmonious development of children depends strongly on how deeply the child feels loved, protected and welcomed. The family has a central and irreplaceable role in this. Guaranteeing a family to all children is a necessary and indispensable commitment for their healthy development. The Association carries out and believes to be effective the following:

- Support to the family of origin at all levels, in order to prevent children being abandoned. This includes financial help, emotional support, counselling and various ways of welcoming children.
- Helping to make foster care and adoption more easily possible, favouring the cultural and traditional resources of each country: 'Give the family to the child, not the child to the family'.
- Welcoming children in difficulty into family like structures, such as family-homes, open families and emergency shelters.

Right to education. Guaranteeing children's right to education means laying the necessary foundations for self development and guaranteeing the chance of a future. Today, millions of children don't have access to primary education. There are also many different reasons why children drop out of school: family poverty which often forces children to work, children who are orphaned and deprived of any kind of support (think, for example, of the emergency situation created by HIV/AIDS), a precarious life which prevents future

planning, the financial burden placed on families by the cost of education etc. Taking into consideration the complexity of these things, it is necessary to develop strategies which are relevant to the various cultural and social contexts. However, starting from our experience, we believe the following general guidelines to be effective:

- liberating families from the burden of the cost of education;
- promoting the insertion of all children into educational systems, paying particular attention to the integration of the weakest and most discriminated against members of society (street kids, children with disabilities, children affected by HIV/AIDS, gypsies etc). When this is not possible, it is necessary to develop alternative educational paths.

Recommendations

- With reference to the commitment of the States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to “promote and encourage international cooperation”, we recommend the actualisation of the commitment of rich countries to dedicate 0.7% of their GDP to the fight against poverty, in particular to favouring the access of children to food, education and healthcare. We also recommend acting through the specific tools of the Committee in order to ensure that commercial treaties do not deny developing countries the rights recognised by the Convention.
- With reference to articles 34 and 35 of the Convention, we recommend strengthening agreements and forms of cooperation amongst states, with the cooperation of civil society, for the prevention of and fight against trafficking of children, especially for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In this case we recommend the strengthening of sentences for both traffickers and clients.
- We recommend the Committee decisive action, in strict collaboration with the different bodies of the United Nations, for the prevention of different forms of violence connected with armed conflict. We also recommend the Committee to ensure that, when an embargo is enforced, the same does not violate the rights of the children.
- With reference to the preamble of the Convention, which refers to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth”, we recommend a more explicit juridical recognition of the right to life from the moment of conception and a stronger commitment against any form of suppression and manipulation of the life of unborn children.

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