

Lima, September 21, 2009

Twenty years after the approval of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, more than 60 children and adolescents from 23 countries of four regions came together at the First Pan American Child Forum to discuss the current situation of respect for and exercise of our rights. This permitted us to identify, prioritize and finally prepare a summary of the main problems threatening our rights. Below are some of the results of our work.

First, violence emerges as a reflection of a culture that reproduces and expresses it in families, schools and society. Some parents and adults use corporal punishment, in violation of our rights.

Violence includes sexual abuse, which occurs most frequently in the immediate environment and often within the family. Girls and female adolescents are frequent victims of this type of violence although sexual abuse against boys often goes unrecognized. We have not been taught to deal with these situations; adults do not want to talk about it. Frequently, victims are viewed as problematic individuals and may suffer discrimination.

Discrimination exists against individuals with disabilities, different cultures or conditions, such as pregnant adolescents. We are given little information on sexuality, sexually-transmitted diseases and problems associated with a lack of affection and respect for our bodies. These are taboo subjects in today's society. Young people are often mistreated by health care service personnel.

Violence also involves other forms of rights violations, such as excessive drug consumption, child labor, mistreatment of children and gang violence.

The environmental contamination caused by factories, mining and petroleum activities affects our health and destroys resources.

Education is characterized by poor quality, poor teacher training, inadequate materials and infrastructure, and discrimination. Children do not participate in the review of school programs or in teacher evaluations.

Difficulty of access to health services. Discrimination also exists in health services.

Poverty and migrations generate many of these problems.

Governments do not give priority attention to issues associated with children. Some government representatives and public servants mistreat children and adolescents.

In this context, we make the following proposals to member states in an effort to resolve the most pressing problems facing our nations.

Education

Guarantee universal access of children to a quality, friendly education system without any type of discrimination.

Develop innovative teaching/learning strategies and methods based on the different needs of children and adolescents.

Education should respond to the demands and realities of students.

We need sex education, assistance and moral support.

Promote values and respect for cultural differences, including the different indigenous, rural and urban cultures.

Develop effective laws for protection and the enforcement of those laws.

Increase and strengthen mechanisms for the participation of children and adolescents in schools.

Develop sports fields and recreational facilities.

Implement rights education programs and teaching tools to this end.

Train parents and teachers.

Ensure that schoolchildren have access to technology in accordance with their needs.

Participation

Participation of children and adolescents in the distribution of public budgets, especially in areas that affect children directly.

Creation of consultation mechanisms for children and adolescents to enable them to contribute to the development and implementation of government policy.

Creation of international organizations for participation to enable children and adolescents to express their opinions.

Participation of children should be significant, active and inclusive.

Promotion of participation and mutual respect within the family by raising awareness of adults to ensure that they respect the opinions and views of children and adolescents.

Health

Guarantee universal access of children and adolescents to quality, friendly, non-discriminatory health care services, free of charge.

Promote the development of government health prevention programs and quality control of health care services to prevent situations of medical negligence.

Promote the development of sexual and reproductive health policies that are inclusive for children and adolescents, with an emphasis on preventing adolescent pregnancy. Support adolescent mothers to guarantee quality care of their children.

Promote traditional medicine as a complement to Western medicine in a coordinated, equitable health care system.

Violence and abuse

Guarantee a specialized justice system that functions effectively, efficiently and transparently to ensure that offending adults are punished, as part of protection measures.

Invest increased resources in preventive, disciplinary and rehabilitation measures.

Raise awareness of systems to protect children from abuse and violence.

Ensure that states guarantee social responsibility of the media and ensure that media content is conducive to a culture of rights.

Environment

Member states should work effectively to decrease environmental damage and reduce the consequences of climate change. Member states should ensure that children and adolescents can participate in these actions.

On the twentieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we demand respect for our rights to health and education and to live in a society without violence or discrimination. In addition, we want to exercise our right to have a family, to have our dignity, to express ourselves freely and to live in conditions of well-being that permit our full psychophysical development. We must also respect the rights of children with different capacities, those belonging to indigenous communities, those living in rural zones and all those who are especially vulnerable and prone to exclusion, for whatever reason. As children, we should remember that we also have the right to play, rest, express ourselves, give our opinions and be heard. In short, we have the right to participate as the people we are in a society of which we form part.

