

4th Session of the Human Rights Council
Special Session on the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities
26th March 2007

Call for a commitment to ensuring that the experiences of children with disabilities inform the Human Rights Council reviews of governments' human rights records

Statement on behalf of the International Save the Children Alliance

Thank you Mr President

We welcome this opportunity provided by the Human Rights Council to highlight the significance of the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. And we would like to use the opportunity to highlight the impact that the Convention, if implemented fully, could have on the lives of children with disabilities.

Globally, children with disabilities face shocking violations of their rights: very limited to access to education in developing countries, disproportionate vulnerability to poverty, significantly higher risk of sexual and physical violence, yet little or no access to justice because they are not deemed to be credible witnesses. Too many live in institutions where all basic human rights are denied – the right to education, to health care, to family life, to adequate nutrition, to protection from violence, to development, to freedom of association, to participation, to play, and even the right to life. Discrimination encroaches on every dimension of the lives of children with disabilities.

But beyond the statistics, the stories that children themselves tell provide moving testimony as to the impact these rights violations have on their lives – the stories of loneliness, rejection, exclusion, abuse, frustration, and a desire for equality, recognition, acceptance, respect and dignity. The despair experienced by many children with disabilities is powerfully encapsulated in the plea of a girl in Nepal who asked *'If families have a negative view of us, how can we have hope?'* However, children with disabilities also tell another story. They recognise that they themselves need to be at the forefront of the fight for the realisation of their rights – a recognition articulated by a young boy who insists: *'Disability is in the eyes of society. It is not in our eyes. If given a chance, we can prove our worth'*. And this Convention, drafted through the direct experience and expertise of people with disabilities themselves, provides them with chance to do just that.

It re-affirms that all the rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child apply without discrimination to children with disabilities, and introduces clear obligations on governments to take the necessary measures to implement those rights. However, perhaps even more importantly, the Convention recognises what the children themselves recognise – that they, themselves, must play a central role in the process of change. To that end, it requires that children with disabilities are consulted when legislation and policies relevant to their lives are being designed and implemented. *It requires that*

children with disabilities are provided with age and disability appropriate assistance to exercise their right to express their views on all matters of concern to them, and to have those views given due weight - within the family, school, the community and local and national government - a right embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but widely disregarded for children with disabilities.

These two provisions demand visibility for children with disabilities. They demand respect for their unique expertise in both defining their own experience and identifying the action needed to end the rights violations they face daily. It is imperative that the right to be heard is fully implemented. Only by listening to children is it possible to get the answers right. Adults do not always know what is in children's best interests. '*Nothing about us without us*', the underlying demand of this Convention, must be understood to include children as well as adults with disabilities.

Questions to the members of the Council

- 1 Will you commit to urging all governments to ratify the Convention at the earliest possible opportunity?
- 2 What measures will you introduce to ensure that the situation of children with disabilities is given proper scrutiny when you undertake universal periodic reviews of governments' human rights records?
- 3 How will you ensure that the experiences of children with disabilities inform all relevant aspects of the work of the Human Rights Council?

Thank you Mr President