

NEWS NOTE

19 Anniversary of the approval of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Approved on November 20 of 1989, the Convention is a fundamental referent in order to work for the basic rights of boys, girls and adolescents.

Bolivia is progressing in the defence of its children and adolescents.

La Paz – Bolivia, November 20, 2008. - Nineteen years after its approval by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20 of 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is and will continue to be the basic and fundamental referent for all the countries in the world when working in favor of the children. On the occasion of the Convention's anniversary, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reminds of the importance of this document, since it is not only the guiding principle of this institution, but also of all the States that have signed and ratified the Convention. It is the first judicially binding international instrument that incorporates all the basic human rights (civil, cultural, political and social) in order to project the children, age group comprised between zero and eighteen years, as recognized in this document.

Composed of a series of norms and obligations, the CRC establishes minimum rights and liberties that ought to be complied with and incorporated in the internal legislation of every country. Based on diverse judicial systems and cultural traditions, the Convention is a wide framework which collects the basic principles so that any boy, girl and adolescent in the world can develop his or her full capacities and lead a life of dignity. The respect for the dignity and value of every individual, independently of his or her race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth or ability, are some of the aspects included that are fundamental in order to achieve an optimal human development for all children. On this basis, all boys, girls and adolescents went on to become holders of rights.

The right to survival; to full development; to protection against dangerous influences, mistreatment and exploitation; and to a full participation in family, cultural and social life, are some of the basic points included in the 54 articles and the two Facultative Protocols into which the CRC is divided. Furthermore, the CRC establishes four fundamental principles for all boys and girls to reach a harmonious development: non-discrimination; dedication to children's superior interests; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for children's points of view.

Bolivia and the Convention

Bolivia was the eighth country in the world to ratify the CRC, which it did on March 8, 1990. Thus, Bolivia came to form part of the majority of States that decided to adhere to it, with the exception of Somalia and the United States, which have still not ratified the Convention. Since the 90s, Bolivia has continued to advance in order to adapt its legislation and public policies to the requirements included in this vital documents. Following its ratification, it was incorporated to Bolivia's legislation as a Law of the Republic, making it directly applicable. Nevertheless, it became necessary to adapt the Bolivian legislation to this new situation.

Throughout these nineteen years, the country has fulfilled its compromise to present reports to the Children's Rights Committee regarding the measures adopted in order to make effective the rights recognized in the CRC and the progress achieved in the enjoyment of these rights. The Children's Rights Committee is the organ that supervises the manner in which the States fulfil their obligations derived from the Children's Rights Convention. When a country ratifies the convention, it assumes the judicial obligation to implement the rights recognized in the treaty. The Convention itself indicates that these reports must be elaborated two years after they come into effect in the country, and from then on every five years. Currently, Bolivia has presented its fourth report for the Committee's consideration.

Some of the progress achieved in Bolivia in the last years, as was recognized by the Committee in 1995 after the presentation of the third report, have been: the coming into effect of the Boy, Girl and Adolescent Code in June of 2000; the passing of the Municipalities Law obliging the municipal governments to establish institutions for the Defence of Children and Adolescents; the amendment to article 4 of the Civil Code, which fixes the majority of age at 18 years; the application, in cooperation with the ILO/IPEC, of a program to eliminate the worst forms of child labour; and the ratification of different international agreements that protect human rights, especially the rights of children. Nevertheless, the Committee has also acknowledged several problems in the effective application of the Convention. Among these problems, it emphasized the political instability, difficulties and conflicts in the social and economic areas, structural poverty and the great disparities existing in the distribution of income.

Furthermore, the Committee expressed its preoccupation regarding other more concrete issues, such as the need to reinforce the existing institutional capacities in order to continue working on the protection of children. The Committee recommended more work to be done in order to deal with issues such as abuse and neglect, mistreatment and violence, discrimination towards disabled children, the health of adolescents and the prevention of their economic and sexual exploitation, among many others.

Currently, Bolivia has finished the elaboration of its fourth report and has put it to the consideration of the Committee, so it can give forth its judgement regarding the progress achieved since the signing of the Convention. Some of the most significant progress was linked to the establishment of the Multisectarian Malnourishment-Cero Program, which has the objective of eradicating chronic malnutrition, the gradual decrease of the mortality rates of infants and children under five, and the passing of laws and decrees that allow the country to keep adapting its legislation and the text of the new Constitution, which refers to the Rights of Children and Adolescents in its Chapter Three, Civil and Political Rights, Section V.

The application of the CRC in the country is fundamental, given that minors under 18 years of age represent 48.4% of the population. This implies that, if the country continues to work for the defence of the rights of children, it will also be working to achieve optimal development in the short, mid and long term.

About UNICEF

UNICEF Works in the field in 155 countries and territories in order to help boys and girls to survive and advance in life from infancy to adolescence. The biggest supplier of vaccines for the poorest countries, UNICEF supports the health and nutrition of children, quality water and sanitation, quality Basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of boys and girls against violence, exploitation and AIDS. UNICEF is financed in its entirety by the voluntary contributions of individuals, companies, foundations and governments.

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