



THE OSLO CHALLENGE

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

On the 10th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - at a meeting in Oslo organised by the Norwegian Government and UNICEF - children, young people, media professionals and child rights experts met to discuss the development of children's rights and their relation to the media throughout the world.

From their discussions emerged the Oslo Challenge, issued on 20 November 1999, which acknowledges that

"the child/media relationship is an entry point into the wide and multifaceted world of children and their rights - to education, freedom of expression, play, identity, health, dignity and self-respect, protection - and that in every aspect of child rights, in every element of the life of a child, the relationship between children and the media plays a role."

The text of the Oslo Challenge, and how it relates to individuals and organisations, follows:

The Oslo Challenge is a call to action.

It goes out to everyone engaged in exploring, developing, monitoring and participating in the complex relationship between children and the media.

This includes governments, organisations and individuals working for children, media professionals at all levels and in all media, the private sector including media owners, children and young people, parents, teachers and researchers.

The challenge to governments is:

- to recognise children as an investment rather than a cost, and as potential rather than a burden, and to strive to integrate this reality into policy, including that related to the media;
- to meet national obligations set out under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to report regularly to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on policies and actions aimed at fulfilling Articles 12, 13 and 17;
- to ensure that resources are provided so that children and young people have access to information;
- to explore ways in which, without compromising professional independence, support can be given to media initiatives aimed at providing greater access to children, serving their needs and promoting their rights;
- to recognise that an independent media is fundamental to the pursuit of democracy and freedom and that censorship and control are inimical to the best interests of both children and adults, and thus to create an effective and secure environment in which the media can work professionally and independently.

The challenge to organisations and individuals working for children is:

- to respect the need for independence of the media as a component of democratic society;
- to work together with media professionals to promote and protect children's rights and to respond to children's needs;
- to provide effective media liaison services to ensure that media have access to reliable sources of information on children's issues;
- to facilitate accurate coverage of child-related issues by developing media liaison policies that discourage misrepresentation in the interests of publicity and fundraising.

The challenge to media professionals at all levels and in all media is:

- to raise awareness in the media professions about the rights of children and how they can be protected and promoted by good professional practices or harmed through inappropriate policies or actions;
- to work ethically and professionally according to sound media practices and to develop and promote media codes of ethics in order to avoid sensationalism, stereotyping (including by gender) or undervaluing of children and their rights;
- to resist commercial pressures that lead to children's issues and the rights of children to freedom of expression, fair coverage and protection from exploitation, including as consumers, being given low priority;
- to work to enhance the relationship between children and the media so that both grow and improve in understanding of the positive and negative power and potential of the relationship.

The challenge to children and young people is:

- to know and understand their rights as laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to find and develop ways to contribute to the fulfilment of these rights, including the rights of access to information and to diverse points of view, and to find ways to promote their own active participation in the media and in media development.
- to learn as much as they can about the media so that they can make informed choices as media consumers and gain maximum benefit from the diversity the media offer;
- to grasp opportunities to participate in production of media output and to provide feedback to media producers, both positive and negative;
- to share their opinions about the media with those who can help to support a positive relationship between children and the media: parents, teachers and other adults and young people.



The challenge to the private sector, including media owners is:

- to take into account the rights of children to access, participation, media education and protection from harmful content in the development of new media products and technologies;
- to make the best interests of the child a primary consideration in the pursuit of commercial and financial success, so that today's children become adults in a global society in which all people are protected, respected and free.

The challenge to parents, teachers and researchers is:

- to acknowledge and support the rights of children to have access to media, participate in it and use it as a tool for their advancement;
- to provide a protective and supportive environment in which children can make choices as media consumers that promote their development to their full potential;
- to be as informed as possible about trends and directions in the media and, where possible, to contribute actively to forming such trends and directions through participation in focus groups, feedback mechanisms and by using procedures laid down for comment and complaints on media content.