

Australia are the only countries that have not banned physical punishment of children, at least in schools. In Australia, paid maternity leave is not automatically available, and we have the sixth highest teenage suicide-rate.

UNICEF Report Warns against following the US Example

James Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF, interviewed on ABC radio (AM, 22.6.94) said he was surprised at Australia's record in terms of commitment to children's rights. This was reflected in the fact that Australia has yet to submit its report on UNCROC to the UN.

Australian government policy was not criticized but Mr Grant warned that Australia should not follow the American example too closely. He said a major problem for young people in American society had been the economic restructuring of the 1980s. These changes had produced increases in the following areas - child poverty, numbers of school drop outs, teenage pregnancies, increased violence in schools and large increases in youth unemployment.

He suggested that when countries make these structural changes they are often guilty of "benign ignoring" of children but the results are less than benign. Australia needs to be aware of this. It is recommended that all major changes introduced should be accompanied by a child impact study in the same way that environmental impact studies are now carried out.

Ban Physical Punishment of Children

In Australia the only people who are legally allowed to be hit are children. Some states have banned physical punishment in schools (Victoria and the ACT). South Australia has a policy that does not allow it and Queensland is intending to ban it in 1995. Other states allow physical punishment and NSW, which had a similar policy to SA, actually reintroduced it in 1989. On this crucial human rights issue there should be a definitive ban and a national standard imposed.

Sally Castel-McGregor, of the Children's Interest Bureau, points out that the idea of parents, and those in a position of being *in loco parentis*, being able to hit children is considered a "right" in our society. She

believes it is a part of the culture. DCI should adopt the enlightened policy of some countries that bans the hitting of children by parents and carers as well as public institutions like schools. Wife beating is no longer legally allowed and is socially frowned upon. Child beating must also become a target.

WORLD SUMMIT ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Australian NGO participation in the World Summit on Social Development, which will be held in Denmark in March, 1995, is being co-ordinated by ACOSS and ACFOA. DCI has followed these discussions carefully, looking for opportunities to make input on children's issues. The Summit will focus on the reduction and alleviation of poverty, expansion of productive employment and the enhancement of social integration, especially of marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

The impact of poverty, unemployment and poor social integration, is always hardest on the children. In the worst situations, children end up as objects for sale, with their bodies or their labour being exploited and their health, potential and spirit destroyed.

But economic development can also victimize children, unless children are carefully protected. More employment opportunities, without effective controls against child labour, will inevitably lead to more children working in factories. Other measures of poverty alleviation can lead to separation of children from their families and to loss of social stability which is so essential for a healthy childhood.

With these priorities in mind, DCI attended the NGO Forum in Sydney on June 21st, to develop Australian NGO priorities for the World Summit. There were plenty of opportunities to counter the invisibility of children even in those socially-aware discussions.

MURPHY'S LAW?

Lawyer Chris Murphy writes excellent articles concerning children's rights. His column, *Murphy's Law*, in the Sun-Herald, provides useful information and insights.

However, if he is going to use headlines such as "Suffer the children" (Sun-Herald, March 13, 1994), he should consider the following:

Even the well-known saying, 'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me'