

# PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

The last issue of ACRN supported a position that states physical punishment of children should be banned. This issue was discussed in the Weekend Australian (June 25-26, 1994) and commented on changing attitudes. The UNICEF report Progress of Nations criticised Australia's attitude to physical punishment of children in the home, at schools and correctional institutions compared to other industrialised nations.



Under UNCRoC Australia is obliged to protect children from "all forms of physical or mental violence". Smacking is one such form of violence. Two child development experts' opinions are taken.

In NSW, Dr. Christopher Green from Camperdown's Child Development Unit was reported as saying that *while he did not think it the best form of discipline, it may be needed in a no-win situation, and 95% of Australian parents would probably at some time smack their children.* He felt it was out of touch with reality to refer to this as a criminal act.

Dr. Terry McDonald, the Director of the Child Protection Services at the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide had an approach closer to that of ACRN. He was reported as saying that physical punishment in any form is inappropriate, *"it is physical violence, the intent is to inflict some pain in order to stop behaviour"*. He is not against discipline but is against physical discipline and felt that today more parents are turning away from violence.

Berenice Nyland

## GOLD, GOLD AND MORE GOLD!

The recent Commonwealth Games once more highlighted the issue of children and sport. Readers of the Monitor (DCI's International Quarterly) may remember the articles on children and sport in 1993 from Switzerland and Belgium. The report from Swiss section of DCI concluded the following -

*"Those responsible for competitive sports (the State, sports federations, coaches and parents) do not automatically take account of children's rights. Yet sport also comes under the jurisdiction of national and international law, and therefore has certain number of obligations to respect"*.

While we have just watched another round of athletes being sent home because of drug abuse or Australian athletes embarrassed at the airport because they only won silver, some of the questions raised in the Swiss article by Paulo David spring readily to mind.

**"Should children be protected against certain sporting vices such as doping, nationalism and profiteering?"**

**"Is it normal that a 16 year old girl without buttocks or breasts, has a height of 1.32m and weighs under 30 kilos?"**

**"Is it normal that the shoulders of a 15 year old swimmers 'have already turned 1.5 million times'?"**

We have just witnessed all this and more on our televisions and radios. It is probably no accident that the commentators for the sprints especially sound more and more as if they are calling a horse race. What does our society offer athletes in return for giving up their childhood and adolescence? Not much, and in the words of A.E. Houseman:

*"and early though the laurel grows  
it withers quicker than the rose"*

Berenice Nyland