

# NGO Coalitions and Experiences of Reporting and Monitoring on the Convention on the Rights of the Child Workshop: A Report

In December 1997, 28 participants from 13 countries in the Asia-Pacific region met at Caylabne Bay in the Philippines for a workshop on NGO Coalitions and their experiences of reporting on and monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC). The participation of DCI-Australia in the workshop, organised by the International Save the Children Alliance Regional Working Group on CROC, was made possible by funding from Save the Children Australia.

Participants were given the opportunity to share the experiences of their country and the ideas and priorities of their organisation. This revealed how variations in levels of economic development, political systems, cultural and traditional practices and social values result in particular issues involving children being prioritised and played out differently in each country. Yet as a Filipino participant commented, there are some rights that are non-negotiable and must be ensured regardless of these variations. Moreover, the workshop revealed that some obstacles are shared by most or all countries. Most notably, participants from all countries felt that awareness about CROC among professionals working with children, law enforcement agencies and policy makers is still low and needs to be addressed.

The workshop revealed the continuing difficulty NGOs encounter in monitoring child protection and child participation. While indicators for child survival and development are now well-developed, participants agreed that appropriate and effective indicators of child protection and participation need to be developed further. There was some disagree-

ment among participants as to whether these indicators can be universal or must be country specific.

The vast majority of participants considered alternative reports

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to be a vital part of the ongoing monitoring process. There was a consensus that while it is important for NGOs and NGO coalitions to work closely and cooperatively with government, alternative reports are necessary to ensure that areas of non-compliance and politically sensitive issues are not neglected or avoided. There was a strong consensus that all aspects of monitoring and implementing the CROC should be inclusive and should prioritise the participation of children.

The experiences of other organisations provide some useful ideas for the protection and promotion of children’s rights in Australia. A strong and well coordinated NGO coalition with a clear children’s rights focus has been shown to be extremely effective elsewhere in the region. The Filipino experience of an NGO

coalition, for example, has been very positive, with the coalition playing a leading role in monitoring and reporting on the CROC and in circulating information among members.

The workshop was a most valuable experience, contributing to the ongoing process of establishing and maintaining networks between children's rights organisations - a process that is central to the promotion and imple-

mentation of the CROC in the Asia-Pacific region. More than anything, the reaction of conference participants to the powerful and moving performance in Tagalog by children from the Visayan Forum (an organisation that supports child labourers) demonstrated that children's rights issues are universal, regardless of language.

**Sharon Bessell**

## International Focal Point on the sexual exploitation of children

Following the World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1997, a Support Group on the sexual exploitation of children and an NGO group for the Convention on the Right of the Child, with DCI as its secretariat, was formed.

This NGO Group has been designated as the Focal Point to facilitate information sharing, collaborative initiatives and the input of Support Group members (comprising interested governments, NGOs, research institutions and individual experts) into international monitoring mechanisms such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Special Rapporteur.

The Focal Point Program has produced brochures in English, French, Russian and Spanish for use by national NGOs who wish to access international mechanisms. It has also conducted a comparative study of the proposed optional protocol on the sale of children for the forthcoming meeting of this UN Working Group. Currently, it is analysing the concluding observations and recommendations of the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child for

national NGOs in the countries examined to follow-up with their governments.

If you would like further information on the Focal Point Program, contact me at DCI, PO Box 88, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland. Alternatively, you can ph: 41-22-740-1145, fax: 41-22-740 1145, email <dcj-sex.ex@pingnet.ch>

**Helene Sackstein**

### **NSW GREEN PAPER ON COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN**

In the wake of the Royal Commission report into paedophilia in NSW, and the recommendation that the Government establish a Commissioner for Children, the Office of Children and Young People within the Cabinet Office has released a Green Paper on the subject. The paper is seeking the views of interested organisations, agencies, and individuals (both children and adults), on the role and functions of such an Office.

DCI is preparing an agency response, the full text of which will be published in the next edition of Children's Rights News. Copies of the Commissioner discussion paper can be obtained from the Office of Children and Young People - Tel. - 02 9228 5146 or Fax. - 02 9228 3984 or from the NSW Government web site - <http://www.nsw.au/html/reports.html>

**The dead-line for responses is March 31st 1998.**