

**Children's Law Centre and Save The Children  
Northern Ireland**

**Young People's Submission to the United Nations Committee  
on the Rights of the Child for consideration during the  
Committee's scrutiny of the UK government's report.**

**February 2002**

The Children's Law Centre is an NGO that was established in 1997. It aims to help young people, their parents and professionals who work with and understand the laws, which effect children. The Children's Law Centre is based at Philip House, 123-137 York Street, Belfast, BT15 1AB. Tel 00442890245704 Fax00442890245679  
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We have examined the various promises made to young people in Northern Ireland through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and this is our response to how these promises should be upheld by the UK government.

## **Having A Say**

The Convention promises that young people will be involved in all decisions that affect their lives (Article 12).

We feel that this promise is still not being implemented. When young people are consulted it can quite often be seen as tokenism or an after thought on the part of the state. Consultation does not often reach a significant amount of young people i.e. those not involved in youth organisations etc. When consulting young people, materials should be produced that are young person accessible and use terminology, which is easy to understand. This is not happening.

We feel that in relation to this the state has let young people down in two significant areas in education. Firstly, we feel that there was a lack of adequate consultation with Children and Young People around the Burns Report and the proposed changes in the 11+ examinations<sup>1</sup>. This will have a major effect on all young peoples lives and they were not consulted.

Secondly, we would like to mention the introduction of AS<sup>2</sup> level examinations, these examinations have significantly changed the way students study and prepare for exams, adding stress and an extra workload to our lives. Again, there was no consultation with young people asking what system would be most suitable for them.

## **Education**

The convention promises that everyone has a right to education. Education will develop a young persons talent for all areas of life – social, cultural and environmental as well as academic (Articles 28 and 29).

We believe that the state is not doing enough to promote integrated education, especially at the primary level. From five to eleven many children are forming their values and belief, yet the vast majority attend religiously segregated primary schools

The state should provide equal funding to all schools including Integrated and Irish medium schools.

With the growing cultural diversity that is happening in Northern Ireland the government must provide adequate support for young people for whom English may be their second language, every school should have access to someone who can provide support for these young people and their parents. We also believe that all teachers should be trained in anti-racism as a priority.

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<sup>1</sup> The Burns Report is a review of the second level education system in Northern Ireland, which at the moment is based on a Transfer Test undertaken at the age of 11, the results of which determine whether a young person can go to a Grammar or a Secondary school.

<sup>2</sup> AS Levels - Advanced Subsidiary Levels - these are subjects studied at the first year of A Level standard (i.e. pre-university) which has meant intense concentration of work and assessment.

All young people should also have the chance to participate in all the activities that the school offers. We feel that much attention is focussed on those students that may have a talent in sport or music and that the rest of students get no chance to participate in after-schools activities. The state should encouraging funding in these other activities, which reflect other young peoples lives i.e. graffiti art, DJing<sup>3</sup> skills, dance.

## **Information**

The Convention Promises that young people will have access to information that is helpful to them (Article 17).

We feel that we are still let down by the information we receive. A lot of the information young people receive about their lives often focuses on the negative aspects of young peoples lives. Information campaigns on drugs, smoking etc., are very valuable. However we would also like to see information produced that will positively enhance our lives in other aspects. There must be much more information produced which reflects our status as citizens. The government should produce information for young people on the right to vote, on their rights etc. This is often left to voluntary organisations or the young people themselves to produce these resources – this is the states responsibility!

## **Privacy**

The convention promises that young peoples privacy will be protected (Article 16).

We feel that there is an issue of confidentiality in schools. There must be away to prevent staff room gossip. Some young people feel that their actions in a certain class or subject are often relayed to other teachers who have no need to know what goes on in the relationship between that pupil and teacher. Teachers should be actively discouraged from this behaviour.

## **Employment**

The Convention promises that if you are working this should be safe and follow government guidelines such as how may hours we should work. We should also be properly paid for our work (Article 32).

We feel we are being let down in a major way concerning this right. The recent legislation on minimum wage totally excludes young people 18 and under. Many young people are now in full time employment and they are not receiving the benefits of the government's minimum wage scheme. Indeed young people 18-21 are being actively discriminated against although they are entitled too a minimum wage it is lower than the rest of the adult population 21 and over, even though they may be doing exactly the same jobs.

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<sup>3</sup> DJ - disc Jockey - i.e. playing records for the public, either on the radio or in nightclubs

## **Play and Recreation**

The Convention promises that young people and children will have places and time to play. Young people will have places to meet friends and to form relationships and to form clubs/organisations with them in Northern Ireland and will be safe and protected from harm (Article 15)

Young people who choose to form relationships with their peers in a detached setting, (e.g. on the street), and not within a youth club, are not provided with adequate or safe spaces. Young people should be involved in the design of parks, housing provision, city centre planning etc. Some young people feel that the solution to the problem is not to have lots of youth clubs everywhere, but to fund provision for projects that meet young peoples needs: especially those within the 14-18 age group who feel that a youth club is not for them.

A young victim of the conflict also felt that there is not adequate provision for young peoples groups in relation to those who have suffered as a result of the conflict. They feel that provision should be made for a youth friendly support service in relation to victims.

## **Youth Justice**

The Convention promises that young people who come into contact with the law have the right to be treated fairly and in a way that takes into account their age (Article 37).

We feel that an important issue that specifically relates to Northern Ireland is the emergence of Community Restorative Programmes, which some young people are now coming into contact with when they are seen by their communities to be involved in breaking the law.

We feel that these programmes should be properly monitored by the state to ensure that young people are always treated fairly when they come into contact with these programmes.

## **Safety**

The Convention promises that young people have the right to be protected from harm. The government has a duty to make sure this happens (Article 19).

We as young people welcome the recent changes in Policing within Northern Ireland. Many young people feel that this process has just begun and that changing the name and badge are not evidence that this process is complete. We are waiting to see what happens. We feel that all police officers should receive specific training in young peoples rights and the Convention, and that a section of specifically trained police officers should be assigned to work with young people.