



European Academy of Paediatrics
Paediatric Section of U.E.M.S (European Union of Medical Specialists)



The European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP) and the Rights of the Child

As a European organization representing Paediatricians, but more importantly as a Paediatric organization representing children, we are dedicated to working together to uphold and defend the normal growth, development and well-being of all children, regardless of their national origin.

Unfortunately, recent events are making us seriously reflect on how our generation is failing to honour the commitments that we have towards our future generation(s). Images of terrified, starving, maimed and orphaned children, child soldiers armed with lethal weapons, and children's toys strewn across the site of a downed civilian airliner, have been filling our television screens. Innocent families seek safety from conflict by walking through hostile countryside or by crossing oceans in un-seaworthy boats. Hardly a day goes by without seeing atrocities to which children and innocent by-standers are subjected as either a direct or indirect consequence of conflict.

The EAP very much fears the impact that these events will have on the future of humanity and it is for this reason that it wishes to remind all Heads of State, and specifically leaders of conflict-affected populations that "Mankind owes to the child the best it has to give". This quote comes from the preamble to the UN Declarations of the Rights of the Child of 1959 and 1979, a document endorsed by all members without exception. These basic rights have been summarized by UNICEF to be the following:

1. The right to equality, regardless of race, colour, religion, sex or nationality.
2. The right to healthy mental and physical development.
3. The right to a name and nationality.
4. The right to sufficient food, housing and medical care.
5. The right to special care if handicapped.
6. The right to love, understanding and care.
7. The right to free education, play and recreation.
8. The right to immediate aid in the event of disasters and emergencies.
9. The right to protection from cruelty, neglect and exploitation.
10. The right to protection from persecution and to an upbringing in the spirit of worldwide brotherhood and peace.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, which came into force in 1990 and was adopted by all UN members, includes references to the safeguarding of children in armed conflict situations, and to the provision of appropriate protection and assistance to refugee children. Article 44 establishes that member states will report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations every 5 years on the measures they have adopted which address the rights of children and on the progress made to ensure the enjoyment of those rights. States have the right to denounce the Convention but unless and until they do so they remain bound by its provisions. They, and we, have clearly failed to honour our commitments.

We call upon all involved in armed conflict, and all governments with influence in these matters, to consider the plight of children caught up in these terrible situations. We would urge that the protection of children must be a priority for all parties and needs to become a political imperative. In line with this admonition, the "UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre" reminds us that those countries that have made children a high priority are taking care of their most precious resource...the next generation.

"We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children"
(Nobel Laureate Gabriella Mistral).