

The World's Children

An overview of the State of the World's Children from UNICEF
(www.unicef.org)

What is Childhood?

- Childhood means more than the transition from infant to adult.
- Also refers to the state and condition of a child's life: the QUALITY of that life.
- Any definition of childhood should include human rights.

The ICRC – Ratified Nov. 1989

- The approval of the **International Convention on the Rights of the Child** supposes a new vision of children:
 - a child is an active subject with rights.
 - The definition of childhood is very important as this indicates the moment in which they acquire certain rights and also when they lose certain protection measures.

Why an ICRC?

- What did the Convention seek to accomplish?
 1. Defining childhood as a distinct space separate from adulthood.
 - -- minimum ages for enlistment in military
 - -- labor laws
 - -- pornography laws

Why an ICRC?

2. Assert the **power of family** in children's lives
 - -- Parents have primary role in childcare and guidance
 - -- However, system of checks and balances for the "best interests of the child"

Why an ICRC?

3. Declares that all children have rights regardless of their circumstances.
 - -- Children are not property or laborers
 - -- Children can have a say in their development

Why an ICRC?

4. Views the Child as both an individual and a member of a larger community
- -- Signing nations commit to a guarantee of individual rights
 - -- No discrimination of any kind
 - -- Expectation to provide spaces for children to have their voices heard, to make decisions, and to participate in a larger society

Why an ICRC?

5. Lay down the "common ground" among nations of what terms we should use when we talk about the "standards" that make a high quality of life for children
- -- represents a global consensus on the terms of childhood.

Why an ICRC?

6. Identifies obligations to the Child
- -- Commits nations, parents, governments, civil society to work to create a protective environment for children and childhood, free from exploitation and abuse.

Who didn't sign the ICRC?

- Only two countries did not sign or ratify the ICRC.
 - Somalia– Could not sign because they do not have a recognized government
 - What is the other country that refused to sign?

The United States

- Refused to sign/ratify the Convention based on two premises:
 1. The U.S. judicial system provided for the execution of juveniles (those ages 16-18) that stands in direct contrast to the ICRC.
 2. All international treaties must have the support of 2/3 of the Senate.

Inroads...2005 court cases

- 2005 *Roper v. Simmons*
 - Supreme Court ruling (5-4)
 - Held that it is unconstitutional to impose capital punishment for crimes committed while under the age of 18.
 - Argued that juveniles clearly have developmental differences from adults.
 - Argued that juveniles make up a disproportionate share of crimes committed.

Inroads...2005 court cases

- Argued that only 7 other countries – (Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and China) – have executed defendants who were juveniles at the time of their crime.
- Since 1990 each of those countries had either abolished the death penalty for juveniles or made public disavowal of the practice.
- The United States stood alone in allowing execution of juvenile offenders.

Political Barriers to Ratification

- Highly conservative bias in the Senate and House of Representatives
- Anger and outrage at crimes committed by juveniles (Lee Boyd Malvo and sniper attacks, school shootings)
- Viewing Convention as a political treaty rather than a global declaration– therefore must follow political rules.

ICRC Strides

- Since the Convention, great strides have been made across the globe.
- Children are increasingly protected from exploitation, abuse, and violence at a state/national level.
- However, **three key threats** leave these successes in danger:

Three Major Problems

- Poverty
- Armed Conflict/War
- HIV/AIDS
- We will be reading about some of these issues in *Small Wars*

Children & Poverty

- Defined:
 - severely underserved of at least one of the basic goods or services that would allow them to survive, develop and thrive.
 - What might these basic goods/services be?
 - In some cultures, not all goods and services are distributed equally among genders, age groups, etc.

Poverty is an issue of *rights*.

The United Nations views poverty as:

“a human condition, characterized by the chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.”

Armed Conflict/War

- Hundreds of thousands of children are caught up in armed conflict:
 - as soldiers
 - as refugees
 - suffer sexual violence, abuse and exploitation
 - as victims of explosive remnants of war (land mines)

Armed Conflict/War

- Children are also deprived of basic human rights according to the ICRC, including:
 - health
 - education
 - family services
 - a “protective environment”

HIV/AIDS

- AIDS is already the leading cause of death worldwide for people aged 15 to 49.
- Over 90 per cent of people currently living with HIV/AIDS are in developing countries.
- In 2003, 2.9 million people died of AIDS and 4.8 million people were newly infected with HIV.

What does this mean for children?

- In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS has led to:
 - rising child mortality rates
 - sharp reductions in life expectancy
 - millions of orphans.

Africa a particular problem

- Around 15 million children under the age of 18 had been orphaned by the pandemic by the end of 2003. Eight out of 10 of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- It is estimated that by 2010 over 18 million African children will have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS.

Orphaned Children

- Losing a parent is more than losing a caregiver.
 - Children often must become primary caregivers of younger children
 - Need to find work to care for the remaining family.
 - Being orphaned young deprives children the benefit of a family environment.
 - In short, it cuts away at some of the **safety nets of childhood.**

HIV/AIDS: Women and Girls

- HIV/AIDS affects women and girls differently:
 - are most often the caregivers
 - are the most likely to refuse education or be offered it
 - are the most likely to refuse medicines in favor of male treatment

HIV/AIDS: Women and Girls

- Women and girls:
- the most likely to obtain work through prostitution
 - more likely to be victims of rape
 - assume the blame for bringing AIDS into the household.
 - account for 75% of the AIDS cases in Africa

The Bottom Line

- The Vision of Childhood promoted in the Convention that unites countries and peoples under a "common consensus" is often at odds with the vision that most children actually experience.

From the Reader

- Diarrhea
 - Leading cause of malnutrition
 - Affects millions of children each year
 - Results in dehydration
 - Easily preventable!

Solutions

- Many known remedies
 - Mixture of sugar, salts, and water
 - Rice water + cereals
 - ORT/ORS (Oral Rehydration Therapy/Solution)

Missing Birth Certificates

- Many children in a "paperless status"
- 46% of Bolivian children are undocumented
- Exorbitantly expensive
- Can result in lack of education
- Bolivia has the lowest child registration rate in the Americas.
- Child mortality may play a role, especially in the countryside.

Organizational Briefs

- UNICEF =
 - United Nations International Children's Emergency Funds
 - Many projects in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean
 - Publishes the State of the World's Children each year.
 - Part of the United Nations
 - www.unicef.org

Project Hope

- HOPE = Health Opportunities for People Everywhere
 - Named for the S.S. Hope, a hospital ship
 - www.projecthope.org

Save the Children

- Famous for their "less than a cup of coffee a day" sponsorship slogan
- Similar to UNICEF and HOPE
- Economical Opportunities Program for women
- www.savethechildren.org

The Peace Corps

- Volunteer organization founded by JFK
- High numbers of students enter the Peace Corps before or instead of graduate school
- Masters International Programs
- www.peacecorps.gov

Lessons from California

- Bayview-Hunters Point zip code in SF has highest mortality rate in California
- Environment + racism + poverty + crime = a "cumulative toll"

Lessons from California

- Need a healthy community
 - Unsafe Housing
 - Crime/violence
 - Unemployment
 - Environmental pollution
 - Social inequity and Stress