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**OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

**REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONCLUDING
OBSERVATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

**organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,
in collaboration with UNICEF and UNDP, and hosted by
the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic**

(Damascus, 17 - 19 December 2003)

1. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), organized the Workshop on the Implementation of the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, (hereafter "the Committee") from 17 to 19 December 2003. The Workshop was hosted by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in Damascus and attended by participants from Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, by representatives of United Nations bodies and of the League of Arab States, and by six members of the Committee.

2. The Workshop was opened by Her Excellency Siham Dillo, Minister of Social Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, who informed the participants of efforts made by her country to accelerate the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter "the Convention") and announced the upcoming National Conference which would bring together the 14 governorates. Mr. Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Adviser for Child Protection for the Middle East and North Africa, reiterated the full and concrete commitment of UNICEF to the implementation of the Convention. Ms. María Francisca Ize-Charrin, Chief, Treaties and Commission Branch, OHCHR, Geneva, underlined that the promotion and protection of human rights were the pillars of the United Nations and pointed out the importance of organizing workshops focusing on the implementation of concluding observations of human rights treaty bodies. Mr. Taoufik Ben Amara, United Nations Resident Coordinator, read, in Arabic, the statement sent by the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, reiterating his thanks to the host Government. Afterwards, he explained the importance that UNDP attached to the promotion and protection of human rights in all development projects.

3. The Workshop held plenary meetings at which several presentations were made and convened working groups on particular themes. Each working group was facilitated by the following members of the Committee: Mr. Ibrahim Abdul Aziz Al-Sheddi, Ms. Ghalia Mohd Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Mr. Jakob Egbert Doek, Mr. Kamel Filali, Mrs. Moushira Khattab and Mr. Hatem Kotrane. Presentations were made by Ms. Jane Connors, Team Leader of the Treaties Implementation and Follow-up Unit, OHCHR, on "The United Nations system and human rights", Mr. Doek, Chairperson of the Committee, on "The Convention on the Rights of the Child - main provisions", Mr. Kotrane, member of the Committee, on "The status of the Convention in domestic law" and Ms. Khattab, Rapporteur of the Committee, on "The Optional Protocols to the Convention".

4. Interventions in the plenary were also made by representatives of the regional office of UNICEF, UNDP Syria, the United Nations Country Team of Jordan, the League of Arab States and OHCHR on the activities of their organizations in the region. Representatives of national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and of the Jordanian National Centre for Human Rights also made interventions on the role of civil society and national human rights institutions in promoting the human rights of children.

5. The working groups worked on eight themes: (a) Legislation; (b) Coordination mechanisms, national plans of action, data collection and resource allocation; (c) Independent monitoring structures; (d) The role of civil society in the monitoring and implementation of the Convention, including the role of private actors such as NGOs in providing health and social services; (e) General principles, in particular non-discrimination, the right to life and child participation; (f) Violence against children, including in the family and in schools as well as in the community; (g) Access to health and social services and to education; and (h) juvenile justice. In addition to being facilitated by members of the Committee, each group elected a rapporteur from among the participants who reported to the plenary.

6. An underlying theme of the Workshop was the emphasis in the Convention on the importance of family and community as an enabling environment for the child, and the Convention's aim to make the child a responsible and effective individual with respect to human rights and fundamental freedoms. The right of parents to provide guidance and direction, taking into consideration the child's evolving capacity and right to participation, was also emphasized throughout the Workshop.

7. The Workshop adopted the following conclusions and suggestions:

Representatives of the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, the Jordanian National Centre for Human Rights, the League of Arab States, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations, participating in the Workshop on the Implementation of the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, held in Damascus from 17 to 19 December 2003,

1. Express their gratitude to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic for hosting the Workshop, to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which organized the workshop, and to UNDP and UNICEF, which supported this effort. They express particular gratitude to the expert members of the Committee who served as resource persons throughout the workshop;
2. Reaffirm the indivisibility and universality of the rights identified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
3. Recognize the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for the promotion and protection of human rights, as evidenced by the near-universal ratification of the Convention and by the efforts made by all participating countries to prepare reports for the Committee;
4. Also recognize the value for the protection of child rights of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography;
5. Further recognize the efforts of the States parties represented at the Workshop, which have submitted their reports to the Committee in a timely fashion; and have readily and actively participated in this workshop;
6. Recall that the consideration by the Committee of the initial and periodic reports of States parties and the drafting of concluding observations thereon have proved to be a useful way of following up the implementation by States parties of the obligations they have undertaken under the Convention;
7. Emphasize the value of follow-up to the recommendations made by the Committee in its concluding observations and note that sincere efforts have been made at the national level to follow up the Committee's recommendations;
8. Affirm that national institutional mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure accelerated implementation of the Convention and fulfilment of the Committee's recommendations;
9. Reaffirm the importance of exchange of experience among States parties on implementation and monitoring of the Convention and the Committee's recommendations;

10. Also reaffirm the importance of strengthening internal human rights coordination among the various branches of government, civil society and international agencies;
11. Welcome the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the promotion and protection of human rights, and in particular its activities in the Arab region;
12. Acknowledge the catalytic role played by UNICEF and the activities of UNDP and other United Nations entities through the United Nations Country Teams and invite these entities to continue and strengthen their work with respect to human rights, and in particular child rights and child protection;
13. Consider that the preparation of reports for the Committee should be viewed as an opportunity for the State party and civil society to evaluate the situation and improve the implementation of the Convention at the national level;
14. Encourage the States participating in the Workshop to provide information in their next periodic reports to the Committee on the measures they have taken to give effect to the recommendations and suggestions made by the Committee in its concluding observations and evaluate the results obtained;
15. Appreciate the expertise of the Committee and suggest that it consider formulating specific, realistic and concrete recommendations in its concluding observations, based on the situation in the State party, with a view to maintaining an open dialogue with States so as to facilitate their further implementation of the Convention;
16. Call upon donor States, agencies and international organizations to assist in ensuring the implementation of the concluding observations of the Committee on the initial report of Israel with a view to providing implementation of the rights of all children in the occupied Arab territories of Palestine, Lebanon and the Golan, and urges Israel to adhere to its obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular with respect to children, infants and women, especially when pregnant, and to ensure freedom of movement and access to medical assistance for those in the Occupied Territories.
17. Stress the importance of respect for the child's opinion and of his or her participation in all decisions affecting his or her life;
18. Adopt the following recommendations addressed to Governments, civil society and the United Nations system, which they agreed should be widely disseminated by the participants and OHCHR:

Awareness-raising, advocacy and dissemination

- (a) To intensify efforts, in partnership between the State and civil society, to foster respect for human rights and a culture of child rights;
- (b) To enhance public awareness of human rights, including by raising the awareness of all parties concerned with children's issues;
- (c) To enhance measures ensuring the implementation of legislation designed to alleviate all forms of discrimination, e.g. in access to free quality health and educational services for children, paying special attention to the girl child;

- (d) To educate, and raise the awareness of, women;
 - (e) To enhance efforts to raise awareness, develop advocacy initiatives and disseminate information on discrimination affecting children, including on the basis of sex, and on the situation of particularly vulnerable children, for example refugee and orphaned children and children with disabilities;
- (f) To raise awareness within the private sector of violations of children's rights such as in the area of child labour;
- (g) To take steps to ensure wide dissemination of information on United Nations activities, particularly in the field of human rights;
- (h) To adopt measures aimed at raising awareness of the Committee's work among the population at large and widely disseminating the States parties' reports and the Committee's concluding observations thereon;

Education, training and technical cooperation

- (i) To introduce and implement training programmes in national technical bodies to facilitate follow-up of the Committee's recommendations;
- (j) To design and implement, in collaboration with relevant entities such as OHCHR and UNICEF training programmes for all parties concerned with children's issues ;
- (k) To support the development of courses on human rights, including the rights of children, for schools and universities, and the development of a master's degree in children's rights for senior managers and decision makers by the Arab Institute for Human Rights, in close consultation with Arab academic institutions;
- (l) To strengthen ties with scholars and support efforts to promote better understanding and increased knowledge of the Convention and its Optional Protocols among professionals, the public at large and children themselves;
- (m) To design and implement training programmes for judges and juvenile justice workers on juvenile justice issues, including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) and the Arab Standards on Juvenile Law;
- (n) To encourage the holding of seminars and workshops on human rights education, the best interests of the child and children with special needs;
- (o) To give priority to the development of poor communities and raise their economic, social and educational standards;
- (p) To encourage OHCHR to hold more workshops, including at the national level, to provide other States parties with an opportunity to exchange experiences on issues of human rights and the rights of children;

Coordination and partnerships

- (q) To establish mechanisms for consultation, with broad participation by all sectors of society, in the preparation of reports and follow-up to the Committee's recommendations and decisions;
- (r) To set strategies and implement programmes to eradicate violence against children;
- (s) To strengthen coordination and cooperation among government structures and civil society, with the participation of youth and children, in order to enhance implementation of human rights obligations;
- (t) To develop national action plans for the promotion and protection of children's rights and allocate sufficient financial resources for their implementation;
- (u) To develop mechanisms, including networks, to ensure effective coordination and cooperation among civil society actors of the Arab region with a view to strengthening implementation of the Convention, ensuring the optimum use of resources and avoiding duplication of efforts;
- (v) To encourage civil society groups to endeavour, to the extent possible, to coordinate their efforts to submit consolidated, concise and concrete information to the Committee;
- (w) To put in place mechanisms for Arab, national and international coordination in the implementation of the Convention;
- (x) To establish mechanisms for assessing the impact of resource allocation, particularly with respect to activities relating to children;
- (y) To encourage donors to meet their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to international assistance, giving priority to countries in particularly difficult circumstances and to those implementing concrete policies and programmes to address the situation of children, and call on donors to coordinate their programmes relating to children;

Data collection and statistics

- (z) To create a database on the activities in the region with respect to the subjects addressed in the Convention, based on accurate statistics, data and information;
- (aa) To create a database on children deprived of primary caregivers, violence against children, child abuse, including child labour and child exploitation, and children affected by armed conflict, with a view to elaborating strategies to address these phenomena;
- (bb) To seek to standardize statistical terminology and concepts used by different groups working on the rights of the child;
- (cc) To establish indicators on progress in children's rights, taking account of the social and economic situation of the country concerned;

- (dd) To build capacity at the national level, with support from relevant international and bilateral partners, for the collection and analysis of statistics, data and the development of indicators;

Law and policy reform

- (ee) To initiate, disseminate and share studies on the conformity of national laws with the Convention and create mechanisms to amend legislation so that it complies with the Convention;
- (ff) To initiate discussions on the rationale for reservations to human rights treaties, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child, taking into account the developments in other States parties with regard to reservations;
- (gg) To consider adopting measures aimed at ensuring the implementation of the Committee's concluding observations with a view to improving the juvenile justice system, in accordance with the Beijing Rules and the Arab Standards on Juvenile Law, including access to legal advice, specialized prosecutors and specialized legal institutions;
- (hh) To take measures to prevent juvenile criminality;
- (ii) To consider the possibility of organizing an Arab workshop on the issue of the age of criminal responsibility;
- (jj) To respect the dignity of juvenile offenders, taking into account their best interests and psychological status;
- (kk) To allocate appropriate resources for the creation of special detention centres for juvenile offenders;
- (ll) To take measures to reintegrate juvenile offenders into society;
- (mm) To create procedures to ensure that child victims can submit complaints to appropriate forums.

Adopted in Damascus, 19 December 2003