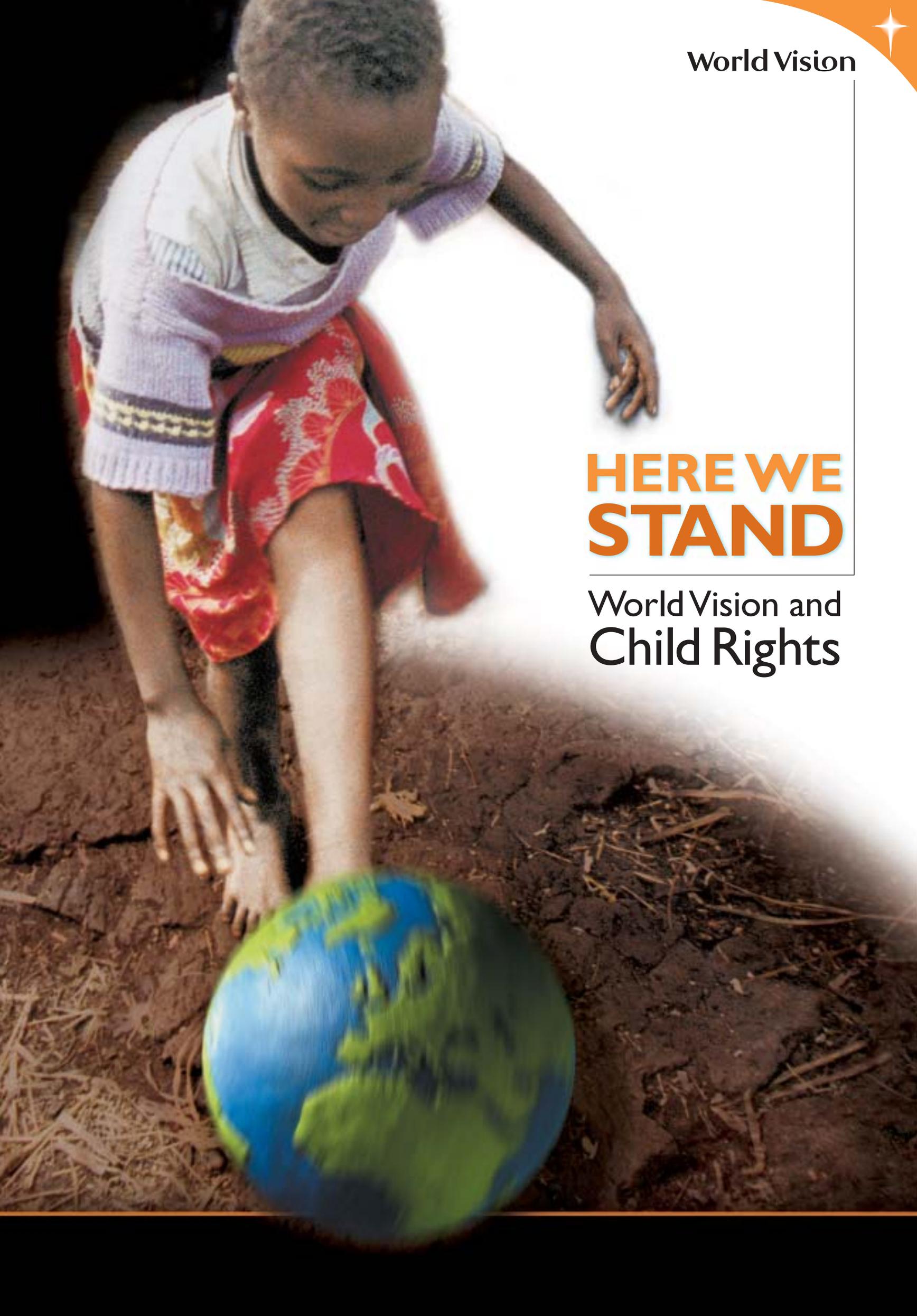




World Vision

HERE WE STAND

World Vision and
Child Rights





Introduction

World Vision is a Christian relief and development partnership that serves more than 85 million people in over 80 countries. Founded in 1950 to respond to the needs of children orphaned during the Korean War, World Vision has always been willing to take a stand when the rights of children are in danger. Today World Vision's mission statement embodies a commitment to seek to follow Christ's example by working with the poor and oppressed in pursuit of justice and human transformation.

For World Vision 'the poor and oppressed' manifestly includes the 250 million children who work to secure essential income for themselves and their families; children traumatised by war; children scarred by debt bondage, slavery or sexual exploitation. And working with children in communities around the globe has also confronted World Vision with issues of family abuse and violence, which threaten children in the very place where they should be most safe.

World Vision's advocacy to secure protection for children and respect for their rights stems from this experience.

Poverty, exploitation and violence are not inevitable. The problems that children face across the developing world, and which claim 30,000 young lives each day, are the result of failures in humanity's stewardship of the resources with which it is endowed. World Vision's mission statement is a call to challenge unjust structures that constrain the poor in a world of false priorities, gross inequalities and distorted values. World Vision works for a world that no longer tolerates poverty—one where all people are able to reach their God-given potential.

World Vision acknowledges that children are subjects in their own and in their communities' development. Recognising children's right to participate as partners in development is a significant pillar of World Vision's commitment to children.

This pack details World Vision's responses to major challenges facing children in the world in which they live today. It explains the agency's commitments to the rights of children and its desire that all children be able to live in safe, secure and prosperous families. World Vision will continue to stand with children as they face each of the issues that are addressed here. ■

World Vision has always been willing to take a stand when the rights of children are in danger (CRC): the right to **survival**, the right to **food**, the right to **family**, the right to cultural and religious **identity**, and the right to **education**.



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Children in Armed Conflict

Our collective failure to protect children must be transformed into an opportunity to confront the problems that cause their suffering. The impact of armed conflict on children is everyone's responsibility and must be everyone's concern.

—Graça Machel, *The Machel Review, 1996–2000*, p. 3.

The issue

War has always hurt children, but today's wars brutalise children in more deliberate, intensive, and systematic ways than ever. When the lines between civilians and combatants are blurred, young people get caught up in complex wars over control of resources, ethnic conflicts and power struggles. Not only are they unintended victims, they often become active participants.

During the 1990s, because of war, more than two million children died; over six million suffered lasting injuries; some 20 million were removed from their homes, often for long periods of time; and over 100 million had their development interrupted by malnutrition or loss of education.

Over 300,000 under the age of 18 are child soldiers. Small arms, cheap and readily obtained, are easy for children to use. Young people are deliberate targets in systematic rape, terrorisation of villages, and the invoking of religion or ethnicity to incite hatred—all tools of modern war. In the absence of other economic or social opportunities, some young people join warring factions for survival reasons. And, thanks to the impact of debt and Structural Adjustment Programmes, governments in conflict-prone countries have cut services that might protect children.

War affects children differently than adults; thus, it is important to focus specifically on protecting the security and rights of children in conflict situations. War threatens the most basic rights expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): the right to survival, the right to food, the right to family, the right to cultural and religious identity, and the right to education. War does not excuse either violations of the rights of children or neglect of their need for protection. The provisions of the CRC are not derogated during armed conflict—in fact, the CRC includes humanitarian provisions from the Geneva Conventions, especially in sections 38 and 39 where States commit to provide assistance to children affected by war.

The reality is, however, that there are few mechanisms to protect vulnerable children in conflict situations. States, which should protect children, are unable to do so or become violators themselves; non-State actors, whether rebel troops or commercial interests that profit from war, are not held accountable. And even when gross violations of children's rights during armed conflict have been documented, the international community has been reluctant to intervene.

Recognition of the problem has grown through the adoption by the Security Council of resolutions 1261 and 1314 on children; the appointment of a UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict; the

War threatens the most basic rights expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

adoption of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; and the Agenda for Action endorsed by 132 countries at the first International Conference on War-Affected Children. Release of children by government forces in Uganda and rebel troops in Sudan are tangible positive developments.

For most children caught in conflict, however, words and good intentions have not changed their reality. We must not stop advocacy until the use of children in war is as unacceptable as the use of chemical weapons or nuclear arms.

World Vision policy

World Vision's commitment on this issue is rooted in the agency's long experience in directly assisting child victims of armed violence—dating from the Korean and Indochina wars—and its ongoing emergency relief, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding involvement through all stages of lasting conflicts—such as those in Burundi, Sierra Leone, Sudan and northern Uganda. In 2000, World Vision published a policy working paper, *The Right to Peace: Children and Armed Conflict*. World Vision recommends the following steps in a comprehensive strategy to protect children's security and rights before, during, and after war:

Prevention

- Stop the use of child soldiers through effective implementation of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the

non-recruitment and non-deployment of those aged under 18.

- Implement the call of the Security Council to “restrict arms transfers which could aggravate existing tensions...and collaborate in combating illegal arms flows”.

- Give the needs of children higher priority in World Bank, IMF and donor country strategies. Seek public child-impact assessments of fiscal policy prescriptions for conflict-prone countries, and monitor their policies’ support for CRC commitments.

- Invest more resources in preventive peacebuilding initiatives in the context of community development programmes and with the active participation of children.

Protection

- Strengthen early warning systems; establish a child-focused early intervention team to aggressively monitor and report systemic violations, and an effective mechanism to pursue complaints of serious violations through UN channels.

- Promote and implement strategies based on the concept of ‘children as zones of peace’; enforce Geneva Convention prohibitions against attacks on schools, hospitals and places where children congregate.

- More actively protect the right of access for children to humanitarian assistance, and allocate more resources to the needs of children in displaced persons camps.

- Strengthen efforts with ways that maximise young people’s participation, to make young people aware of the risks and consequences of involvement in armed conflict.

Recovery and reintegration

- Establish education as the fourth component of emergency assistance.

- Give high priority to children’s issues early in the peace process, using such means as civil society children’s advocates drafting child-specific provisions in peace agreements.

- Implement child-specific demobilisation and reintegration efforts that expedite a clear rupture with military life, allow a sufficient time frame for successful reintegration, and promote active participation by the young people and their communities.

- Pay special attention to the needs of girls, including reproductive health services and overcoming commu-

nity rejection—especially following sexual abuse by enemy forces.

- Use community-based approaches to deal with the psycho-social impacts of conflict, with respect for the cultural context of the children.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision participated in the Graça Machel study *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* and in follow-up advocacy, including the recent update of the report. World Vision initiated a Non-governmental organisation (NGO) consultation and presentation to Security Council members before their debate on children and armed conflict, and was active in the First International Conference on War-Affected Children and in developing its NGO Plan of Action. World Vision continues to provide leadership in the network of NGOs on Children and Armed Conflict, participating in Working Groups on Geneva and New York; is active in

We must not stop advocacy until the use of children in war is as unacceptable as chemical weapons or nuclear arms.

the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and various national chapters; and advocates on a range of other issues, such as landmines and small arms, to lessen the impact of conflict on children. ■

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Child Labour

Hazardous child labour is a betrayal of every child's rights as a human being and is an offence against our civilisation.

—UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 1997*

The issue

While child labourers are in many ways victims of the development process, they are also active participants within it. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that some 120 million children (aged 5–14) worldwide work every day, full time, often at the expense of their education, health and natural development. Another 130 million children are said to work part time, attempting to combine education and other commitments. Many millions of these are working under exploitative and hazardous conditions.

The ILO defines exploitative child labour as work which “deprives children of their childhood and their dignity, which hampers their access to education and the acquisition of skills, and which is performed under conditions harmful to their health and their development”.¹

Opinion is divided as to the point at which work becomes exploitative, but the debate focuses on questions such as: What is the physical nature of the work? How does the work affect the child's current activities (such as education) and future choices? What impact is the work having on the child's access to his or her most fundamental human rights?

In 1999 the ILO secured agreement on a new international Convention (No. 182) on the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, supplemented by Recommendation No. 190. The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, as it is known, seeks to eradicate the least tolerable forms of child labour, which include slavery, prostitution, compulsory recruitment into armed forces, and any labour which will harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Well-meaning measures can often have disastrous consequences, as demonstrated by the experience of a US Child Labour Deterrence Act which was designed to deal with child labour through sanctions against the industries involved. When the Harkin Bill was first introduced into Congress in 1993, it led to preventive

action by factory owners who faced being penalised, particularly in Bangladesh, one of the largest garment suppliers to the US. Factories that feared the loss of US contracts dismissed an estimated 70,000 child workers.² A follow-up study by Oxfam found that an estimated 30,000 children who formerly worked in the garment industry in Bangladesh had moved into the more hazardous welding and sex industries.³

World Vision policy

World Vision's experience in working in developing countries among marginalised people, including child labourers, makes one thing very clear: children will continue to work until there are viable and sustainable alternatives that reach the entire family and community. While families continue to live in poverty with an overriding need for income, their children are potentially vulnerable to exploitation. If children are not sent into export industry factories to work, they may be sent to work in other less-monitorable industries. Indeed, most

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child labourers are found in the informal economy—on farms, in households, on the streets and in workshops, beyond the reach of protective labour legislation.

Rather than favouring punitive sanctions or consumer boycotts, World Vision, along with many other children's rights activists and non-government organisations, focuses on working to abolish the most extreme and hazardous forms of child labour—such as child prostitution, bonded labour, work involving very young children, and any work that is hazardous to children's physical, emotional or spiritual health.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision has consistently advocated a multi-pronged approach through representations at national and international levels and through a range of publications (some of which are listed below). This approach can be summarised as:

- Ending the worst forms of child labour quickly.
- Persuading formal sector employers to improve conditions and shorten hours.
- Creating income alternatives for families.

- Improving access to good quality and appropriate education.
- Tackling the structural impediments which create and compound poverty.

World Vision recently undertook a major study of child labour in several Asian countries, publishing an executive summary of the extensive data obtained.⁴ This study confirmed that the underlying causes of child labour are basically structural: widespread poverty, gross inequality of income distribution, and poor or inadequate education. Furthermore, the implementation of some Structural Adjustment Programmes, imposed by the International Monetary Fund onto developing countries, has made children more vulnerable by diverting funds from areas such as health and education.

Therefore, World Vision endorses the three 'pillars' advocated by the ILO for any strategy to eliminate child labour: prevention, removal and reintegration. Of these, prevention is the most challenging—it requires long-term, international, national, community- and family-based solutions. And in the short term, if removal is neither possible nor appropriate, World Vision urges better protection for working children. ■

Further reading *Look Before You Leap: Strategic Approaches to Urban Child Labour*, World Vision Cambodia, 2000. • *Good Work, Bad Work, Tough Choices: Child Labour and World Vision's Area Development Programs in Thailand, India and Philippines*, World Vision Canada, 2000. • 'Eradicating Child Labour Without Putting Children on the Streets', *Together: A Journal of the World Vision Partnership*, No. 58, World Vision International, 1998. • *Helping Business to Help Stop Child Labour*, Anti-Slavery International supported by World Vision, 1996. • *Children of the Dust: Street Children in Vietnam and Children in Extremely Difficult Circumstances*, World Vision International, 1996. • *Child Labour in Context*, World Vision Australia, 1995. • *Street Survival: Children, Work and Urban Drift in Cambodia*, World Vision Australia, 1995.

Well-meaning measures can often have **disastrous** consequences.

¹International Labour Organisation, 'Strategies for Eliminating Child Labour: Prevention, Removal and Rehabilitation', *Synthesis Document Prepared for the ILO Conference on Child Labour*, Oslo, 27–30 October, 1997.

²'Eradicating Child Labour Without Putting Children on the Streets', *Together: A Journal of the World Vision Partnership*, No. 58, April–June 1998, pp. 9–10.

³*Ibid*, p. 10.

⁴*Good Work, Bad Work, Tough Choices: Child Labour and World Vision's Area Development Programs in Thailand, India and Philippines*, World Vision Canada, 2000.

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Monitoring and Accountability Under the CRC

Our promises to children throughout the world remain unfulfilled.

—Graça Machel, Introduction, *The Machel Review, 1996–2000*

The issue

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is more than a statement of ideals or collective dreams for children. It is a covenant, or statement of commitments to children, and, as such, entails responsibilities for meeting those commitments. States have official obligations, but responsibility to respect the rights of children belongs to everyone.

The CRC's purpose is to protect the most vulnerable group in society, but tragically it has the weakest follow-up mechanisms of all the human rights instruments, and weaker mechanisms than any international economic agreements.

States are required to report on their progress toward meeting the goals of the CRC within two years of ratification, and then once every five years. An appointed Committee on the Rights of the Child reviews the country reports and makes recommendations to the governments.

However, long delays, lack of resources to carry out investigations, the uneven quality of appointments to the committee, and the lack of any power to require compliance have all been identified as weaknesses in the current system.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the rights of children are often the last to receive attention instead of the first. When asked to comply with the CRC, national governments of poor countries rightfully argue that their capacity for compliance is heavily influenced by the fiscal decisions of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other economic institutions—institutions which have no official obligations to children.

The system breaks down even further when national governments ignore violations of the rights of children, or worse, are violators themselves.

World Vision policy

World Vision believes that the monitoring and implementation mechanisms of the CRC must be strengthened as a

matter of urgency. Many government delegations and most non-governmental representations to the first two preparatory sessions for the UN Special Session on Children in 2001 have advocated for measures to strengthen implementation and accountability at all levels.

When violations of the rights of children threaten their lives or cause permanent damage, the official mechanism of national reports once every five years to the Committee on the Rights of Child is clearly inadequate. This is particularly true when the committee is vastly under-resourced—leading to a backlog of government reports of well over two years.

Furthermore, the committee's directions are non-binding. This means that even in some of the most extreme cases of child rights violations, it has only the power of persuasion—effectively, its recommendations can be ignored.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision is a member of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and also participates in a range of inter-agency coalitions dedicated to securing the rights of children (including the Global

States have official obligations, but responsibility to respect the rights of children belongs to everyone.

Campaign for Education, the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the NGO Committee for UNICEF). World Vision's own advocacy work has a special focus on the rights of children, and the agency has specialist child rights policy staff working in Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia and elsewhere. Advocacy for the rights of children inevitably entails seeking stronger implementation of the CRC, and as a result, World Vision has consistently called both for the ratification and implementation of the CRC and for the strengthening of its accountability mechanisms.

World Vision advocates action to:

- Involve youth in monitoring and regular reporting on circumstances for local children.
- Increase resources for CRC awareness, education and training, and training in abuse prevention (through national action plans or—when countries cannot afford it—international assistance).

- Incorporate the CRC into national laws and compliance mechanisms.
- Undertake and publicise child-impact assessments of fiscal policies—national budgets and policies, and those developed by institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and UN—ensuring that such policies support countries' commitments under the CRC.
- Establish national-level positions or institutions (for example, ombudsman or commission) to hold governments accountable.
- Strengthen the Committee on the Rights of the Child through increased resources, timely reporting, and wide dissemination of reports.
- Give the needs and perspectives of children high priority in plans for international assistance, and in-country coordination of aid.
- Build on the monitoring system for the CRC that is already in place, at national and international levels, including the elaboration of elements for a petition procedure under the CRC by the Commission on Human Rights.

- Strengthen the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to carry out immediate investigations of violations during armed conflict and report to the Security Council, with follow-up action through measures—such as diplomatic pressure, arms embargoes, and targeted sanctions—that punish violators but not children. ■

Our promises to children throughout the world remain unfulfilled.

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Children in a Global Economy

The need to protect and nurture children in early childhood should merit the highest priority when governments make decisions about laws, policies, programmes and money. Yet, tragically, both for children and for countries, these are the years that receive the least attention.

—Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, launching *The State of the World's Children 2001*

The issue

In 1998, in the aftermath of the Southeast Asian economic crisis, World Vision issued a report that documented the devastating effects of that upheaval on children.¹ In Thailand, Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines, World Vision partners were witnessing problems of plummeting school enrolment and increasing numbers of children seeking to earn income, many in high-risk sectors of the economy.

These problems were greatly exacerbated by International Monetary Fund-imposed economic conditionalities that served both to deepen the recession and to restrict help for the very poorest. The situation was made even worse by prolonged time lags in the implementation of donor-funded social safety net programmes. World Vision was compelled to speak out and call for policies that would be less damaging to children.

Yet macroeconomic policies do not affect children only during times of crisis. In many ways, children are a 'weathervane' for poverty: infant mortality and morbidity tend to be highest in contexts where economic growth is low (although growth alone is not always the answer). It has consistently been children who have felt the effects of misguided economic policy.

In the 1980s, for example, Structural Adjustment Programmes designed by the IMF insisted that governments balance their national budgets—a process that even most developed countries find impossible during recessions. The result was that those governments had no choice but to make deep cuts in health and education spending; to reduce investment in children and thereby undermine their own long-term national economic prospects.

Having resources available for services essential to children is not just a question of debt and adjustment, however. While debt repayments by developing countries were rising, obstacles to their exports remained and

overseas development assistance from richer countries was falling. Third World governments struggled to follow instructions from the IMF and others to pursue a free-market solution to their problems, because although the IMF insisted on developing states opening up their markets to foreign imports, OECD governments did not reciprocate. The failure of the OECD to liberalise its own markets is believed, by the World Bank, to cost the poor US\$150 billion per year.

World Vision policy

World Vision programmes worldwide benefit over 10 million children—both directly (through provision of services such as education and nutrition) and indirectly through initiatives that strengthen the economic position of their communities (such as training, micro-credit and income-generation initiatives, and agricultural improvements). Such programmes equip children, and help to create opportunities for future participation in the economic life of their countries. But it is clear that without just economic policies at the national and glob-

It has consistently been children who have felt the effects of misguided economic policy.

al levels, their participation will always be hindered.

World Vision believes that economic injustice is at the heart of the causes of child poverty, and that without sustainable, 'pro-poor' economic growth, hundreds of millions of children will stay in absolute poverty, living on less than US\$1 a day. Supporting pro-poor growth means allowing governments the resources they need to invest in education and health provision for children; it also means ensuring income distribution that shares national wealth fairly. This kind of growth is dependent on the creation of a fairer international context for development, which includes better trade rules, deeper and quicker debt relief, and the provision of desperately-needed funds for human development.

World Vision advocacy

To help achieve the kind of economic justice that can allow poor children to reach adulthood in more prosperous countries, World Vision has advocated on a range of key economic issues. World Vision's Global Economic Issues Group is a network of policy specialists and development practitioners who analyse and seek to influence

international and national financial policies and institutions—often using formal policy-making processes, such as the design of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers—to call for interventions that target assistance at vulnerable children.²

Children must be able to grow up with equal access to essential services such as health and education. Research has shown that education provision not only improves economic opportunities but also has a significant impact on health. World Vision is a member of the Global Campaign for Education, that seeks to hold governments to their international commitments to ensure universal free primary education.

On the macroeconomic level, World Vision has been active in the Jubilee campaign against unpayable debt and recently called for the World Bank/IMF's Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative (HIPC2) to be improved. In 2000 World Vision launched a new initiative on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers to encourage national governments to consider the needs of children in developing their PRSPs. At meetings of the WTO and other global institutions, World Vision calls for much-needed reform of the inter-

national trading system.³ World Vision's advocacy also includes a focus on the need for increased levels of overseas development assistance. ■

Further reading: *PRSPs: Good News for the Poor?* World Vision International, 2000. • *Food Security: A First Step Toward More Fair Trade*, World Vision Canada, 2000. • *The*

Research has shown that education provision not only improves economic opportunities but also has a significant impact on health.

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¹ *Who Will Bale out the Poor?* World Vision International, 1998.

² *PRSPs: Good News for the Poor?* World Vision International, 2000.

³ *Trade and Development: Making the WTO Work for the Poor*, World Vision Australia, 1999.



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Girl Children

The girl child of today is the woman of tomorrow. The skills, ideas and energy of the girl child are vital for full attainment of the goals of equality, development and peace. For the girl to develop her full potential she needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual and material needs for survival, protection and development are met, and her equal rights safeguarded.

—from the *Platform for Action*, Fourth UN Conference for Women, 1995

The issue

The fact that girls are disadvantaged is not news. Before birth, the girl child may be selectively aborted; at birth she may be killed or abandoned. As she grows, she receives less food, health care and education than her brothers. In at least 25 countries, she may face mutilation to her genitals in order to guarantee her virginity. She will typically work longer hours than the boy children around her, receive less training and lower pay, and be treated as a second-class citizen in the social, economic and legal systems that structure her life. She is extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation through abuse, rape, or prostitution; viewed as an economic and social burden, she is often married off early, becoming a bride and a mother while still a child.

The deplorable conditions in which countless children, especially girls, exist have prompted the global community to create a safer, more nurturing world for children—at least on paper. While some progress has been made in changing policies, the reality for millions of female children is dismal.

The Partnership on Sustainable Strategies for Girls' Education has stated that investment in girls, particularly through education, is one of the most effective development investments a country can make:

When a country educates its girls, it raises economic productivity, lowers maternal and infant mortality, reduces fertility rates, improves the health, well-being and educational prospects of the next generation, promotes sounder management of environmental resources, and reduces poverty. It also meets a basic human right.¹

World Vision policy

In the early 1990s World Vision's Gender and Development Working Group developed a renewed pol-

icy commitment to advocacy and programming for women and girls. One result of this process was World Vision's 'Decade of the Girl Child' throughout the 1990s. World Vision's own commitment to the vision that girls should grow as equals reflects those UN conventions that have helped to define and promote women's human rights.

World Vision believes that for communities and nations to have healthy, productive societies, the girl child needs to live and develop in an environment free from discrimination. She needs to be valued on an equal footing with her brothers and have the same access to education, health care and economic opportunities. She needs to be affirmed in her self-worth and her voice encouraged to be heard. Attitudes must change in the home and in the community. Government legislation must protect her.

One cannot address the values and prejudices that affect girls without involving the whole community and policy makers.

Targeting girls for assistance does not disregard boys. Girl-child initiatives seek to bring a balance in opportunity, investment and resources for girls, but effective strategies will involve and benefit boys and ultimately the whole community. One cannot address the values and prejudices that affect girls without involving the whole community and policy makers.

Yet World Vision has implemented projects specifically to work with girls who might otherwise be denied basic rights to education and economic opportunities and carried out interventions to address specific problems such as female genital mutilation, dowry and sexual exploitation. A recent 34-country study of World Vision's girl-child programming has highlighted the potential impact of innovative and flexible strategies to help girls.

World Vision advocacy

Recognising that sustainable development efforts depend on girls being valued, protected and having equal access with boys to services and resources, World Vision has continued actively to promote equal rights for girls. World Vision participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and echoed the calls on participating governments to take concrete measures to "end all forms of discrimination against girls, to

increase public awareness of the value of the girl child and to strengthen her self-image, self-esteem and status”.

Gender empowerment was a major theme in World Vision's 1999 advocacy campaign Urgent Issues for the Children of the New Millennium. At the Beijing +5 meeting in New York in 2000, World Vision's representatives included four adolescent women. World Vision has also staged major conferences in Australia, Canada and the US, and led or participated in Regional Forums in Bolivia, Ghana and Tanzania.

As a member of the Girl Child Network, and also of the Geneva-based Working Group on the Girl Child, World Vision continues to advocate for legislation and practices that value, support and promote the girl child.

Child Rights Advocates focusing on girls have been appointed by World Vision in Tanzania, Guatemala and Sri Lanka, and World Vision has an international Gender and Development Director who, supported by a global network, promotes programming and advocacy for the empowerment of girls. ■

Further reading: *Every Girl Counts: Development, Justice and Gender*, External Report, World Vision International, 2001. • *In Their Own Right: Girl Child*, World Vision UK, 2001 (at <http://www.worldvision.org.uk/main.htm> select 'global

The skills, ideas and energy of the girl child are vital for attainment of the goals of equality, development, and peace.

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¹At www.girlseducation.org/PGE_active_pages/AboutUs/b-right.asp.

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Sexual Exploitation and Violence

The issue

Although the vast majority of countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the sexual exploitation of children remains an alarming fact of life for many. This gap between rhetoric and reality echoes the power gap between children and adults.

World Vision's own research suggests that a large proportion of the world's 100 million-plus street children will experience either prostitution or other forms of sexual abuse during their adolescence. The prostitution of children is a growing problem in both developed and developing countries; it has become a multi-billion dollar industry that destroys young lives—and with them, the potential human capital of their countries. Each year, according to one estimate, more than 1 million children fall victim to some form of sexual abuse or exploitation. For children in traditional forms of prostitution—for example, within brothels—abuse frequently includes hazardous living conditions and enforced captivity, leading in extreme cases to death through neglect or the inability to escape disasters such as fires.

Popular myth suggests that child prostitution is largely a product of Western tourism or the presence of foreign military bases. In reality these factors have been significant in relatively few cases. The recent growth of child prostitution owes more to poverty and to the spread of HIV/AIDS, which has encouraged predominantly local men to seek young girls/boys in the belief that they are less likely to carry the virus.

Children who drift to urban centres after experiencing family disintegration in rural areas sometimes engage in prostitution to supplement their income from begging or scavenging. These children often need additional income to buy 'protection' from street gangs and from pimps who use extortion (and in some countries, the pimps buy their own protection from the authorities). Street children live in the moment and can experience life on the streets as exciting; their awareness of occupational hazards such as drug use, prostitution and HIV is often low.

Increasingly younger children are being drawn into the sex industry. In Cambodia, for example, one third of an estimated 80,000 commercial sex workers are prostituted children. A survey in 1992 showed that the

minimum age of a commercial sex worker was 18; by 1995, the proportion under 18 was 35 percent. World Vision's own work up to 2000 indicated that the average age of children who had been freed from sexual exploitation was 14 years and two months. Of this number, 52 percent had sexually-transmitted diseases and 18 percent were HIV-positive.

World Vision policy

World Vision has been involved in programming aimed both at preventing children from being drawn into the sex trade and at helping those who have already been victims of sexual exploitation. Integral to successful prevention have been awareness-raising activities aimed at reducing the flow of girls from rural areas to urban

Each year more than one million children fall victim to some form of sexual abuse or exploitation.

brothels. Building such activities into income generation, HIV/AIDS awareness, and maternal and child health programmes in Thailand, Myanmar/Burma and Cambodia has ensured that awareness-raising is essentially owned and managed by local people. World Vision has also undertaken projects aimed at those most at risk, such as street children of Dhaka, Bangkok, Manila and Phnom Penh.

As well as endorsing the CRC as an important set of standards for the rights of children, World Vision supports implementation of other key conventions (including ILO Convention no. 182) that relate to aspects of sexual exploitation of children. The position taken by World Vision recognises the need for children to participate in addressing issues of their future, the need to promote accountability of governments on children's rights issues, and the essential role of broad-based prevention strategies.

The vulnerability of children in all situations must be recognised within government policies on aid, trade and investment. As one example, it is an unfortunate reality that pedophiles seek and attain positions of employment with organisations that allow them greater access to children. It is vital that all organisations operating in any country enact and enforce strict guidelines on recruitment and operations with a view to the protection of children.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision is committed to advocating for a world in which children are safe from sexual violence and has been an active advocate on issues related to sexual exploitation of children for many years. Experienced World Vision programme staff have highlighted the reality of this problem for vulnerable children at events such as the First World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm, 1995), and World Vision's ground-breaking report *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children* was a major contribution to the process surrounding the congress.

World Vision has convened the Sub-Group on Sexual Exploitation of the NGO Group on the Rights of the Child in Geneva and in this role has participated in the international planning committee for the Second World Congress.

In Cambodia, World Vision has worked with law-enforcement agencies to try to build their capacity to deal humanely with a rapidly growing problem of child prostitution and has also worked with the Ministry of Tourism to research the problem of sex tourism. World Vision also seeks child-friendly legal reform and specific interventions that will strengthen response where exploitation occurs.

World Vision Brazil is active in the Campaign to Combat Domestic Violence and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, which was launched in 2001 by a partnership of government councils on the rights of the child and humanitarian and medical groups.

World Vision continues to advocate to governments and development institutions for steps that would protect children from abuse, including adequate legislation, comprehensive training, awareness-raising and the adoption and implementation of rigorous child-protection guidelines. ■

Further reading: *A Safe World for Children: Ending Abuse, Violence and Exploitation*, World Vision International, 2001. • 'Millennium Celebrations: But What About the Children?' *Together*, No. 65, World Vision International, 2000. • *Challenge and Hope: Disability, Disease and Trauma in the Developing World*, World Vision Australia, 1999. • *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Street Children*, World Vision Bangladesh/ Brazil/Philippines/UK, 1996. • *Children of the Dust: Street Children in Vietnam and Children in Extremely Difficult Circumstances*, World Vision International, 1996.



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Children and HIV/AIDS

The issue

Children are bearing the brunt of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Since 1980, about 4.3 million children under 15 years of age, mostly African, have died from AIDS or AIDS-related diseases. In 2000, AIDS killed 500,000 children and some 1.4 million were living with HIV/AIDS—over 1 million in Africa and 200,000 in Asia.

AIDS is a major contributor to the rising mortality rate of children under 5 in Southern and Eastern Africa. In AIDS-struck Zambia and Zimbabwe, for example, infant mortality leaped 25 percent due to the disease. Child mortality in Botswana in 2010, currently projected at 148 deaths per 1000 live births, would be only 38 without HIV/AIDS-related deaths; in Kenya the projected rate is 110 (45 without HIV/AIDS) and in Zimbabwe, 202 (97 without HIV/AIDS). Higher child mortality is a major contributor to shrinking life expectancy in many African nations.

Last year, 620,000 children were infected before they reached the age of one. Almost all young children with HIV/AIDS were infected by their mothers.¹ HIV-positive mothers pass on the disease to approximately 20 percent of their unborn children; a further 15 percent of babies born to HIV-positive mothers are infected via breastfeeding.

Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS strikes children at an early age and again at puberty. In several countries the HIV infection rate among teenage girls is 30 percent or higher. In Kisumu, Kenya, 8.3 percent of girls are HIV-positive by age 15, and at age 19, 33.3 percent are infected. In the eight African countries with the highest adult HIV prevalence rates, AIDS will kill one-third of children who are now 15 years old.

Girls are more likely than boys are to be infected with HIV. Studies show that girls are less informed about HIV/AIDS and how the disease is spread; other studies in economically deprived areas have found that a significant proportion of girls were sexually active at the age of 14 or 15. Female physiology makes girls more susceptible to HIV than boys, especially if other STDs are present. Poverty is an additional factor—and not only for its role in motivating commercial sex work. In Africa and elsewhere, ‘sugar daddies’ provide small gifts or may help buy, for example, school supplies in return for sex. Younger sexual partners are considered to be more likely to be HIV-free; unfortunately, the chances are that the

men are HIV-positive. Where persuasion or money fail, coercion may be resorted to: rape and sexual abuse are worldwide problems. Added to the physical and psychological trauma is the possibility of HIV infection.

Most children won’t contract HIV/AIDS, yet millions will suffer indirectly from the disease. Last year there were 13.2 million ‘AIDS orphans’—12.1 million of these in sub-Saharan Africa.² The number is on the rise: before 2006, 20 percent of school-aged children in sub-Saharan Africa may be orphans. Current projected numbers of orphans include Zimbabwe: 0.9 million (2005); Côte d’Ivoire: 1.2 million (2005); and Ethiopia: 3 million (2010). Christian Aid projects that the total African figure will jump to 43 million by 2010.

Reports indicate that orphans are among the ‘poorest of the poor’—often living in extreme poverty with other orphans under the care of ailing grandparents or other extended family members. Increasing numbers of AIDS orphans are becoming street children, trying to survive as vendors, car watchers, beggars, or thieves. Intravenous drug use is part of the lifestyle of many street children, often exposing them to HIV.

In the eight African countries with the highest adult HIV prevalence rates, AIDS will kill one-third of the children who are now 15 years old.

Whether under the care of a relative or on the street, chances are that AIDS orphans are not in school; in Kenya, a study found that 52 percent were not (56 percent of girls and 46 percent of boys). Both African and Asian research have shown that girl children, who often have fewer choices and less control over their lives, are more likely to drop out of school if their families face AIDS. If this weren’t grave enough, declining family resources may see girls pressured into commercial or non-commercial sex to increase income. In parts of Africa many children will be affected by teacher shortages, with HIV rates among primary schoolteachers higher than the general adult prevalence rate in Southern and Eastern Africa. Within the next five years, AIDS will have killed 10 percent of sub-Saharan Africa’s teachers. In South Africa, the HIV prevalence rate among teachers is 16–20 percent; in Malawi and Zambia the rate is 30 percent. The Central African Republic already needs 30 percent more primary teachers than currently on staff.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is also robbing children of their right to health care, putting pressure on already-strained local, district and national health infrastructures, and increasing the risks in medical and surgical procedures. In Kenya's Machako district, 15 percent of blood from donors aged under 18 is HIV-contaminated.

World Vision policy

As a child-focused agency, World Vision staff, child sponsors and donors are committed to improving the lives of children through programmes and advocacy. World Vision has managed HIV/AIDS programmes since 1990 in East Africa and Southeast Asia, varying from large state- and agency-financed ventures to smaller community-based activities.

World Vision's focus is both on HIV prevention and on care for people living with AIDS. Special awareness-raising initiatives reach young people and other high-risk groups with both mass media and group activities, but family-oriented approaches are also emphasised. Recognising that HIV/AIDS is not only a physical but also a social and economic disease, World Vision also includes HIV/AIDS awareness-raising components within other programmes. Family/community acceptance of and care for sufferers is critical. Non-institutionalised care for orphans is also extremely important: World Vision emphasises helping young orphans to stay in school as well as vocational training to enhance the economic prospects of those who need or decide to support their families. Through World Vision's new Project HOPE initiative, the agency's HIV/AIDS programmes will dramatically increase in number and breadth.

Probably two-thirds of prenatal infections could be prevented by the proper use of prenatal drugs, but even the cheap anti-retrovirals are too expensive for poor women. World Vision supports concerted action by the international community (by governments, pharmaceutical companies, medical professionals and humanitarian agencies) to secure access to such treatments for the poor. Empowerment of girls and women is critical. Clean water and enough money to buy infant formula would alleviate the problem of breastfeeding transmission, but both are scarce in poor areas, and the risk of child death through unsafe formula feeding far outweighs the risk of HIV transmission; therefore, breastfeeding is still the safer option.³

World Vision advocacy

World Vision is also engaged as an advocate for children affected by HIV/AIDS. Governments must be held accountable to make and enforce laws and policies that

support the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), numerous Articles of which are extremely pertinent to the HIV/AIDS issue:

- the obligation to care for orphans (Articles 19 and 20);
- the right to health (Article 24);
- the right to education (Articles 28 and 29);
- the right to information aimed at the promotion of his or her well-being (Article 17);
- the right to protection from sexual abuse, that may lead to HIV/AIDS (Articles 19 and 34);

but the cornerstone is found in Article 6:

1. States Parties recognise that every child has an inherent right to life.
2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child. ■

Further reading: 'Lighting the Darkness for AIDS Orphans', *Childview*, World Vision Canada, Winter 2000/2001 edition. • *The Silent Crisis: The Challenge of HIV/AIDS in Africa*, Action News, World Vision Australia, Summer 2001 edition. • *Addressing the HIV/AIDS Crisis in Africa: 2000 and Beyond*, Concept Paper (presented to the World Bank Africa Vice President), World Vision Africa Regional Office, 2000. • *Children and HIV/AIDS: A Millennium Time Bomb*, 'Promoting the Convention on the Rights of the Child Worldwide' Briefing Paper, World Vision UK, 1999. • *Mitigating the Heterosexual Transmission of HIV/AIDS Amongst Women and Children in Uganda*, World Vision Uganda, 1997. • *Beyond the Fragments: HIV/AIDS and Poverty*, Issues in Global Development, no. 1, World Vision Australia, 1994.

¹Most of these women were infected by their husbands or partners.

²Cumulative figures.

³WHO estimates that 1.5 million babies die a year due to *not* being breastfed. That's about the same number of children who became infected with HIV through mother's milk in the past 20 years.



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Ending Violence Against Children: A Call to Action

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

—Article 19, Convention on the Rights of the Child

In the home, on the street, at school—is no place safe for children? Around the world, children are the victims and survivors of shocking and abhorrent forms of violence.

Conclusive and consistent statistics and documentation on violence against children are difficult to identify, yet what is known is that violence against children is both widespread and disturbingly diverse. No society, rich or poor, has shown itself to be immune to violence against children.

Violence against children takes many forms, including economic, political, structural, societal, physical and psychological. As a development agency World Vision is all too familiar with economic and societal forms of violence: the effects of poverty, the lack of adequate health care, education, food and shelter. World Vision is also witness to the violence associated with exploitative forms of child labour, armed conflict and neglect by the State and others.

World Vision has recently undertaken firsthand research analysing domestic violence in Latin America, gender violence globally, the sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia and the extent of abuse and neglect throughout a number of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The findings of this research are shocking and indicate widespread and systemic violence against children perpetrated by all segments of the community.

As a result of these findings World Vision has renewed its calls for concrete action for change and for governments to meet their child-protection obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Protecting all children from all forms of violence requires a holistic approach to the rights of children, encompassing their economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights. Taking the CRC as a framework for action and reflecting its fundamental principles of the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, participa-

tion, and survival and development, World Vision seeks to address violence against children wherever it is found.

Whilst not exhaustive, and not themselves cure-alls to eliminate all forms of violence against children, the following recommended steps provide a clear basis for action:

Call to action!

World Vision invites you to help create a world where children are safe; change can be achieved if the political will exists. World Vision asks all people to encourage their governments and representatives to act now against the many forms of violence against children. In particular we would urge you to use your influence to ensure that your government:

1. Enacts laws that protect all children from sexual abuse, violence and exploitation.
2. Trains welfare and law-enforcement agencies on child abuse issues and effective child-sensitive policies based on international standards—no child who has suffered violence should be re-traumatised by the wel-

No society, rich or poor, has shown itself to be immune to violence against children.

fare or legal process.

3. Raises awareness of violence against children by educating the public.
4. Works with community groups, churches and civil society organisations to promote prevention, protection and rehabilitation for at-risk and abused children; makes accessible reporting and support services (such as telephone helplines).
5. Seeks and commits the resources—whether national or international—to protect children from violence; for example, poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) should include a plan for child protection.
6. Supports comprehensive efforts, including those by the UN, to study and address violence against children wherever it is found.
7. Invites children to be full participants in establishing measures that will offer them protection, foster their development and guarantee their human rights.

World Vision believes that if governments and others commit the resources and the political will and take action on the above recommendations, many children

would be better protected from violence and those in situations of violence would have greater access to more effective measures to assist them.

Imagine a World Where Children Are Safe . . . ■

Imagine a world where children are **safe** . . .



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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: An Essential Framework for Action

Mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give. —extract from the Declaration of the Rights of the Child

The child should be . . . brought up in the spirit . . . of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. —Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Recognising that children have rights, but also acknowledging children's need for special care and attention, their vulnerability, and the difference between their world and the adult world, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1959.

Time has moved on, and in the decades since this Declaration was adopted, many perceptions have changed and new ideas have emerged. The concept of children's rights has widened, and so has the international will to enforce these rights. On 20 November 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted—unanimously—by the UN General Assembly. The basic principles that underlie the CRC are straightforward and have at their heart the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, the right to survival and development, and respect for the child's views.

While these fundamental principles are captured in particular articles of the CRC (Article 2: non-discrimination; Article 3: best interests of the child; Article 6: survival and development; Article 12: participation), they also form a core interpretation for the entire instrument. In addition, for the first time, the CRC gives special attention to the needs of:

- refugee children (Article 22);
- children with disabilities (Article 23);
- ethnic minority children or children of indigenous origin (Article 30);
- working children (Article 32);
- children victims of sexual, physical or other forms of abuse (Articles 34 and 36);
- children in war and armed conflicts (Articles 38 and 39); and
- children in conflict with the law (Articles 37 and 40).

The CRC also emphasises as children's core entitlements a loving and secure family, a good quality education, a healthy life, a name and nationality, and

leisure, recreation and cultural activities.

As the first human rights instrument to recognise political and civil as well as social, economic and cultural rights within a single document, the CRC provides an innovative and ground-breaking framework for government action and obligation. As signatories of the CRC, governments accept the responsibility to promote its implementation, not only within their own borders, but also internationally.

Certainly achievements have been made since the adoption of the CRC, not least of which is its near-universal ratification. However, the achievements of the past years must not lead to a sense of complacency that there is little left to be done. In many countries the national commitment and international cooperation required to protect and promote the rights of children have been vastly inadequate.

In many countries the national commitment and international cooperation required to protect and promote the rights of children have been vastly inadequate.

The promotion of children's participation is a key aspect of the CRC, and some countries are making impressive strides in formally and legally acknowledging children's right to have their views heard. Agencies such as World Vision are discovering the enormous value of including children's perspectives in planning and evaluation of their programming and advocacy efforts.

World Vision views the CRC as a legitimate guide for its programming, policy and advocacy work. Decades of experience in assisting children has compelled the agency to promote children's rights and enabled it to take informed stances on a number of child rights issues. Disturbingly, however, in carrying out its work World Vision continues to see evidence of children's rights being deliberately violated and persistently ignored by governments and others across the world.

Progress in meeting children's rights has also been threatened by falling levels of aid from major donors and the negative effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on developing countries. The impact of SAPs on education and health-care budgets, combined with rapid urban growth, has prompted UNICEF to state that

Alongside the more visible tragedies of violent conflict or sudden catastrophe, this quieter

process of economic marginalisation is also affecting many millions of children...increasing the likelihood that they will fail to grow to their physical and mental potential, fail to complete school, fail to find work, and fail to become well-adjusted, economically productive, and socially responsible adults.

In the last decade the debate has been less about whether children have rights than about how those rights can be effectively implemented and enforced for children to be beneficiaries or claimants of those rights. It is accepted that much can be done to incorporate the CRC within the legislative frameworks of States Parties that will allow children the opportunity to challenge breaches of the CRC at nation-

al level, but a coherent international procedure must also exist for implementation to be meaningful. Resources are urgently needed to address the inadequacies in the current system of monitoring, reporting and addressing governments' compliance—or otherwise—with their CRC obligations.

WorldVision views the CRC as a legitimate guide for its policy, programming, and advocacy work.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child does provide both a statement of principles and a concrete framework for action. Its centrality to protecting and promoting children globally must be continually supported and strengthened. ■



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Child Rights and Christian Humanitarianism: *Are They Compatible?*

A survey in 1996 showed that 70 percent of World Vision national offices were dealing with some form of exploitation of children locally. Firsthand experience with the effects of abuse of and injustice against children motivates World Vision to be concerned about the security and rights of children.

In practice, World Vision offices have found the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to be a useful tool for work with young people and their families. In working with government officials, the CRC can be invoked in support of improving circumstances for children, since most countries have ratified it and are obliged to report on their progress in implementing it. More than that, however, promoting respect for the rights of children, as expressed in the CRC, is in itself an expression of the mission of World Vision and consistent with the agency's core values.

In the lead-up to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, questions continue to be raised about the compatibility of a Christian organisation supporting the CRC. A Christian rationale for a rights-based approach in general, and for understanding child rights in particular, is helpful in responding to these questions.

Is the rights-based approach Christian?

For Christians, human rights are rooted in the following biblical teachings:

1. Worth and dignity are rooted in creation and calling. Every person, including every child, is created in the image of God and called by God to participate in the unfolding of creation. Every person has dignity and worth in the eyes of God; every person is called to share in the task of caring for the creation itself and for the people who live in it. Creating room for people to be what God intended them to be—as distinct from the concept of human autonomy—is the basis for a Christian respect for human rights.

2. Love includes, but does not replace, respect for human rights. Love includes—not supersedes—respect for human rights. Jesus calls us to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. This definition of love—far from being paternalistic charity—reflects profound respect for the other as equal in worth before

God. The biblical concept of shalom captures the unity of justice, love and joy in service to God.

3. Doing justice is emphasised throughout the Bible The words for 'justice/righteousness' are used over 600 times in the Old Testament and over 200 times in the New Testament. The biblical concept of justice has to do with restoring right relations between God and people, between people, and

Creating room for people to be what God intended them to be—as distinct from the concept of human autonomy—is the basis for a Christian respect for human rights.

between people and the creation.

Respect for the rights of others is a duty to God, not just a matter of human relations. Throughout the Bible the focus was on doing justice for those without power in society: the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the poor. And protection for the rights of vulnerable groups was not just a matter of charity—it was an obligation under the legal system in the Old Testament.

Jesus made it clear that he came to fulfil the Old Testament vision, not replace it; restoring dignity and a rightful place for vulnerable people is a common theme in the ministry of Jesus. The focus on vulnerable people is not because they are morally superior, but because a society that respects their rights is likely to respect the rights of all. For Christians in positions of some influence, the focus is on enabling others without influence and power to exercise their rights rather than demanding one's own rights. In fact, Christians throughout history have been called to give up their own rights in order to secure the rights of others.

4. Rights and responsibilities are intrinsically linked under God. The Bible teaches that when I wrong another person, I wrong God. The cry of the victim of injustice reaches the heart of God. Whether acknowledged or not, the concept of rights is inherent in the concept of morality; without acknowledging that others have a rightful claim, there is no basis for defining what is right and wrong. Rights, on the one hand, bring into focus the suffering God, who weeps when people suffer injustice; obligations, on the other, bring into focus

the anger of God when people misuse their abilities and power to harm others.

Some Christians are concerned that ‘rights’ talk is self-centred; they prefer a focus on obligations. On closer examination, however, respect for rights is focused on the claim of others, while obligations reflect what I have to do to avoid my own guilt—a self-centred approach. The problem arises more in practice than in the concept of human rights itself: if rights are implemented within a framework of individual human autonomy, their expression can be self-centred demands. Acknowledging the dignity of every person under God counters a selfish or self-centred approach to human rights.

Does a child have rights or a need to be protected?

The child is a person of no less worth than an adult, being also created in the image of God. Children are entrusted to the care of families and communities as part of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity, but they also have dignity and value before God apart from their families. Jesus, in demonstrating the values of the kingdom of God, made it clear that children were not to be pushed aside or considered less important. The Bible includes many examples of children and young people taking an active role in the events that shaped human history, among them Samuel, David, Esther, Daniel and his three friends, the young Mary chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the young Jesus teaching in the Temple at 12, and the boy whose lunch Jesus used to feed thousands.

The concept of ‘childhood’ is a social construct in that it takes different forms in different cultures. The contemporary Western concept of childhood is vastly different from concepts current in biblical times. While every culture’s concept of childhood needs to be respected, engaging with the biblical norms of the dignity of every child and respect for children’s calling by God can support families and communities in protecting their children and also support children in fulfilling their potential to contribute to the ongoing development of their community, their world.

A rights-based approach sees the child in the context of family, community, the State, and other social structures. The balance between protecting a child’s rights, allowing children to participate directly in decisions that affect them, and holding children accountable for their own exercise of rights and responsibilities shifts by age

and stages of personal development, not by status. In contrast, a needs-based approach tends to put some needs ahead of others and risks losing sight of the whole.

Without a child rights focus, children are easily overlooked in political discourse. It is patently clear that children often bear the brunt of economic, social, and military decisions, without having any voice in those decisions. Effective work with children will not treat them as miniature adults, the property of adults, or mere extensions of the community. In order to nurture their God-given potential, they need to be taken seriously as active participants—different but just as important as any other component of society. This is an important strength that a child rights focus brings to the work of World Vision and other organisations.

Is the Convention on the Rights of the Child anti-family?

In a recent survey in Canada, children put ‘the right to have a family’ at the top of their list of important rights in the CRC. Throughout the text of the CRC, the ‘responsibilities, rights, and duties of parents’ (article 5)

In a Christian understanding of social development, only God is sovereign; national governments have legitimate authority and power, but they must also be held accountable to the biblical norm of justice in the way they govern.

are recognised, and the CRC’s recognition of the right of a child not to be separated from his or her parents and of the right of family reunification can also be invoked to support advocacy by pro-family groups—including Christians. No one part of the CRC cancels out another.

Crucially, the CRC is very useful to help address factors that prevent families from protecting their children. But it embodies the belief that where parents do not or cannot protect the rights of their children, other mechanisms are needed. From a Christian perspective, parents do not have absolute power—only God does. While the Bible calls on parents to discipline children, it also commands parents not to bring children to wrath or to violate their trust, an expression of the boundaries God places on all human institutions to prevent abuse of power.

What are some of the implications of a Christian approach to child rights?

World Vision is committed to transformational development that affects every area of life. Within that paradigm, child rights help this Christian agency to maintain

focus on the whole child, and to integrate relief, development and justice programming in the best interests of children and their families.

On a broader scale, the contribution of Christian thinking to the implementation of the CRC could make a substantial difference for children. A Christian emphasis on dignity and right relations among people, rather than on individual

autonomy, draws attention to elements of interdependence in the exercise of both rights and responsibilities. Civil rights, in this approach, are not automatically given priority over other rights.

Above all, the divine imperative for justice moves child rights from an add-on to a top priority. It would be a tragedy for children if concerns about particular implementation decisions led to a dismissal of the entire Convention.

Christians are not naïve about human nature; their promotion of human rights is not based in a shallow or false optimism about the perfectibility of individual persons. There is no perfection apart from God. Respect for the rights of all, including children, prevents individuals or the institutions they create from setting themselves up as 'gods' and abusing power over others.

Child rights in development

While World Vision promotes active youth participation in planning and implementing its programs, there is still much to learn about doing this effectively and appropriately.

More attention is needed to understand the developmental aspect of child rights by different age groups

and for girls and boys. There is also a great need to articulate more clearly the implications of the various provisions of the CRC, to develop better mechanisms to implement the Convention, and to address concerns about conflicting claims. Demonstrating effective ways to implement child rights within the context of family

The cry of the victim of injustice reaches the heart of God.

and community will include further work to differentiate among different kinds of rights. In all these areas Christian contributions have much to offer; it is regrettable when Christians sideline themselves or reject a fundamentally sound concept because of important but narrow concerns about implementation in a few areas.

One major problem around the CRC is that Nation-States are deemed the final and almost the sole arbiters of the rights of children. The United Nations, as the level of appeal, is ultimately controlled by powerful member States. In a Christian understanding of social development, only God is sovereign; national governments have legitimate authority and power, but they must also be held accountable to the biblical norm of justice in the way they govern. Yet how well governments promote and protect the rights of their citizens, especially the vulnerable, including children and families, is a measure of how well they meet the criteria of justice. This is an important area of Christian witness to governments. For the future, justice may be better served by creating more room for other social institutions, such as local communities, civil society organisations and youth organisations to play an integral role in the implementation of the rights of children. ■

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