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QUESTION OF A CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

**Written statement submitted by the Baha'f International Community,
a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

GE.84-10431

[January 1984]

The child and the mass media

During his formative years, the child is extremely susceptible to influences of every kind. These influences contribute in a very large degree to the shaping of his character, the development of his intellect and the determination of his attitudes and behaviour in later life.

In the developed countries, the mass media (particularly radio and television) have an enormous influence on children. The ready availability of cheap, transistorized radios means that children in the developing countries are now also exposed to mass media influences, and these influences will undoubtedly increase and spread to even the remotest areas of the world in the years to come.

In view of this, and bearing in mind that we are living in an age which is frequently described as the "Communications Era", it seems to the Eaha'i International Community that it would be appropriate, useful and desirable for the Convention on the Rights of the Child to contain some positive reference to the mass media and to the role of the mass media in the life of the child. (The only reference to the mass media currently contained in the revised draft convention appears in article 9 and deals solely with the possible negative influences of media materials on the child).

Viewed positively, the mass media (in global terms, most notably the radio) provide the most potent means of conveying information to vast numbers of people. Appropriate information conveyed in this manner has the capacity to benefit children in a large variety of ways. Such information, disseminated in the appropriate languages, would be especially beneficial to children who live in remote rural areas and/or who are members of minority or indigenous groups.

We believe that the mass media (and again, radio would be of the widest general application) have the potential - not yet fully realized - to play a vital role in child welfare and development by (to quote a few examples):

- disseminating information to adults concerning child health, welfare and development;
- supporting, supplementing or enhancing existing programmes of education, especially in regions where educational facilities are limited;
- promoting the preservation, enhancement and recognition of the cultural heritage of the child;
- informing the child of the wider world of which he is part, and thus contributing to the attainment of the goals enumerated in article 17 of the revised draft convention.

Technological developments have facilitated mass communication in virtually every part of the world. We believe that the child has the right to benefit from such developments.

For many reasons, including those mentioned above, the Baha'i International Community feels that the Convention on the Rights of the Child should take a positive view of the role of the mass media in the life of the child. The inclusion of an expanded article relating to the mass media is, in our view, merited by the enormous benefits to be derived from child-oriented mass media activities, and by the fact that the potential of the mass media to benefit the world's children is, as yet, largely untapped.

At the same time, the Baha'i International Community feels that the child requires protection from the negative influences resulting from unrestrained use of the mass media (most notably by commercial interests producing non-educative "adult" material) which, because of the child's tender years and immature judgement, may be injurious to his mental or physical health or to his social, spiritual or moral development.

The Baha'i International Community has accordingly prepared a proposed revision to article 9 of the revised Draft convention. This proposal, devoid of any explanatory notes, was submitted to the Working Group at its spring 1983 session (see document E/CN.4/1983/WG.1/WP.2) but was not then considered because article 9 was not discussed at that session.

The Baha'i International Community's proposed text reads as follows:

"In order to ensure to the child enjoyment of the benefits of mass communication systems, the States parties to the present Convention shall:

(a) Encourage mass media agencies to disseminate information designed to promote the health and welfare of the child and the upbringing of the child in the spirit of article 17;

(b) Encourage mass media agencies to disseminate material of social and cultural benefit to the child and, as appropriate, to develop and disseminate programmes designed to support, supplement or enhance existing programmes of education and introduce new programmes designed to expand educational opportunities for the child;

(c) Encourage mass media agencies to disseminate their child-oriented programmes not only in the official language(s) of the State but also in the language(s) of the State's minority and indigenous groups;

(d) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of child-oriented material from a diversity of cultural and national sources;

(e) Encourage mass media agencies to develop guidelines to protect the child from written, printed, audio or visual material injurious to his physical or mental health or to his social, spiritual or moral well-being, bearing in mind that, in accordance with article 8, the primary responsibility for such protection rests with the parents or guardians of the child."