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QUESTION OF A CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by the Women's International Democratic
Federation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status
(category I)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[12 January 1987]

The Women's International Democratic Federation notes with satisfaction the decision of the Commission on Human Rights to continue its work on a draft convention on the rights of the child at its forty-third session with a view to completing the work on the draft at that session for transmission, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly.

The adoption of the convention is now more than ever an urgent necessity because, 27 years after the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the situation of children in many parts of the world still continues to be far from satisfactory, and the full enjoyment by children of human rights calls for continuous improvement of the situation of children as well as their development and education in conditions of peace and security.

Since its foundation in 1945, the Women's International Democratic Federation has always worked for the implementation of the rights of the child in all countries, having in mind that women's rights are closely linked with

children's rights. One of the four points in the Programme of Activities of WIDF adopted in June 1963 is the defence of the rights of all children to life, well-being and education. Accordingly, WIDF has engaged in wide-ranging activities on behalf of children and is always guided by the fundamental principles of relevant United Nations texts, particularly the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in 1959.

WIDF is deeply convinced that only in a world of peace, free of nuclear weapons, can children enjoy the rights which are enunciated in the United Nations Declaration and set forth in the draft convention, particularly their right to life, the first and foremost of human rights, and their right to health, well-being and harmonious physical and mental development.

WIDF is of the opinion that at the present time, in spite of the efforts undertaken by the international community in recent years and especially during the International Year of the Child, in 1979, the situation of children has worsened in many countries of the world. This constitutes an acute social problem the solution of which is one of the urgent tasks of the whole of society. However, the situation of children cannot be assessed separately from the socio-economic system in a given country. In this respect, WIDF wishes to stress the necessity of drawing public attention to the positive experiences and achievements in the field of children's rights in a few countries, and in particular in the countries with planned economies. There, children enjoy all the rights proclaimed in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, free medical services, special laws for the protection of mother and child, pre-school child-care facilities, free compulsory education, and a network of cultural, educational and leisure establishments.

The Asian, African and Latin American countries where colonialism has been defeated are paying increasing attention to programmes for improving health services and educational facilities for children.

At the same time, the situation of children in many countries remains grave.

In the market economy countries in all parts of the world, mainly in Western Europe and North America, hundreds of thousands of children are the victims of social and ethnic inequality and racial discrimination. Poor housing, malnutrition, disease and insecurity are facts of life for many children; economic crises, inflation and unemployment breed crime, prostitution and vagrancy among children.

Millions of children in many developing countries are condemned to disease, hunger and poverty as a result of the policy of neo-colonialism and an unjust economic order. Accordingly, and with the aim of improving the deplorable situation of children, WIDF reaffirms the need to establish a new international economic order based on equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and co-operation among all States, irrespective of their economic and social systems.

The situation of children in countries with racist and dictatorial systems and those suffering from armed aggression and occupation is particularly grave. The living conditions of children subjected to the criminal apartheid system, especially in South Africa, and of those living

in the occupied Arab territories, particularly the Palestinian and Lebanese children, are inhuman and constitute a violation of their most elementary rights. WIDF stresses the urgent need to ask all Member States of the United Nations to respect the principles of the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict adopted by the General Assembly in December 1974.

Highly appreciating the efforts of the Commission on Human Rights to promote the elaboration of a convention on the rights of the child, WIDF reaffirms its conviction that the adoption of such a convention would be a decisive step towards realization of the rights of children.

As a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (category I), WIDF will, for its part, do everything possible to mobilize public opinion to press Governments to sign, ratify and implement the convention after it is adopted.

Therefore, WIDF, which unites 136 national organizations in 118 countries at the present time, expresses its hope that the Commission on Human Rights will complete the elaboration of the draft convention at its forty-third session in order to submit it for adoption to the next session of the General Assembly in 1987.