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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).

[2 February 1988]

The Women's International Democratic Federation, uniting 138 national women's organizations from 124 countries on all continents, welcomes the determination of the Commission on Human Rights at its forty-fourth session to continue, as a matter of high priority, its work on the preparation of the draft convention on the rights of the child. It supports all appropriate measures taken so far for a rapid completion of this significant document and its submission through the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly.

Since its foundation in the year 1945, WIDF has persistently worked for the implementation of the fundamental rights of all children. It has always let itself be guided by the principle, laid down in its programme, of standing up for the creation of such conditions as are indispensable for a harmonious and happy development of children and of future generations. Thus it is in absolute agreement with the principles laid down in the 1959 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

WIDF has developed numerous activities in this spirit at the national and international levels. It is the initiator of International Children's Day, 1 June on which, every year, emphasis is given to the need for active and intensive work for the rights of children, which are trampled underfoot in many parts of the world.

Today, 29 years after the signing of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the situation of children in individual countries is very diverse, depending on the concrete social and economic conditions they are living in. It has further deteriorated in many parts of the world in recent years. Due to the poverty of their families, many children, even in their early childhood, are compelled to contribute to their families' income instead of going to school, learning and playing. Millions of children die of malnutrition or infectious diseases, become victims of traffic in children from which unscrupulous traffickers derive enormous profits, are forced into prostitution, become addicted to drugs or alcohol, are made criminals or face an uncertain, insecure future. This is true not only in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which suffer under the burden of a heavy colonial heritage or are still exposed to foreign exploitation and oppression, but also in the market economy countries of Western Europe and North America.

It is really a sad state of affairs when 40,000 children die of hunger and disease every day, 11 million children do not live longer than one year, and 120 million children go without schooling for lack of schools. These shocking figures are illustrative of the fact that children in many parts of the world are the innocent victims of increasing arms expenditures, devastating foreign indebtedness and economic underdevelopment.

The situation of children in countries with racist and dictatorial régimes and those suffering from armed aggression and occupation is particularly grave. The living conditions of children subjected to the criminal apartheid system, in South Africa and Namibia, and of those living in the occupied Arab territories, particularly the Palestinian and Lebanese children, are inhuman and constitute a violation of their elementary rights.

In Angola, for instance, every third child dies of malnutrition or starvation before reaching five years of age as a result of the continuous acts of aggression and subversion perpetrated by the South African racist régime and the UNITA bandits it supports. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), this is the highest infant mortality rate in the world.

WIDF stresses the urgent need to ask all States Members 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.

Fully convinced that the situation of children cannot be separated from the social and economic conditions in the countries where they live, WIDF wishes to refer to the progress made in this field in some countries, particularly in those with planned economies. Here, the principles of the rights of the child proclaimed by the United Nations are not only guaranteed in the Constitution but implemented in practice. Everything possible is done so that children can grow up physically and mentally healthy and can develop their abilities and their creative power to the full.

The World Congress of Women, convened by WIDF from 23 to 27 June 1987 in Moscow under the motto "Toward 2000 - without nuclear weapons! For Peace, Equality and Development", brought together 2,823 representatives of 1,005 different organizations and figures of public life from a total of 154 countries. The question of the rights of the child was once again the object of particular attention. A special commission dealt with the topic "Women, children and the family". In the in-depth discussions, the right of all children to a happy life and a secure future and to healthy all-round development was emphasized. We are convinced that a convention on the rights of the child would decisively contribute to making this demand a reality. In the realities of the present day world it is more evident than ever before that the struggle for a happy life for all children is closely linked to the struggle to avert a nuclear catastrophe, the struggle for nuclear disarmament. We are deeply convinced that humanity will make full use of the prospects now open for concrete disarmament measures and for diverting the means thus released towards resolving the global problems of our time, such as hunger, disease, underdevelopment and droughts, whose immediate innocent victims are primarily children.

WIDF reiterates its conviction that the signing of the treaty between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America on the elimination of their intermediate- and shorter-range missiles offers an historic chance for nuclear disarmament and will facilitate further disarmament steps. Such developments are in the interest of the whole of humanity and will make the future of our children and that of future generations more secure.

WIDF emphasizes once again the urgent need for speedy adoption by the United Nations of a convention on the rights of the child. It supports the endeavours of the Commission on Human Rights to work for the speedy conclusion of the discussion on the draft of such a convention and cherishes the belief that the adoption of the convention on the rights of the child in the year of the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be one more triumph of its noble principles and convincing proof of its vitality. WIDF will, for its part, mobilize its national organizations to press Governments to sign, ratify and implement the convention after it is adopted.