

WA 04/2003 - Russia

Children's Day**There is no task more important: Protecting the rights of children**

"There is no task more important than building a world in which all of our children can grow up to realize their full potential, in health, peace and dignity." Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations

Lost lives. Lost hope. Lost opportunities. Every day, children across the world are being harmed in war zones, in detention, in care homes, in the community. Every day, more governments and more societies are failing in their duty to protect the rights of those least able to protect themselves. Every day, governments are breaking their promises to protect children's rights.

Take action on the following cases, and help ensure that children receive the levels of protection to which they are entitled. This Universal Children's Day, help restore health, peace and dignity to future generations.

Lost lives...

...Tens of thousands of children have been recruited to fight alongside all the parties to the conflict raging in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** since 1998. These children are abused, beaten, raped, or otherwise tortured. Those who survive the deplorable conditions in training camps are sent to the frontlines to kill or be killed.

Take action against the use of child soldiers

...During the armed conflict that raged in **El Salvador** in the 1980s, parents were murdered and families became separated. Soldiers took many of the children who survived to orphanages, or put them up for adoption. These are the "disappeared" children of El Salvador. Their families have been searching for them ever since.

Take action to help find the "disappeared" children

Lost hope...

...By sentencing young offenders to death for crimes committed when they were under the age of 18, the **Philippines** is breaking both its own laws and international law.

Take action against these unlawful death sentences

Lost opportunities...

...Most children with mental disabilities in the **Russian Federation** are confined to state institutions. Many are kept in cruel and degrading conditions, often permanently confined to bed. More than 10 per cent of the children held in these institutions die each year.

Take action to protect children with mental disabilities

... The program of closures and curfews in the **Occupied Territories** is preventing Palestinian children from attending school classes, while increasing levels of poverty are reported to be fuelling malnutrition in young children and rises in the number of child labourers.

Take action to protect children in the Occupied Territories

**We were all children once.
Take action now.
There is no task more important.**

APPEAL CASE

A life sentence: children with mental disability in the Russian Federation

APPEAL CASE

There are 155 *internats* (state orphanages) in the Russian Federation which are home to around 29,000 children. A further 19,400 children up to the age of four are housed in children's homes. A significant number of these children have a mental disability.

Parents of children born with mental disability are often recommended to give up their child to state care at birth. If the parents agree, they sign a document giving up their legal rights as parents.

This procedure has typically been applied to babies with Down's syndrome. When the child is older the same procedure may come into play if she or he is suspected of having cerebral palsy or autism.

A further assessment of children with mental disability is conducted when they reach the age of four. It is at this stage that some are declared "unfit to be educated". Many will then remain in state care for the rest of their lives as there is no requirement for a review of this decision.

Children in *internats* who are diagnosed as "uneducable" are often kept in cruel and degrading conditions. Many are permanently kept in bed and most have little opportunity for play. No effort is made to encourage their development.

Doctors working in *internats* have described them as suffering from conditions such as "imbecility" and "idiocy", which do not exist in the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases. Amnesty International considers that such treatment shows no respect for the rights of children with mental disability.

It is now time for this to change.

Please write immediately to the Minister of Labour and Social Development, using the letter below as a guide.

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Mr. Pochenok,

I am concerned that a large number of children with mental disabilities in Russia's state institutions for children live in conditions which can amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. They are not given an opportunity for play and education and to fulfil their potential, whatever that may be. Many are confined to state institutions for their whole life without a chance of a review of their placement. The Russian Federation has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and has the right to education and liberty enshrined in its constitution.

Therefore, I urge you to ensure, that all children in state institutions - including those with mental disabilities - under your ministry's responsibility are given access to education, and that procedures are established to ensure the placement of these children in state institutions is regularly reviewed.

Yours sincerely

Please send appeals to:

Aleksandr Petrovich Pochenok
Minister of Labour and Social Development
Ministry of Labour and Social Development
Birzhevaia ploshchad 1
109012
Moscow
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 095 9287314

Photo Caption
A child in an *internat* in the Russian Federation.