

children are not new. Throughout history they have been exploited, abused and victimised by adults. Yet, as UNICEF points out, the causes are 'more widespread and profoundly entrenched than they were even a decade ago.'⁴ Thus the International Labour Organisation estimates that some 250 million children work in conditions that violate both Article 32 of the CRC and the provisions of ILO international treaties.⁵ The general public's increasing awareness of violations of children's rights, particularly with respect to sexual exploitation and rising reports of children's sufferings in situations of armed conflict, has led to indignation and calls for action.

The International Bureau for Children's Rights is an international non-governmental organisation incorporated in Canada, which was established in 1994 to respond to the need to turn indignation about violations of children's rights into action and to promote increased compliance with the international instruments designed to protect them. The Board of Directors of the Bureau consists of humanitarians and experts from various regions of the world as well as from diverse backgrounds. Regular activities are co-ordinated by a six-member Executive Committee. The General Secretariat, based in Montreal, provides the professional and logistical support required for the operation of the Bureau.

The objectives of the International Bureau for Children's Rights are to:

- Ensure that children's rights are respected in accordance with the principles set out in the CRC;
- Denounce, condemn and publicise any situation which contributes to the continuation of children's suffering and violation of their rights;
- Intervene on high priority issues affecting children's rights internationally;
- Raise awareness and urge citizens and governments to take responsibility for the violations of children's rights;
- Call for concrete action to ensure the welfare and protection of children;
- Recommend action, facilitate co-operation within the international community and mobilise efforts at all levels.

The Bureau has developed the International Tribunal for Children's Rights, a unique intervention mechanism for conducting enquiries and proposing practical solutions to specific violations of children's rights.

The first cycle of Public Hearings, held from 1997 to 1999, focused on issues relating to the international dimensions of sexual exploitation of children. The outcome and follow-up activities from these Hearings included a meeting in Madrid, for the fifteen member States of the European Union, hosted in November 1998 by the Government of Spain, with the objective of developing

Mission Statement

The Bureau's mission is to protect, defend and promote the rights and welfare of all children in every corner of the globe.

amendments to regional and national laws guaranteeing better protection for child victims of sexual exploitation. The University of Pennsylvania, in co-operation with the Bureau is conducting a research project on child trafficking between Canada, Mexico and the United States. Working closely with the United Nations, the Bureau has set up a Working Group to draft international norms for the protection of child victims and witnesses in criminal cases. The Tribunal's recommendations resulting from the first cycle of Hearings have been submitted to the UN and, on November 23rd 1999, a Global Report of these recommendations was published with the support of UNESCO.

In addition to its specifically international work, the Bureau is involved in Canadian programmes that include awareness rising and co-operation projects with members of the travel industry. The Bureau is working with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Sûreté du Québec to fight child pornography and sex tourism.

The Bureau is also involved in an initiative organised in Canada known as the Children and Armed Conflict Working Group of the Canadian Peacebuilding Co-ordinating Committee; is participating in a network of Canadian organisations working for children's rights; and is taking part in a series of conferences and youth activities commemorating the first decade of the CRC.

The International Bureau for Children's Rights has already begun to follow-up on the First Hearings on the Protection of War-Affected Children. The IBCR and Cantilevers-peacemedia (CPM), a civil society peacebuilding and conflict transformation publication forum, have become partners in an effort to respond to the declarations and recommendations (Section 3) of this report. The CPM publication entitled, *Rites of Peace: Responding to the Rights of Children in Armed Conflict*, in line with the IBCR mission, is seeking to broaden the understanding of the issues affecting children's rights in the context of war. The Tribunal's conclusions and recommendations are highlighted throughout the publication. They are linked to each article, creating a framework whereby the process of advocacy strongly supports the best practices expressed through the articles. The *Rites of Peace* collaborative project will see the production of an effective and accessible publication, facilitating the sharing of experience, key challenges and best practice cases in response to these critical issues amongst diverse sectors of society.

4. UNICEF, 1999, *The State of the World's Children 2000*, New York, UNICEF, p. 8.

5. Chief among these are Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1974) and Convention 182, on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) supra note 1.