

Children First

At a glance
Who are we?

International Campaign for Children's Rights

The Founding Document

By *Soraya Shahabi, Mansoor Hekmat*

November 13, 1999

I. *Children First (CF)* is a voluntary independent organisation formed to defend the civil and human rights of children and to fight for improvement in their living conditions and social status worldwide. *Children First* regards the physical and emotional well-being of all children, their welfare and their free development as the most paramount priority under all circumstances and views the position of the child as a fundamental measure of the worth of any society and culture. The way a society treats its children is the most telling testimony to its humanity and liberty. Children must come first, above any national, economic, political, ideological, religious and cultural considerations and interests.

II. *Children First* is an international campaign, both in its outlook and in the scope of its activities. We do not recognise any geographical, political, national, ethnic, cultural and religious barriers and boundaries to our defense of the rights of children. We see children's rights as universal. *Children First* endeavours to expand its activities to include as many

countries and communities as possible.

III. *Children First* is a citizens' campaign, a non-governmental organisation appealing to all concerned citizens. All who care about the fate of children in our society can become members and/or activists of *CF*.

IV. *CF* resorts to all means legally at its disposal, from acting as a lobbyist pressure group to mobilising mass meetings, demonstrations and direct action by people, in order to fight for children's rights and well-being. *CF* will also engage in a continuing campaign to raise public



awareness and sensitivity regarding the conditions of children in society.

V. *CF* relies first and foremost on the support and contributions of the people who share its concerns. *CF* welcomes, however, any assistance by governmental and non-governmental bodies that seek to support *CF*'s activities.

VI. *CF* is a non-profit organisation. As a rule, with the exception of a limited number of paid full-time officers, the activists of *CF* work on a voluntary basis.

Join Children First

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Organisational Structure, Membership and Voluntary Activist

Organisational Structure

- **Children First**, hereafter also referred to as CF, is an international campaign that strives to expand its activities to as many countries and communities as possible.
- **Children First** is managed by its Chairperson. The Chairperson is responsible for the international activities and coordination of local activities.
 - The Chairperson is selected by the Founding Committee of CF for a term of two years.
 - In order to organize, lead and coordinate the activities of the CF, the Chairperson establishes the Central Office and selects its members.
- **Children First** organizes its network of members and activists by setting up local offices in different countries and cities.
 - All local offices have their own contact addresses and are managed by their own chairperson.
 - Decisions at local offices are taken at their meetings with the local activists, where they prioritize their local tasks, organize accordingly, and set up commissions, committees or any other assemblies that they see fit.
 - Local projects and programs must be approved by the Central Office.
- As a general rule, apart from a few full-time officers, all activists of the CF are volunteers.
- **Notes:**
 - 1 Details relating to meetings and practical executive mechanisms in this document will be later defined and published in further documents
 - 2 The contents of this document may alter at any time, according to the requirements of the activities of Children First.
- **Remarks:** The Founding Committee has elected *Soreya Shahabi* as

the Chairperson of the CF for a term of two years, commencing from the date of this document.

Membership

- All interested in supporting and defending the **Children First**, may join and become one of its members.
- Names of the members of **Children First** are kept in the membership list. CF members receive their membership cards, announcements and are kept informed of the activities of CF.
- Members of **Children First** support CF financially to whatever extent they like.
- Members of **Children First** may become activists of CF by filling in an application form for voluntary work, and participate in its planned activities.

Voluntary Activist

- Members of the **Children First** may become its activists by voluntarily allocating part of their time or skill, providing facilities, taking the responsibility of a specific project, or taking a planned part in the CF activities.
- Activists of **Children First** may participate in decision making and planning at their local office.
- Activist of **Children First** may become local chairpersons by being elected by the members. Where the local office has just been set up and there are not sufficient number of members, the Central Office may select the local chairperson.
- Activists of **Children First** support their local office financially, so that it is self-sufficient. They participate in the fund raising programs for the international activities of the CF.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

By *Soreya Shahabi*, CF Chair

Last November was the tenth anniversary of adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by the United Nations General Assembly. The convention was first drafted in 1979, and was adopted by UN on November 20, 1989. On this occasion, a variety of meetings and conferences were held to evaluate the effect of the convention on the lives of children. The outcome of these evaluations indicates that after a decade, despite meagre improvements



GAP PHOTO

here and there, there has been a general deterioration in the situation of children around the world. The Convention is claimed to be the most advanced and the humane international treaty to date – a proportionate claim in so far as the international resolutions and treaties of the ruling governments and United Nations are concerned. All the member states except Somalia have signed the Convention, while the United States of America is yet to ratify it. Though undoubtedly a progressive international treaty, the convention is replete with limitations and restrictions. It does not, for instance, mention *free* care or services for children. Moreover, the achievement of most of the provisions is dependent, for all intents and purposes, upon the state of laws and legislation, the ruling

government, religion, nationality, and governing culture within a given society and/or family, and accordingly it suffers from discriminatory and double standards in different societies.

In addition, despite holding national governments accountable for ensuring that the rights of children are protected, the Conventions does not have any power of enforcement, but merely makes recommendations and puts pressure on the governments.

Most importantly, however, the United Nations headed by the United States and other economically powerful countries are themselves at the root of inhumane policies and violations of the rights of children by imposing such policies as embargo and military invasions. A recent example is the situation of millions of children in Iraq and Cuba whom are the victims of war and economic sanctions. These children have been facing horrendous suffering



IAP PHOTO

Protest the death penalty of the children in Iran

A section of a press release

January 4, 2000

The world is in a process of abolishing the death penalty, which used to be a planned crime committed by the states; this verdict has been handed down by the movement of human emancipation and pro-nullification of capital punishment. The world and human morals have forbidden aggressive punishment of children under 18, and their execution for many years. This decree has been legislated, as an international law, by the conscience of billions of people all over the world and it has been imposed to even the right wing and conservative governments to put into effect.

But the Islamic Republic of Iran, still brutally tortures the children, cruelly punishes and sentences them to death. In Iran, the capital punishment, and other Islamic punishments including retaliation, stoning, and whipping are legally enforced against children too; the Islamic regime, not only has enrolled and deployed thousands of the children solders to the Iran – Iraq war fronts and mine fields, but it has also been detaining, torturing and executing thousands of children for defying the religious rules for two decades.

Females over 9-year-old, and males over 15-year-old, according to the Islamic penal codes, are religiously adults, thus the Islamic punishments apply to them. There is no law, in Iran, to protect the children and their lives, from the state violation. Islamic veil (Hejab), execution, torturing, retaliation and stoning in Iran are legal punishments for children too and tens of thousands of children and youths have been victims of the Islamic regime's barbarism.

According to a November 1999 report from Amnesty International, Iran is one of the six countries, which has executed children in 1999. Obviously, because of dictatorship and censorship in Iran, only a few reports and news about the regime's cruelty are published and the Islamic regime's violation against children is much more than what is publicly published. 18 year-old, to death and the authorities have confirmed this sentence.

and death because of the embargo on food, medicine, and medical equipment imposed by the United States and its Western allies. In fact, the Convention has, in several cases, been used as a means of political and economic propaganda among conflicting governments rather than the well-being of children. It must be said that the Convention of the Rights of the Child, regardless of all its restrictions, is an achievement for all those movements seeking freedom and equality; and as such, it must be employed as a watchdog, compelling the governments to respect the rights of children. This Convention has, during the last decade and in the absence of a progressive and advanced international children's rights alternative, been used and referred to by non-governmental organisations and equal rights movements as a means of putting pressure on governments. Furthermore, forcing the governments to pledge, legislate and implement the Convention is part of the struggle for improved living conditions. This is part of the struggle of empowering the real alternative, vis-à-vis the struggle for an equal and humane system: a struggle for the only system that by abolishing capitalism, establishes and guarantees the rights of children. The function of the Convention on the Rights of the child is not to make fundamental and serious changes in the lives of children, but to prevent governments from violating the rights of children and it should be used and

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referred to in this capacity. While maintaining a critical stance regarding the Convention, it must be used in the struggles for the rights of children. Its main shortcomings include its double standard approach towards the rights of children, namely with regards to the ideology, nationality, religion and wealth of the society, and the status of the family, while allowing the ruling governments a free hand to impose poverty and inhumane conditions on children. None-the-less, given this level of expectations, the Convention provides a stepping stone to achieve further demands, and gaining support for recognition and empowerment of alternative demands.

The followings are some of the important articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. **For the complete text of the Convention visit the Web Site of the Children First.**

- States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.
- States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
- States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.
- No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

A decade of sanctions A decade of crimes against children

By *Ellaheh Saba*, CF Central Europe coordinator

The world has stood horrified. Everyday 200 children die in Iraq. According to the UN children agency, UNICEF, half a million Iraqi children have died in the decade since sanctions were imposed. Children are dying from diseases such as leukaemia because hospitals are unable to provide adequate treatment. The cited number of deaths is merely one official indicator of the price that innocent people have paid in the past decade.

The statistics hardly bring home the true picture, as the actual cost to human lives is much wider spread. Since the imposition of the sanctions, a dramatic poverty has engulfed low-income families and child labour has become an issue in Iraq. The sharp rise in the number of street children, the extensive employment of children, and a noticeable rise in juvenile crimes are all the blind spots in this reflection of life under sanctions in Iraq.

The extent of human suffering can no longer be covered up by the United States and Britain who have been heading the genocide of a generation in Iraq. The whole show of the "new world order" is no longer the headlines of the media that so blatantly dressed up the killings that took place in the Gulf war. A decade of sanctions has gone by and Madeleine Albright is confronted with the question: "is such suffering worth it?" Her reply came just as lifeless as the interests of capital: "We think the price *is* worth it." At the same time, Tony Blair claims that British pilots "policing" the no-fly zones perform vital humanitarian tasks! The Labour and the Democrat faces of capital have been insisting that the embargo was imposed after the Gulf War to punish "Iraq" for invading Kuwait and force it to dis mantle "its" weapons of mass destruction.

Even this farce of a claim does not hold water any more. In February this year a third senior UN worker in Iraq resigned in protest against the failure of the organisation's relief programs. The head of the World Food Program, a UN humanitarian agency chief in Iraq, Jutta Burghardt, has given notice that she is leaving her post, just days after the resignation of the UN's top humanitarian official in Iraq, Hans Von Sponeck.

Mr. Von Sponeck, who resigned after 32 years of working for UN said that he is resigning because he believes sanctions are inhumane and ineffective and it was no longer acceptable to keep his mouth shut. "For how long should the civilian population, which is totally innocent on all this, be exposed to such punishment for something they have never done?" His predecessor, the Irish diplomat Denis Halliday, stepped down in July 1998 having attacked the sanctions policy.

The US State Department has attacked Mr Von Sponeck for commenting that the UN's oil-for-food programme was not meeting the minimum requirements of the Iraqi people and that "you have frozen their capacities. You haven't allowed them to develop. So, for them, it's too late." A spokesman James Rubin said "I think an article in the Iraqi press praising his approach to his work is ample evidence of his unsuitability for this post, ... and his job is to work on behalf of Iraqi people and not the regime. We look forward to an able manager who will maximise the benefits of the oil-for-food programme. !!!

The revenue that is available now, \$2.9bn for six months for a population of 23 million translates into \$252 per person per six months. The UN sanctions committee is holding up 20% of the goods ordered on the grounds that it might be used for making weapons of mass destruction

I dread when I wonder how a parent explains the current nightmare to their malnourished toddler in Iraq "my dear ...

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full realization of this right in accordance with their national law.

- States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
- States Parties recognize the right of the child to education...
- States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
- States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - (a) The development of the child’s personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
 - (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - (c) The development of respect for the child’s parents, his/her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he/she may originate, and for civilizations different from his/her own;
 - (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
 - (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
- In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his/her group, to enjoy his/her own religion, or to use his/her own language.
- States parties recognize the right of

the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

- States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.
- States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
- States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and



educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.

- States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.
- States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.
- States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of



the child’s welfare.

- States Parties shall ensure that:
 - (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below 18 years of age;
- States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child.
- States Parties shall take all refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities.
- States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of 15 years but who have not attained the age of 18 years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.
- States Parties recognize the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child’s sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child’s respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child’s age and the desirability of promoting the child’s

reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.

- Nothing in the present Convention shall affect any provisions which are more conducive to the realization of the rights of the child and which may be contained in:
- (a) The law of a State Party; or
- (b) **International** law in force for that State.

Message to
CLAE
Congress of Latin American Students
 April 2000

By *Salah Irandoust*
CF North American coordinator

“When you look into a child’s eye you expect to see hope, trust and innocence, but when you see these signs of childhood are replaced by betrayal, hunger, child labour, fear, prostitution and suspicion, we need to take a serious stock of ourselves and the society which has been created for us.”

On behalf of Children First, I protest the United States’ sanctions against Cuba and condemn the United States’ tension to impoverish Cuba. Everybody knows that numerous children and youth in Cuba have fallen the victims to the brutal and inhumane tensions of the United States. There is no doubt that the United States is directly responsible for these tragedies and we support the people of Cuba and their struggles against these tensions. We declare our solidarity to Cubans.

The issue of children and youth is now one of the most important problem all over the world. We are all witnessing the governments’ negligence and lack of attention regarding children and youth in different countries. Let me for a moment take you out of this hall and mention some examples of horrendous conditions involving children and youths in other countries.

In Iran, the country in which I was born, Khomainsi and the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a superstitious promise and key to the heaven, recruited, deployed and killed thousands of children and youths in the mine fields during the war

with Iraq. Imprisonment, torturing and the execution of children are legal and are a daily practice of their lives. Under the Islamic canon in Iran, the legal age of marriage for girls is 9 years. Such a practice in Europe or any western society would be prosecuted as child abuse and rape. In Iran, free relationship between girls and boys are illegal and voluntary sexual relationship will cause death penalty for the partners involved. In the neighbouring country of my birthplace, Iraq, thousands of children were killed by the United States and its allies invasion, bombardments and sanctions; according to a published statistic from UN, five thousand children are die monthly because of economic embargo and lack of basic medicine, milk and food.

NATO invasion and bombardment of Yugoslavia caused the deaths of thousands of ordinary people, including children and youth.

You all remember horrible tribal war in Rwanda. Half a million human beings were eradicated within a month- the main slaughtered population being children and youths.

According to another published statistic from UN, 24000 people die daily from hunger; three quarters of these deaths are children. Only conflict or famine causes 10% of these fatalities, 90% are due to malnutrition and starvation. It is impossible to recount the tragedies that have become a reality in the lives of our children all over the world. The local police continuously kills the homeless and street children in Brazil. There are hundred thousands of children within the South East Asian countries that are traded for prostitution or their organs. Female infants are murdered in Asia. Millions of children are died due to starvation. These are horrifying facts that inflict the children of this world today.

There is no doubt that capitalism is the source and cause of these tragedies. Clearly, we must put an end to this situation! Mankind deserves a better. Children deserve a better life and a chance at brighter future. The only barrier to such a better world is capital and capitalistic rule. In capitalistic societies profitable businesses cause the starva-

tion and death of millions of children. Deprivation of education, health care and security are realities for children living within these societies. Children, undoubtedly, are the most vulnerable victims of capitalism.

We, the majority of the world workers and employees do not have any benefit from supporting such a barbaric system as such. It is to wellbeing of all that capitalism be over turned. We must topple down capitalism and its current rulers in order to fight for a world free from oppression, cruelty, ignorance, religion, war and senseless killings. We must work together to build a world in which laughter, happiness, entertainment, health are obtainable for all. A world that offers a clear and bright future for all children and youth. This and only this should be the basis for the improvement and progress of our society. We must commit ourselves to this social movement and play an active part of this effort necessary to build such a better world. We are assured support of millions of noble people in our



way of struggle.
Friends and comrades! The only clear alternative to the complicated capitalistic tragedies is the socialism of workers- a socialistic society- an equal and free society in which all human beings are treated equally and worth and are granted the opportunity of a humane life, where all humane strives for prosperity.

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