

Amnesty International Children's Action 1999
Appeal cases
AI Index ACT 76/15/99. All artwork by Bob Linney

i) FOLDER TEXT

Children's rights: the future starts here

'Many things we need can wait. The child cannot.'
Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) Chilean poet and politician

Children are routinely denied the basic rights that most of us take for granted – the right to education, to freedom of movement, to freedom from torture, to freedom from discrimination and to protection from armed conflict and exploitation. Children's rights are the blocks with which we build a human rights culture in societies and secure human rights for future generations.

Ten years ago, the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a landmark for human rights. Here for the first time was a treaty that sought to address the particular human rights of children and to set minimum legal standards for the protection of their rights. It is the only international treaty to guarantee civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

The Convention's importance is demonstrated by the fact that it has been ratified by all but two states: Somalia and the USA. Somalia has no functioning government, but the USA continues to lead a defensive action against children's rights, lobbying against further measures designed to protect children – most recently against efforts to stop the use of child soldiers.

According to the Convention, in all actions concerning children, adults should always act in the "best interests" of the child. Yet it is adults who are the main perpetrators of human rights abuses against children.

- It is not in the "best interests" of the child to be tortured, to go through an unfair and unjust trial, to suffer a harsh prison regime, to be denied access to rehabilitation and special care...
- It is not in the "best interests" of the child to be made to take up arms and fight, to have to leave their home and everything they know, to suffer the after-effects of war, to have landmines continuing their suffering long after the cease-fire...
- It is not in the best interests of the child to be exploited, to be denied access to an education, to suffer traditional practices prejudicial to their health, to live at risk of violence or abuse at the hands of those trusted to care for them...

... and yet everyday, everywhere in the world, children face these abuses of their human rights.

These last 10 years have seen a huge growth in awareness of children's rights, and activists have learned important lessons in successfully implementing the Convention. One of the Convention's key strengths is that it recognizes that rights must be actively promoted if they are going to be enforced – awareness is not enough. Although children's rights are still a long way from realization – Amnesty International continues to receive and act on reports of abuses of children's rights – in the almost worldwide acceptance of the Convention we have a powerful tool for campaigning for children's rights.

Keep up the pressure for children's rights. Take action on the appeal cases today. The future starts here.

BACK COVER

Budari and Odette, aged 13 and 16, have spent more than seven months in prison without charge or trial in Burundi after reportedly being tortured.

“Yosef” and “Istvan”, two Romani children aged 15 and 14, were beaten and racially insulted by police in Central Europe.

At least 6,000 children, some reportedly as young as eight, are being used as soldiers in Colombia’s armed conflict.

The Iranian authorities have forced Sohrab, Salar and Sardar, aged 14, 13 and six, to spend four years as hostages for the return of their father.

In Myanmar, "Mi Mi" and "Ma Aye", aged 13 and 16, were forced by the authorities to work instead of going to school.

Sixteen-year-old Lal Jamilla Mandokhel was shot dead in Pakistan to restore her tribe's “honour”.

Around the world children are suffering because governments refuse to grant them the levels of protection they not only need but are entitled to under international law. Help secure the human rights of the next generation. Read the appeal cases inside, and then take action.