

From Russia.....

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We are the representatives of the National Coalition of Russian NGOs, dealing with the rights of the child in Russia. We have recently submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child an Alternative Report - Comments to the Russian State Periodical Report "On Realization in Russian Federation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993-1997." We appeal to you with the same message, which we addressed to members of the Committee of the Rights of the Child two days ago: "Help us to make the deaf hear!"

The essence of our Alternative Report to the CRC is a grave diagnosis: the Russian Government appears to be totally deaf to appeals and recommendations of the international community in respect to children's rights. It has flatly ignored practically all recommendations of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child, formulated five years ago in the Committee's "Concluding Observations" to the Russian 1992 Initial State Report to the CRC "On Realization in Russian Federation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child." Most important, from our point of view, are the following points:

- No mechanism has been created for the implementation in Russia of the Convention of the Rights of the Child during the last five years capable of protecting children's rights in Russian State institutions, in families, etc.
- No procedures have been elaborated to consider complaints of children subjected to brutal or cruel treatment;
- No steps have been taken to create a system of Juvenile Justice in Russia;
- No efforts have been undertaken to develop a foster family system and to de-institutionalize orphans being kept in the state orphanage system in Russia.

As a consequence, the shocking atrocities inflicted towards children has become accepted as normal in Russian life, especially in the closed world of orphanages (and much more in the institutions for mentally-disabled children, see recent Human Rights Watch Report at: <http://www.hrw.org>), in places of detention, etc.

We can now speak about the most serious crisis in child conditions in Russia during the last five years, because of a sharp rise of child delinquency, homelessness, use of drugs and alcohol and different forms of child abuse, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

However, we do not consider the situation to be hopeless: positive changes are possible if necessary action is taken by Russian political leaders. So far, they have not demonstrated any political will or capacity to hear the voice of Russian NGOs, which proposed to introduce in Russia a system of Juvenile Justice, to establish a post of Child Ombudsman and to create a public "watch-dog" inspection structure to make children's institutions transparent.

You can see our Alternative Report at:

http://www.openweb.ru/p_z



News from the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Three new members and two previous members were elected to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in February. Mrs. A. Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso) and Ms. J. Karp (Israel) were re-elected and Mr. J. Doek (the Netherlands), Ms. A. El-Guindi (Egypt) and Mrs. E. Tigersted-Tähtelä were elected. Documents related to the 20th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) held in January 1999 can be accessed through the main page of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights website (www.unhcr.ch) (go to "Last updated").

These include the Committee's Concluding Observations on Austria, Belize, Guinea, Sweden (2nd) and Yemen(2nd). The Committee's day of general discussion on children with disabilities is also reported. At its next session from 17 May to 4 June 1999, the Committee will consider Barbados, St. Kitts & Nevis, Benin, Chad and the second periodic reports of Honduras and Nicaragua.

The Committee is planning to hold a two-day workshop in October, on achievements and challenges of the first ten years since the adoption of CROC by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989.