

## International Interdisciplinary Course on Children's Rights

To be held, 10-17 December 1999, Children's Rights Centre, University of Ghent Henri Dunantlaan 2B-9000 Gent Belgium, Cost: US \$1650 including accommodation.

### BACKGROUND

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted in 1989, may be considered the expression of a change in our relationship with children, and as such may provide impetus for a broad social debate. Social changes and developments in the legal position of children play a central role in the definition of the concept of children's rights. Worth noting here is the interaction between social norms, i.e. education, and legal norms, in which the law (rules and regulations and case law) is used as a means to improve children's position in society. Hence the Convention is regarded as a powerful international regulatory instrument, which is comprehensive and legally binding. It is used by numerous people as a legal framework for worldwide efforts to improve the position of children. Given this fundamental social debate, it becomes imperative to give these actions an academic basis, thereby lending the subject matter a credence worthy of its importance to society. The International Course's primary aim is to contribute to an intensive study of the background, motivation, strategies and main themes of the children's rights.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child can be regarded as an historic milestone. On the one hand, it is the culmination of a difficult struggle over decades, aiming at improving children's situation in society, on the other, it is the beginning of a new way of dealing with children, enshrined in hard law by the international community. Since the turn of the century, the law has reflected our relationship with children, founded on a view of them as creatures who are "not yet" human beings, which has led to them being considered mere objects of the law. Over the last decade however, more and more criticism has been leveled at this child-image. Gradually, but with increasing insistence, voices have been heard emphasising that children are in fact first and foremost human beings, and that therefore our relationship with them has to be based on respect for them as people. In legal terms this means that children are to be regarded as individuals with fundamental human rights. This new child-image is becoming ever more forceful and hence the present situation has become confused and, at times, even paradoxical. Indeed our relationship with children is still based on the dominant child-image, while, simultaneously, the new one is gaining influence. The Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects this situation.

Human rights have now formally been recognized for children. Enshrining these rights in positive law is however not the end of the matter. Central to the debate is the relationship between the law and education. Educational science, teaching us how to deal with children, is all about human (children's) rights. The relationship between education and the human rights project, or specifically the children's rights project, plays a fundamental role, and requires as such an interdisciplinary study.

### PROGRAMME

This course deals specifically and in an academic way with views and theories on children's rights. The course provides extensive, basic information and in-depth knowledge on background, motivation, strategies and main trends in the field of children's rights. The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child and the implementation of it figures largely in the programme. The course uses a heuristic structure, allowing participants to create order from the increasing amount of information received, and to think things through. All lectures will be given by well-known academics, based on fundamental research and by international officers with an established expertise in the field of children's rights. During the course, several operational modes of lecturing will be used: plenary sessions, workshops, panel discussion, and participants can also have an active role in the (self-) organised evening informal sessions. Possibilities are created to discuss, to exchange experiences, to visit poster sessions, to watch films etc. Via the setting (a residential seminar package in a hotel) a good atmosphere is created between lecturers and participants in this seven day intensive course.

#### *The social position of children*

- A. Motivation for children's rights
- B. The competence debate
- C. Strategies for children's rights
  - 1. Study of the child
  - 2. Child-advocacy
  - 3. Participation & children's self-organisation
  - 4. Development of networks

#### *Human rights and international human rights instruments*

- A. Civil and political rights
- B. Economic, social and cultural rights
- C. NGO's/IGO's and human rights

#### *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

- A. Contents
- B. Implementation
- C. Monitoring
- D. Regional instruments

#### *Children's rights and education*