



MANIFESTO / DECLARATION of SAN JUAN

In the city of San Juan, Argentine Republic, from October 15 to October 19, 2012, under the motto “Childhood, Adolescence and Social Change”, the 5th WORLD CONGRESS FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS was held, with the presence of public officials and senior officials responsible for childhood and adolescence from all continents, referents of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, social and community organizations, networks for the defense of the rights of children and adolescents from different countries, main actors in the academic environment, and specialists, researchers, amateurs and activists of the rights of children and adolescents.

In this framework, following a rich and deep debate about ideas, practices and policies aimed at worldwide childhood and adolescence, we reassert the determining and fundamental role that new generations have as main actors and leaders of social changes.

We also underline the progresses achieved after the approval of the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, as to establishing a new doctrine —the comprehensive protection doctrine— thus allowing a change in adults' perception of girls, boys and adolescents, guiding and facilitating the implementation of programs and actions aiming at improving their living conditions.

However, more than twenty-four years have passed since this international treaty entered into force and we must alert to the major challenges still to be resolved so that every girl and boy from our countries is included in the new paradigm, promoting models of societies that guarantee the inclusion and full development of young generations. In this framework we consider appropriate to point out the following substantive concerns:

- More than 800 million people in the world, particularly women, boys and girls, suffer from the scourge of poverty and hunger. This is the major obstacle to the satisfaction of their needs and the promotion of their rights. It has an adverse effect on children's comprehensive development at its roots: in the physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional and cognitive dimensions. Thus, poverty eradication and the reduction of social inequalities and disparities must be core objectives in every development initiative, as the basis for guaranteeing children's rights and well-being.
- Millions of boys and girls are still deprived of access to their fundamental rights, such as health, education, water, sanitation and decent housing. This situation is concomitant with high levels of unresolved poverty.
- There are huge quantities of exploited and abused boys, girls and adolescents regarding children work worldwide. A much more serious situation is that of those who suffer the consequences of being immersed in





armed conflicts, exposed to severe emotional and psychic distress, to losing their lives, becoming an orphan, being injured or having to move from one place to another or being drifted apart from their families. In this regard, we call attention to the increasing military spending.

- We must alert to the negative incidence of measures to restrict resources — as a result of the response of large financial capitals to the economic downturn— aimed at the welfare of children and young people on the effective fulfillment of rights of children and adolescents in some world regions. We must avoid the enforcement of this type of austerity measures on the part of some governments, where the level of public investment for the promotion and protection of childhood must not be limited; rather it must be sustained and increased in order to guarantee a future with prosperity, equity and social inclusion.
- In different parts of the world there are still high levels of sexual exploitation of boys and girls, a phenomenon intrinsically related to deep socioeconomic inequalities, that show in the form of tourism which first objective is sexual exploitation of children. In addition, it is essential to pay attention to the relationship existing between new ways of sexual exploitation and the development of new technologies and ways of communicating.
- Illiteracy prevents the economic and social development of countries and has a negative effect on the poor childhood, which in general is not capable of overcoming such shortages. Efforts to drastically decrease illiteracy rates, guaranteeing access to free education for every boy and girl, remain a priority for the movement in defense of the rights of children and adolescents.
- We are concerned to observe that boys, girls and adolescents worldwide are subject to increased violence and ill-treatment at physical, emotional, psychological and institutional level. We understand that violence and ill-treatment of children is a multi-causal problem determined by multiple forces acting on the individual, the family, the community and the culture where the individual lives, hindering or impeding the child's comprehensive development. In this framework it is essential to create proactive public policies to develop an interdisciplinary tool to assist victims of violence and ill-treatment and to accompany them in the restitution of their rights, elaborate prevention and communication policies that may help to create new problem-approaching frameworks on the reduction of violence, and finally to agree on guidelines to promote good treatment towards boys, girls and adolescents in the family, communities and institutions.
- The challenge of broadening global consciousness on the propagation of infectious diseases and pandemics affecting millions of girls and boys is still valid. Regrettably, world rates for infant mortality, diseases and malnutrition remain high and there are enormous deficits in primary health care:





breastfeeding, vaccination, nutrition and access to appropriate medicines. In this context, we must point out the alarming development and propagation of the HIV virus (AIDS) notwithstanding the intersectoral and governmental efforts and measures implemented to strengthen the prevention and control of the effects derived from this disease.

- The paradigm shift has had a significant impact on the legislative dimensions. However, the judicial systems, even with differences among the different countries, are still hostile scenarios for the full exercise of rights on the part of girls and boys whose guarantees are not always respected, and in cases where childhood is subject to the repressive and disciplinary mechanisms of society. Likewise, some world regions witness a trend to expand the criminalization and the use of punitive measures over boys and girls, and particularly over adolescents.
- The growing impact of large corporations in the massive media has resulted in a negative mercantilization of children. Boys and girls as mere consumers of products and services, drawn by publicity and other marketing strategies, suffer from nutrition and dietary problems, and related pathologies. It is also very harmful for boys and girls to conform subjectivities based on instilled idolatry trends, values and/or models and socioeconomic success; subjectivities which are far from a genuine civic responsibility.

We want to point out the progress made, particularly since the entry into force of the ICRC (International Convention on the Rights of the Child) —the most widely ratified International Treaty on Human Rights, which urged to consider Childhood as a political priority in the governments' agendas— with specific measures such as:

- Reduction in child poverty through various actions and the implementation of direct cash transfer programs for assisting children, adolescents and families at risk. Direct subsidies and transfers included in the social security systems have, for the first time, recognized boys and girl as direct holders of the right to adequate food.
- Marked progress regarding the rights of every boy and girl to be treated with dignity and not to be subject to situations of psychic and/or physical violence, evidenced in different social and cultural movements and in legislative improvements, as well as in program and policy improvements.
- A new consciousness and concept with regard to disabilities, in particular with the inclusion of disabled boys, girls and adolescents into the general education system and welfare.
- A positive perception of the progress made by Latin America in achieving the “Millennium Development Goals” and in implementing intersectoral programs focused in early childhood.



- Improvements in the effective participation of boys, girls and adolescents in our society have been promoted and achieved. They are valued as citizens that can contribute in building a better society where democratic relationships are strengthened within the family, the school and the society. Today, the rights of children and adolescents to associate, to express themselves and to participate in the various social dimensions, including politics and suffrage, are more widely respected.
- The implementation of public policies and direct allotments in conjunction with social and community organizations across different countries and regions have significantly improved health, sanitation and housing.

On the basis of the foregoing, resulting from the rich discussions of the 5th World Congress for the Rights of Children and Adolescents, the undersigned consider it is essential to redouble efforts so that the governments of the countries worldwide, multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations, the scientific community and the international community in general:

- Move forward in the improvements in order to make real the adoption of a new paradigm for childhood, based on the reconfiguration of the relationship between adults and new generations, taking into account cultural diversity around the world. In this process it is crucial to move forward in creating a new political and social subjectivity over the mere legal subjectivity. Childhood and adolescence are social categories and thus they must play a key role in society changes, in the sense of justice, democracy and equality.
- Advance—in view of the prospect of a more complex, diverse and ever-changing world—towards a deeper and updated insight of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, so as to adapt it to the realities that children, adolescents and their families must face.
- In the face of the global economic crisis that poses new challenges, it is necessary a restructuration of Multilateral Credit Organizations and International Organizations so that these international tools improve interactions with country governments in new contexts in respect to planning and developing public policies to foster growth together with social inclusion and to guarantee better living conditions for every boy, girl and adolescent.
- Succeed in incrementing the allotments aimed at the welfare of boys, girls and adolescents, counteracting the economic adjustment measures, and thus improving its implementation efficiency and effectiveness.
- Create information and evaluation systems to provide updated, periodic, systematized and constant data concerning the situation of children and



adolescents in order to record both advancements and setbacks in terms of the securing of rights.

- Promote the access of every boy and girl to modern information technologies, particularly in schools and education centers, in order to achieve greater equality and to develop processes for a democratic computer literacy education.
- Defend access to quality free state education, as a key environment where boys and girls become aware that they are members of a society and they self-produce themselves, and develop their culture and citizen consciousness in their own terms.
- Deepen the understanding of family strengthening as core for the comprehensive development of every boy and girl, particularly in early childhood. Families, in their different types, must create new ways to talk to each other with respect towards each individual's autonomy and the democratic interpersonal relationships.

Change is the sign of the times; it is the unavoidable responsibility of the adult world, in its various forms, to guarantee that every boy, girl and adolescent can effectively enjoy their rights. The world, our societies, can be infinitely more fair and peaceful if we create conditions where boys, girls and adolescents may have a leading role.

