

## **Comment on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Hong Kong**

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February 1, 2013 was a memorable day because at GENEVA, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child announced the adoption of an official document, or "General Comment", that clarifies for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The General Comment is online now:

[http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC-C-GC-17\\_en.doc](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC-C-GC-17_en.doc)The right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts, UN General Comment no. 17

As an NGO advocating children's right to play in Hong Kong, we read the second report of the HKSAR of the People's Republic of China under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and would like to highlight the following comments with respect to Article 31:

1. **Play is still a forgotten right** - Play is essential to the health and well-being of children. It is also a distinctive part of Article 31, equally important to leisure, recreation and cultural activities, but its meaning and values are not understood. Play is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and is undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. However, the report has mainly focused on the provision of structured and organized activities and its related facilities, especially arts and culture. Such an imbalanced development must be addressed.
2. **Hong Kong needs provision of quality playable space in the community** - Children need supportive and play-friendly environments to develop. Children never just play on designated play equipment. They need open space and be in touch with the natural environments to expand their play horizon. Other than the outdoor and indoor playgrounds provided by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, children also need to play and be in touch with natural environments, as well as neighbourhood open play spaces close to their communities. The facilities management should be open to create a play-friendly or child-friendly culture to nurture our next generation.
3. **Children need to play in school and in hospital** - Wherever there are children, their play needs should be addressed. However, there is no mention in the reports about how children's right to play is implemented in school and hospital settings. Spontaneous play is of positive benefit to children's development and should be facilitated during the course of everyday life in school. For children who are hospitalized, play is equally important in bringing enjoyment and strengthening their resilience in such adverse conditions. Play provision in these settings will require the concerted efforts of different government departments working together for

the health and well-being of children, including but not limited to the Education Bureau and Hospital Authority.

4. **Children with special needs need to play** - We especially care for play opportunities for children with special needs. In their entire childhood, most children with disabilities occupied by “training” and surrounded by well-intended adults to meet the many developmental goals. Their right to play both in school and in the community is often overlooked. Besides, there is still a big gap in the usage and provision of inclusive playground in public parks that requires attention. One of the most urgent agenda for playground improvement is to improve the design and types of provision. To this effect, the development of guidelines on design standards for inclusive playground is considered essential.
  
5. **Supportive play provision for families needs to further develop** – Community toy library provision has long been proven to be a supportive play provision for families. There is only one toy library at the Central Library in Causeway Bay. The government should consider to further develop this play provision to other districts.

Finally, I would like to highlight again the General Comment just released by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on Article 31. The poor recognition of the significance of Article 31 in the lives of children has resulted in lack of investment in appropriate provision, weak or non-existent protective legislation and invisibility of children in national and local level planning. It is important to create time and space for spontaneous play, creation and creativity, and the promotion of societal attitudes that support and encourage the implementation of Article 31.

The profound changes in the world in which our children are growing up are affecting the well-being of our children. We can no longer take happy and healthy childhood for granted. I trust that everyone cares about children and earnestly call for your attention to the Rights of Children to Play, so that children can regain their childhood!

Thank you for your attention!