



AGAINST CHILD ABUSE
Submission to the Panel on Home Affairs
on
The Report of the HKSAR under the Convention on the Rights of the Child
20 July, 2005

Introduction

We congratulate the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for promptly presenting the Hong Kong Report to the UN on the implementation of the UNCRC. The report captures important data and information regarding actions and areas attended.

The mere fact that children involved in a child rights participation project, funded by the Home Affairs Bureau and implemented by the Against Child Abuse, the Hong Kong Committee on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF (HK), is used as the report cover perhaps reflected the government's acknowledge of the importance of the child's rights in participation and the intention to announce that Hong Kong has been moving in that direction.

We appreciate efforts devoted in bringing about such actions and changes and hope that such efforts could be more comprehensive, long term and more progressive. We do think a more critical and proactive approach is required to be able to move beyond an administrative approach and to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of HKSAR in CRC's implementation. It should be our goal to bringing about fundamental and prompt changes in the community's genuine respect for children's rights in provision, protection and participation and in ensuring such environment and conditions exist in Hong Kong. The appointment of A Commissioner and the set up of a Child Commission to represent children and monitor the CRC implementation is essential.

Objective indicators to measure progress of CRC Implementation

In a survey by the government's Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education

between October and December, 2004, it was said that half of Hong Kong people feel human rights conditions have deteriorated since the hand over. We would very much like to know whether children's rights conditions have progressed or have also deteriorated and in which specific areas. We would like to know the priorities and resources allocated in the CRC Implementation for the period covered and the period to come. It would also be important for the government to explain why many proposals covered in the Concluding Observations of the UNCRC Committee have not been met. The HK Report provided no clear answers to these important questions.

The HK Report provided no clear answers because:

- a. Hong Kong has not developed objective indicators as the goal and baseline for rights implementation.
- b. Hong Kong has decided not to set up a high power platform for rights implementation and monitoring.
- c. Hong Kong has not taken in-depth and on going measures to consult and involve the community, adults and children, to collect views as to how the CRC could best be implemented and how successful Hong Kong has been since the last report in 1996/7.
- d. Difficulties and limitations could also be jointly listed by GOs and NGOs who are partners and stakeholders of the CRC and who could jointly design immediate and long term plan attempting to overcome such difficulties and limitations.
- e. Hong Kong is still reluctant to establish fatality and serious child abuse and domestic violence cases review mechanism to trace trends, characteristics and find out what and who needs to be improved.

Children are at grave risk and their rights infringed

There are various signs indicating that our children and families are at grave risk of abuse and neglect and thus we should promptly review our current policies and practices to improve the situation.

The Social Development Index worked out by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service 2000, 2002, 2004 indicated serious deterioration of family solidarity. The government commissioned Hong Kong University Household Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering has been shocking the community to face the prevalence of

child abuse and spouse battering squarely. A total of 6% of the adult respondents indicated physical abuse and 10% of couples battering in the past 12 months of the survey.

The huge disparity between this figure with those under the Child Protection and Domestic Violence Record, the disparity between the rich and the poor, the increase in homicide suicide cases involving children all deserves immediate action. Many tragic cases, such as the one in Tin Shui Wai have led to review and recommendations which needed to be seriously followed up and move beyond mere 'vigorous debates'.

The Cross Border issues regarding children and families must be properly addressed and a Cross Border high power mechanism must be set up to look into such matters impacting children and families.

The Importance of a National Plan of Action for CRC Implementation

A strategic long term National Plan of Action for CRC Implementation has been lacking in the past and must be made available with consorted efforts of the community, professionals and lay public; adults and children; GOs and NGOs.

As the implementation of CRC is cross sector, multidisciplinary, we propose a high power platform: A Child Commission to take this matter up representing children and an annual consultation and follow up focus groups for the formulation of such plan and evaluation, multidisciplinary advocates, experts and children to be involved in its development.

The government claimed to see the importance of prevention but must move to actual efforts honoring such claims. The currently announced Head Start Program for the 4 designated regions did not include home visitations to engage families. We would like to know the budget devoted to such cause and the way government will measure project effectiveness. We also feel that many local experiences of NGOs have not received sufficient support and recognition.

We are very concerned with the welfare reform in terms of Lump Sum Grant and Tide Over Grant and the Integrated Family Service Centre. The reform has contributed to stresses and strains in the already over stretched welfare system and unless personnel involved are provided with time, support and supervision, it would be difficult to actualize genuine prevention. It is to our understanding that some workers have to

handle over 90 cases and some families are simply not contacted for many months and situations of child and spouse abuse deteriorated.

We also propose the government to announce budgets for 'specific' Child Rights Implementation in the period the CRC Report covered and allocate budget for the future to further implement the CRC in Hong Kong.

Priorities must be clearly listed and all stakeholders identified and opportunities made available for them to participate. We would like to know the current priorities in the agenda of the government and the already intended plan and budget to meet such priorities.

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