

# The Child and the Media<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

"The child and the media" is the theme for the next general discussion of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The discussion will take place on 7 October 1996 at the United Nations Office at Geneva. United Nations bodies and specialized agencies as well as non-governmental organizations and representatives of the media, including organizations of journalists, are invited to take part in this full-day discussion.

This decision was taken by the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its eleventh session in the light of rule 75 of its provisional rules of procedure. The purpose of the general discussions is to enhance a deeper understanding of the content and implications of the Convention. The discussions are public.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is formally addressed to Governments and does not interfere with the independence of the media; however, it does have an indirect message for media institutions: as with human rights in general, the press and other media have essential functions in promoting and protecting the fundamental rights of the child.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child believes that the media - both written and audiovisual - are highly important in the efforts to make reality the principles and standards of the Convention. The media in many countries have already contributed greatly in creating an awareness of the Convention and its content. The media could also play a pivotal role in monitoring the actual implementation of the rights of the child.

In their reporting the media give an "image" of the child; they reflect and influence perceptions about who children are and how they behave. This image could create and convey respect for young people; however, it could also spread prejudices and stereotypes which may have a negative influence on public opinion and politicians. Nuanced and well-informed reporting is to the benefit of the rights of the child.

It is important that the media themselves do not abuse children. The integrity of the child should be protected in reporting about, for instance, involvement in criminal activities, sexual abuse and family problems. Fortunately, the media in some countries have voluntarily agreed to respect guidelines which offer such protection of the privacy of the child; however, such ethical standards are not always adhered to.

Concern has also been expressed about the influence on children of negative aspects of the media, primarily programmes containing brutal violence and pornography. There is discussion in a number of countries about how to protect children from violence on television in video films and in other modern media. Again, voluntary agreements have been attempted, with varied impact. This particular problem is raised in article 17 of the Convention which recommends that appropriate guidelines be developed "for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being".

Such guidelines have indeed been developed in some countries, with varied results. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has recently renewed discussion on this topic.

Finally, the media is important for offering children the possibility of expressing themselves. One of the principles of the Convention is that the views of children be heard and given due

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from CRC/C/50, Annex IX, 13<sup>th</sup> Session, 7 October 1996.

respect (art. 12). This is also reflected in articles about freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion (arts. 13-14). It is in the spirit of these provisions that children should not only be able to consume information material but also to participate themselves in the media. This requires that there exist media which communicate with children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has noted that there have been experiments in several countries to develop child-oriented media; some daily newspapers have special pages for children and radio and television programmes also devote special segments for the young audience. Further efforts are, however, needed.

For the general discussion, the Committee on the Rights of the Child invites written contributions on all the topics mentioned above. The Committee has decided to recommend special emphasis on the following aspects:

- (a) What can be done to protect children from harmful media violence?
- (b) What can be done to encourage the media to contribute in combating xenophobia?
- (c) What can be done to develop the possibilities for children to participate actively in the media?

The analysis is intended to cover all forms of media, including video games and the INTERNET.

Written input is welcome and should be addressed to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, c/o Centre for Human Rights, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, by 2 September 1996.

### **Summary of Discussion<sup>2</sup>**

**242.** In the light of rule 75 of its provisional rules of procedures, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has decided periodically to devote one day of general discussion to a specific article of the Convention or to a theme in the area of the rights of the child in order to enhance understanding of the content and implications of the Convention.

**243.** At its eleventh session, the Committee decided to devote its next day of general discussion to the issue of “The child and the media”, to be held on 7 October 1996.

**244.** In an outline prepared to guide the general discussion, the Committee expressed the view that, as with human rights in general, the press and other media had essential functions in promoting and protecting the fundamental rights of the child and in helping to implement in practice the principles and standards of the Convention. The Committee also expressed the view that the media could play a pivotal role in monitoring the realization of the rights of the child. Special reference was made to the “image” of the child given by the media, which could either create and convey respect for children and young people or spread prejudice and stereotypes which might have a negative influence on public opinion and politicians. Reference was also made to protection by the media of the privacy of the child in reporting, for instance, involvement in criminal activities, sexual abuse or family problems and to the protection of children against information that might have a harmful impact on them, primarily programmes containing brutal violence and pornography. Finally, reference was made to the role of the media in offering children the possibility to express themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> CRC/C/57.

**245.** The Committee identified three main areas to be considered during the day of general discussion:

- 1 What can be done to develop the possibilities for children to participate actively in the media?
- 2 What can be done to protect children from harmful influences through the media?
- 3 What can be done to encourage the media to contribute to improving the image of the child through their reporting?

**246.** As for previous thematic discussions, the Committee had invited, in the light of article 45 of the Convention, representatives of United Nations organs, bodies and specialized agencies, and other competent bodies, including non-governmental organizations, media representatives, research and academic organizations, and children to contribute to the discussion and provide expert advice on the topics identified.

**247.** Several organizations submitted documents and contributions on the theme. The list of these documents and contributions is to be found in annex VI to the present report.

**248.** Representatives of the following organizations and bodies participated in the day of general discussion: High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights, United Nations Information Service, United Nations Children's Fund, the International Labour Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Non-Governmental Organizations Liaison Office, International Committee of the Red Cross, National Youth Bureau of the Office of the Prime Minister of Thailand, Permanent Mission of Albania to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Permanent Mission of Hungary to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Association internationale des Magistrats de la Jeunesse, ATD Fourth World, Alianza Civica Mexico, Bahai International Community, British Broadcasting Corporation, Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance, Caritas Internationalis, Centre international du film pour l'enfance et la jeunesse, Childnet International, Child Rights International Research Institute, Children's Rights Development Unit (UK), Children's Rights Office (London), Consultant on Health and Social Aspects, Defence for Children International, International Abolitionist Federation, International School of Geneva, International Federation of Journalists, International Federation of Social Workers, International Inner Wheel, International Save the Children Alliance, Just Think Foundation, Lutheran World Federation, Network for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Japan), NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Romanian National Committee for UNICEF, Save the Children-UK, SOS Torture, Women International League for Peace and Freedom, Women's World Summit Foundation, World Council of Churches, World Federation of Methodist Women, Young Media Partners, Zonta International. Ms. Dulce P. Estrella-Gust also participated.

**249.** The following persons made statements during the introductory part of the day: Ms. Akila Belembo, Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child; Mr. José Ayala-Lasso, High Commissioner for Human Rights; Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and rapporteur for the day of general discussion; Mr. Paul Ignatieff, Director, UNICEF Geneva Office; Mr. Neil Boothby, Senior Coordinator for Refugee Children, UNHCR; Mr. Carlos Arnaldo, Chief, Free Flow of Information and Communication Research, UNESCO; Ms. Angela Penrose, Save the Children-UK, on behalf of International Save the Children Alliance; Ms. Gunilla von Hall, a journalist with Svenska

agbladet; and Ms. Bettina Peeters, Deputy Secretary-General, International Federation of Journalists.

**250.** After the introductory statements in plenary session, the participants were divided into three panels to discuss the various issues identified. Panel I on “Child participation in the media”, was chaired by Ms. Marilia Sardenberg, Vice Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Rapporteur was Ms. June Kane from UNICEF; Panel II on “Protection of the child against harmful influences through the media” was chaired by Mr. Youri Kolosov, a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Rapporteur was Mr. Carlos Arnaldo from UNESCO; Panel III on “Respect for the integrity of the child in media reporting”, was chaired by Ms. Sandra Mason, a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Rapporteur was Ms. Bettina Peeters from the International Federation of Journalists.

**251.** After the discussions in the three panels, a general debate was held, in which, together with members of the Committee, the representatives of a number of United Nations organs, bodies, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations participated. The day of general discussion was concluded by the statements made by Ms. Thérèse Gastaut, Director of the United Nations Information Service, Ms. Bettina Peeters and Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, who presented the preliminary conclusions of the discussion in his capacity as Rapporteur of the day.

**252.** On the occasion of the discussion day, UNICEF organized a lunch-time interactive session which brought together young people from the International School in Geneva, representatives of the media and persons working in the field of the protection and promotion of children’s rights to discuss examples of effective partnerships between children and the media, with the objective of providing practical examples of the use of the media to promote children’s rights.

**253.** The discussion in Panel I (“Child participation in the media”) centred around the importance of children participating not just as commentators, but at all levels of the information process, as the only way to avoid tokenism. For that purpose it was necessary to develop adequate mechanisms to enable the child to participate at all stages of media production. It was also felt that it was essential to take into account the context in which each child lived and communicated, as well as to know to what extent and how the child’s voice was already heard in each community. The participants discussed ways of influencing the various actors in helping children to make their voices heard. Such actors encompassed a broader range than the media as such and included parents and professionals working with and for children. The essential need to form partnerships and collaboration and to encourage all actors to make the links themselves between their personal concern for children and their professional capacity to make a difference was stressed in that connection. The potential positive impact of technology for children’s rights was also underlined, as well as the importance of access to all kinds of media including traditional forms. The educational role of the media and the global responsibility of all groups in society in changing attitudes was mentioned. Lastly, the group considered that any guidelines produced must draw attention to the positive potential of the media and the desirability of promoting collaboration and participation.

**254.** Participants in Panel II (“Protection of the child against harmful influences through the media”) felt that there was a need to keep children on the media’s agenda on a continuing basis and that States should be called upon to take concrete measures to encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29 of the Convention, as called for in article 17 (a). The clear identification of harmful influences in the media was considered essential, as well as the need to raise, through school and in other forums, children’s awareness of how to

handle media issues. For that purpose, it was necessary to promote education programmes on how to deal in a critical and constructive manner with the media. It was also considered that a better balance should be reached in the media between concern for protection and an accurate reflection of the real world; it was stressed that positive as well as negative aspects of the news should be covered. Reference was made to the need to protect and preserve cultural diversity and avoid cultural stereotypes. The general gender bias against girls and women was mentioned as being an important protection issue that should not be overshadowed by the issue of sexual exploitation. The need for media professionals to draft, or to amend guidelines for media in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was stressed. While the implementation of these guidelines should be carried out by the media profession and industry in a spirit of self-discipline, this could be made more effective through empowering citizens' associations and consumer groups in their monitoring of media programmes and scheduling. Freedom of expression was to be safeguarded as a basic right enshrined in the Convention, though several felt it was necessary to resort to strong measures to limit the access of the very young to injurious media fare, specifically pornography, paedophilia and gratuitous violence. Specific reference was made to Internet, and some suggested promoting software to limit access to harmful sites. The need to develop in all countries hotlines where Internet users could transmit information on existing harmful sites in order to allow those responsible for the hotline together with other interested parties to find solutions was also stressed, as well as the need to share responsibility for screening the material between the industry, the parents, the teachers and where appropriate children themselves.

**255.** The debate in Panel III (“Respect for the integrity of the child in media reporting”) started with a reference to the general legal framework provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which addressed every human being below the age of 18. It was recognized that the media played an essential role in the promotion and protection of human rights in general and that media professionals, including media editors and owners, should be particularly vigilant in trying to safeguard the integrity of the child. It was felt that there was a need for further debate and cooperation at the national, regional and local levels on integrating the principles of the Convention in media reporting and implementing the Convention through the media. The discussion focused on two main issues. The first related to the way the media should approach children as sources of information. Reference was made to the need to use special techniques taking into account the best interests of the child in interviews or simulations involving child victims of violence and abuse. It was stressed that it was useful to provide such children with an appropriate channel of expression, and that such an opportunity could contribute to raising awareness on human rights violations suffered by children. The second issue concerned the child's access to the media. In that regard, mention was made of a number of positive experiences, such as news agencies where child reporters provided information aimed at children. Reference was made to the most common stereotypes in media reporting about children, such as the "violent teen-ager" or the misrepresentation of children from specific groups. It was mentioned that such stereotypes were not only the responsibility of the media but involved the society at large.

**256.** On the basis of the discussions on the various issues both at the plenary and by the three panels, the following recommendations were formulated by the Rapporteur for the thematic debate:

- 1 **Child media.** A dossier should be compiled on positive practical experiences of active child participation in the media, such as “Children's Express” in the United Kingdom and the United States.
- 2 **Child forum within Internet.** The UNICEF-initiated “Voices of Youth” at the World Wide Web should be promoted and advertised as a positive facility for international discussion on important issues between young people.

- 3 **Active child libraries.** The experience of dynamic child libraries, or child departments within public libraries, should be documented and disseminated.
- 4 **Media education.** Knowledge about the media, their impact and functioning should be imparted in schools at all levels. Students should be enabled to relate to and use the media in a participatory manner, as well as to learn how to decode media messages, including in advertising. Good experiences in some countries should be made available to others.
- 5 **State support to media for children.** There is a need for budgetary support to ensure the production and dissemination of children's books, magazines and papers, music, theatre and other artistic expressions for children, as well as child oriented films and videos. Assistance through international cooperation should also support media and art for children.
- 6 **Constructive agreements with media companies to protect children against harmful influences.** Facts should be gathered about various attempts at voluntary agreements with media companies on positive measures, such as not broadcasting violent programmes during certain hours, clear presentations before programmes about their content and the development of technical devices, such as "V-chips", to help consumers to block out certain types of programmes. Likewise, experiences with respect to the introduction of voluntary ethical standards and mechanisms to encourage respect for them should be assembled and evaluated; this should include an analysis of the effectiveness of existing codes of conduct, professional guidelines, press councils, broadcasting councils, press ombudsmen and similar bodies.
- 7 **Comprehensive national plans of action to empower parents in the media market.** Governments should initiate a national discussion on means to promote positive alternatives to the negative tendencies in the media market, to encourage media knowledge and support parents in their role as guides to their children in relation to electronic and other media. An international workshop should be organized to promote a discussion on this approach.
- 8 **Advice on implementation of article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.** A study should be conducted with the purpose of developing advice to Governments on how they could encourage the development of "guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being". Such a study should also serve the purpose of assisting the Committee on the Rights of the Child in drafting a general comment on article 17.
- 9 **Specific guidelines for reporting on child abuse.** To encourage further discussion in newsrooms and within the media community as a whole guidelines should be drafted by appropriate journalist bodies on how to report on abuse of children and at the same time protect the dignity of the children involved. Special emphasis should be placed on the issue of not exposing the identity of the child.
- 10 **Material for journalist education on child rights.** Material should be produced to assist journalist and media schools on child rights standards, established procedures for child rights monitoring, existing international, regional and national institutions working with children, as well as basic aspects of child development. The manual planned by the Centre for Human Rights of

the United Nations as a tool for journalist education on human rights should be widely disseminated when produced.

- 11 **Network for media watchgroups.** The positive work of media watchgroups in various countries should be encouraged and “good ideas” transferred between countries. The purpose is to give media consumers a voice in the discussion on media ethics and children. A focal point for exchanges should be established.
- 12 **Service to “child rights correspondents”.** Interested journalists should be invited to sign up on a list of “child rights correspondents”. They should be provided regularly with information about important child issues and with interesting reports by others, and be seen as media advisers to the international child rights community.

257. In view of the various contributions made and the importance of the issues considered, the Committee felt that there was a need to ensure follow-up to the general discussion. It was therefore decided that a working group on the media and the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be constituted to consider further the various recommendations made. This working group should include representatives of the Committee, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Department of Public Information, the International Federation of Journalists and non-governmental organizations. It was requested that that working group should consider, in particular, constructive ways of ensuring implementation of the 12 recommendations and other proposals made during the discussion. The Committee decided to authorize Mr. Thomas Hammarberg to represent it on the working group and initiate its convening. The group is expected to report to the Committee at a future session (May-June 1997).

### **List of Documents Submitted<sup>3</sup>**

#### **By the Committee on the Rights of the Child**

##### Mr. Thomas Hammarberg

- “Children, the United Nations Convention and the media”, Background paper for the discussion day.

#### **By United Nations organs**

##### Department of Public Information

- “Children's Rights”, United Nations Backgrounder, January 1996 (English/French)

##### United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

- “Prime time for children: Media, ethics and reporting of commercial sexual exploitation”, paper submitted by the International Federation of Journalists, for UNICEF, to the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, August 1996
- “Interviewing children”, a training pack for journalists, written and produced by Sarah McCrum and Paul Bernal, 1994; book and tape
- International Children's Day of Broadcasting, “Tune to Kids”, 15 December 1996

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<sup>3</sup> CRC/C/57, Annex VI.

## **By specialized agencies**

### United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

- “Children, the media and the rights of the child”, by Carlos A. Arnaldo and John Bennett
- “Children and violence”, summary of the report of the Commission on Children and Violence convened by the Gulbenkian Foundation
- “How do you curb violence in the media?”, paper by Andréa Martinez, submitted to the International Symposium on Women and the Media. Access to Expression and Decision-Making, Toronto, 28 February-3 March 1996
- “Violence et télévision”, par Hervé Bourges, Président du Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (France), Programme international pour le développement de la communication - Paris, 22-26 janvier 1996
- “Jeunes et média de demain, quelles problématiques? quelles perspectives?”, Groupe de recherche sur les relations enfants/média, Forum international de chercheurs, UNESCO, Paris, 21-25 avril 1997
- “Non-violence, tolerance and television”; an international round table organized by UNESCO, the International Programme for the Development of Communication, and the Indian Government, New Delhi, 1 April 1994; report of the Chairman to the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication
- “Violence in Broadcasting Worldwide”, International Survey of Regulations in Broadcasting with Specific Regard to Violence, prepared for UNESCO by Broadcasting Standards Council, paper by Colin Shaw, Director, BSC
- “Television Violence versus Viewer Power: the Power to Zap Away”, a synthesis of UNESCO IPDC Actions 1994-1996, by Carlos A. Arnaldo, Chief, Free Flow of Information and Communication Research, International Programme for the Development of Communication, UNESCO, Paris, 23 January 1996
- Chroniques du Forum, No. 1, “Les jeunes et les médias demain”, juin 1996 (English/français)

### United Nations Development Programme/UNESCO/UNICEF/World Bank

- “Education for all, achieving the goal”, final report mid-decade of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, 16-19 June 1996, Amman, Jordan

## **By regional intergovernmental organizations**

“Télévision et enfants”, par Bernard Blin, Conseil de l'Europe, Comité directeur sur la politique sociale, projet politique de l'enfance, Strasbourg, 11 avril 1995

## **By intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and individual experts**

### Childnet International

- “Promoting the interests of children in international communications”, Nigel Williams

### GRAPES

- Children's Environments Research Group, City University of New York: “The Whole Story by Kids for Kids”

### International Committee of the Red Cross/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)/UNICEF/International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

- Joint statement on the evacuation of unaccompanied children from Rwanda

#### International Federation of Journalists

- “The Child and the Media”, Bettina Peeters, Brussels, October 1996

#### International Save the Children Alliance

- “Children, Ethics and the Media”

#### M. Koren

- “Tell me the right of the child to information”, NBLC, The Hague, November 1996

#### NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child

- Sub-Group on Education, Literacy and Mass Media, “Media and children's rights”

#### Unlimited Productions

- “What can be done to develop the possibilities for children to participate actively in the media?”, by Sara MacNeill

#### Watch, the World Alliance of Television for Children

- Prix Jeunesse and Watch at the UNICEF Workshop, “The Child and the Media”, 7 October 1996. The Foundation's objective is to contribute to an improvement of worldwide television output for the young, to promote communication between nations and to increase programme exchange on an international level
- Asian Declaration on the Child and the Media, Asian Summit on Rights of the Child and the Media, Manila - 2-5 July 1996
- “Youth and media”, bibliography compiled by David B. Shedden, Poynter Institute for Media Studies
- “Panel 3b: The role of the media”, Rapporteur's summary, World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, August 1996
- “Networking for children's rights in the media”, by Connie Tadros, in Media Development, 1994
- “Lolita lives: child imagery in the media”, by Jane Lizop, Media Adviser to the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in CROSSLINES Global Report, August 1996
- “Prime Time for Children”, including “Recommendations for Further Action”, in CROSSLINES Global Report, August 1996
- “Sex, computers and video tapes” by Eve Porter, in CROSSLINES Global Report, September 1996, vol. 4, No. 24

### **Report of Working Group<sup>4</sup>**

#### **Introduction**

On 7 October 1996, the Committee on the Rights of the Child convened a general discussion day on the wide-ranging issues of “Children and the media”. The Committee, moreover, felt that there was a need to ensure follow-up on this important issue, and requested Mr. Thomas Hammarberg to constitute and convene a working group to consider the implementation of 12 specific recommendations coming out of the October 1996 meeting, with a view to action by concerned United Nations bodies, NGO and media industry partners and other relevant players interested in exploring and facilitating the role the media can play in the protection and promotion of children's rights. The Committee requested Mr. Hammarberg to report on progress at its next session in May/June 1997.

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<sup>4</sup> CRC/C/66, Annex IV.

After collaborative preparation, the Working Group met on 14 April 1997 at the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris. The 20 participants represented a broad range of players including UNICEF, UNESCO, the United Nations Information Service, ILO, the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights, NGOs, the International Federation of Journalists and representative journalists and media associations.

The participants agreed that it was important to put together a first-stage action plan for the 12 recommendations and allied issues, and to report to the Committee at its next session so that interested donors might be identified and work be undertaken speedily. Once first-stage action was under way, second-stage action could be discussed and planned.

### **General observation**

While discussion of the 12 principal recommendations was ensuing, a number of general issues were also considered and the Working Group noted that action on the 12 recommendations would generally benefit from the development of a strategic framework. Such a framework would aim to identify target audiences, formats, working partners, and time-frames and would permit deeper reflection on the aims of article 17 and other relevant articles of the Convention relating to information. It was agreed that potential elements of a strategic framework should be identified during stage one activities with a view to constructing a general strategy in which stage two activities might be undertaken.

### **Action on recommendation 1: Preparation of a best practice dossier on child participation in the media**

The Working Group considered that it was important not only to compile a dossier of best practices of child participation in the media, but also to conduct an analysis of the examples gathered both to identify obstacles that might stand in the way of effective child participation and to examine ways in which such obstacles have been or might be overcome. It was therefore agreed that this work would begin immediately.

In stage one (approximately six months), UNICEF, UNESCO, the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child with the Child Rights Information Network, and ILO/IPEC, will conduct internal research and compile best practice dossiers. For these searches to produce comparable data, UNICEF will prepare a questionnaire for all partners to use.

Additionally Groupe de recherche sur la relation enfants-média (GRREM) and UNESCO, who are co-organizing a forum for researchers in the field of children and the media in Paris in late April 1996, will identify a special rapporteur who will conduct a similar search based on the presentations at the forum.

In stage two, these individual dossiers will be compiled and analysed, and further input will be sought. Such work might be undertaken by a consultant. At this stage, additionally, there will need to be consideration of the target audiences for such a compilation, the format it will consequently take and how it will be distributed.

### **Action on recommendation 2: A child forum on Internet**

This recommendation sought to “add value” to the work already done by UNICEF, whose Voices of Youth web site has become a widely used and well-respected interactive Internet site for children and teachers to exchange opinions and information on a wide range of issues

of importance to young people. The participants agreed that it would not be practical to consider creating additional web sites specifically for this initiative, but rather to further develop Voices of Youth and to attempt, where possible, to link other web sites so that children and young people might more readily “surf” across them and have the widest possible access to sites containing useful information aimed at children and additional opportunities to interact via the Internet.

In stage one, therefore, UNICEF undertook to further develop Voices of Youth, and invited input from partners in the Working Group.

In stage two, it was felt that it would be useful also to develop working partnerships with journalists and editors of Internet-related magazines aimed at young people. This would allow wide dissemination of information on available web sites and would provide both an additional source of information for young people and the opportunity to forge new relationships between this specific arm of the media and the Working Group in the interests of children.

### **Action on recommendation 3: Documentation and dissemination of experience of active child libraries**

The Working Group discussed the value of sharing experiences on active child libraries and children's departments within public libraries, while noting that many children, particularly in developing countries, live in societies where libraries and, indeed, books and reading, are not major sources of information.

At the close of discussion, it was agreed to record that the project to compile best practices of child libraries remains unfunded.

### **Action on recommendation 4: Encouragement and furtherance of media literacy**

The Working Group discussed the importance of helping children to become critical consumers of media in all its forms, a task which today fewer parents assume and which, although included in school curricula in some parts of the world, is not consistently or widely undertaken or implemented with updated information. It was noted, with regret, that UNESCO is no longer active in this area although a number of past UNESCO reports, including one from a meeting in Toulouse in 1990 on this subject, are available.

It was agreed that, in stage one, UNESCO would compile and circulate amongst Working Group members any documentation currently available, including the Toulouse report.

In stage two, UNICEF undertook to give consideration to how a clearing-house function for such information (and potentially data compiled under recommendations 1 and 3) could be planned and funded.

### **Action on recommendations 5 and 8: State support to media for children and advice on implementation of article 17**

The role of Governments and mechanisms through which the Committee on the Rights of the Child might assist Governments in fulfilling the aims of article 17 and other relevant articles of the Convention relating to information were considered together. The Working Group noted that a number of members of the Group had already collaborated in some preliminary work on this issue: the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights

circulated a draft research paper which examined and compiled reporting to the Committee on the issue of children and the media by Governments to date; UNICEF had been working on a general conceptual framework which might form the basis of a narrative general comment on article 17, and a UNICEF handbook on implementation of the Convention (currently in draft) also deals with this issue.

It was agreed that, in stage one, these complementary undertakings would form the basis of further analysis and discussion with a view to producing an appropriate narrative. Members of the Working Group will receive copies of the draft work done so far for comment.

**Action on recommendation 6: Agreements with media companies to protect children against harmful influences**

At this first meeting, recommendation 6 was not discussed in detail. However, this issue forms part of the ongoing work of the journalism association representatives present, and a number of initiatives were described which are furthering discussion of professional guidelines, codes of conduct, ethical frameworks and monitoring mechanisms. As part of its ongoing work, therefore, the Working Group will take note of such progress and identify opportunities for cooperation.

**Action on recommendations 7 and 11: National plans of action to empower parents/networks of media watch groups**

There was wide discussion on the broad scope of this topic, during which it was noted that the Norwegian Government was potentially a valuable source of experience on the subject of parental roles in the protection of children from harmful media influences. In Sweden, Redda Barnen had also worked on this issue and UNICEF advised that it had worked with Consumers International to prepare a report on children as media consumers.

It was agreed, therefore, that in stage one the Chairman of the Working Group would approach the Norwegian Government to seek collaboration in making experience on this issue more widely available, potentially through a meeting of interested parties and/or follow-up documentation.

**Action on recommendation 9: Specific guidelines for reporting on child abuse**

The International Federation of Journalists noted that, following the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1996, there was a “change of atmosphere” that would facilitate cooperation with journalists on this issue. It was agreed at the Congress that input from non-journalists should be “non-intrusive” and aim rather at collaboration than imposition. Indeed, it was also agreed at the Congress that child rights organizations themselves would benefit from further reflection and direction on the way they treat the image of the child in, for example, fund-raising materials. A follow-up meeting in late 1997 will bring together media professionals to consider guidelines and ethics for journalists, and how journalists interact with the communities they serve. This would be useful as a way of spreading this debate further, since there remains the concern that ideas being discussed will only make a real difference for children if they are spread widely. UNICEF advised that it would be willing to continue to work with IFJ on this issue, and to integrate its own work on the image of the child into the debate. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography is also an important player in this work and should be both supported in her work and involved in debate on this issue.

It was agreed that, in stage one, the IFJ would consider how it might coordinate the media professionals' side of this debate and facilitate the process of drafting text, workshopping regionally with media and child rights workers and potentially then collaborating in a larger international meeting. UNICEF would work with IFJ on this and contribute input on how the process might be widened to include NGOs and United Nations bodies and mechanisms. The United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights may have some funding available for this in support of the Special Rapporteur and the Chairman also undertook to identify potential sources of funding for this work.

#### **Action on recommendation 10: Materials for journalist education on child rights**

The Working Group noted that work has been initiated by the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights to produce a training manual on the wider issue of human rights, and that an expanded child rights section could be developed within this already funded project. The International Federation of Journalists is currently advising on the development of this work and noted the importance of the manual being a “real tool” for newsrooms, so that journalists should be engaged, rather than trained. The IFJ also noted that such a handbook must go beyond “structural” listings of international instruments and mechanisms, and include narrative which would assist journalists as they confront the ethical issues involved in reporting children's issues. It was noted that journalists already show great interest in rights issues and that the desire to explore children's rights seems to be growing. It was also noted, however, that other sectors such as advertising professionals, film and entertainment media and the suchlike are not yet similarly engaged. It was also noted that within the profession of journalism it is not only journalists who must be engaged but also editors, photo editors and other actors in the media process. The Working Group also noted that the IFJ and UNICEF had collaborated successfully in promoting debate on media coverage of child rights issues in preparation for the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1996, which produced preliminary input to journalism materials on this issue. UNICEF would be willing to continue this collaboration during preparation of training materials.

It was recommended, therefore, that in stage one the International Federation of Journalists formulate thinking on how to include child rights issues in the materials currently being developed with funding from the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights. Collaboration between IFJ and UNICEF on this work should continue.

#### **Action on recommendation 12: Service to “child rights correspondents”**

This idea to build a “register” of media professionals with a specific interest in the wide range of children's issues, including child rights, was discussed in the context of heightened media interest. It was noted that all the Working Group members already had access to mailing lists of journalists. It is vital, however, that journalists whose names appear on such lists should be “serviced” and that their inclusion on a list should not lead to their receiving large quantities of unsolicited and irrelevant information which might alienate them from the issue of children and their rights. A consolidated mailing list, therefore, should be disaggregated (to allow journalists to receive only information that is of specific interest to them, and to allow for country- and issue-specific mailings), and serviced (for example so that journalists do not receive duplicate mailings and can move off the list when they wish to, and so that their requests for information are dealt with speedily). It was also noted that there is a specific, immediate need to upgrade press work around the Committee on the Rights of the Child, so that its discussions and deliberations are more widely reported in the interests of children.

It was agreed that, in stage one, the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights and the United Nations Information Service in Geneva would continue to work together to improve reporting on the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Meanwhile, consideration will be given to producing, in stage two, the consolidated, disaggregated mailing list (register) of child rights journalists envisaged, including mechanisms for servicing such a list so that it functions effectively.

### **Conclusion**

It was agreed that the Rapporteur of the Working Group would ensure immediate follow-up after the meeting and would prepare a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and an expanded action-oriented record for Working Group members.

The Working Group recommends to the Committee on the Rights of the Child that the Working Group meets again before the Committee's January 1998 session, to assess progress and consolidate stage one action in order to facilitate stage two undertakings. In preparation for the meeting, consideration should be given to including more media professionals and taking a more regional approach.