

Manifesto of children and adolescents from Latin American countries taking part in the South American Meeting for Follow-Up to the United Nations Study on Violence against Children and Adolescents.

Asunción, 29 April 2011

Here in the city of Asunción we have been taking part as delegations of organizations of children and adolescents from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, sharing reflections and concerns about violence against children and adolescents, and we therefore,

Declare that:

1. Although we live in the same region, there is great inequality of opportunity and different forms of violence against children and adolescents in every country. Every State has different levels and forms in terms of compliance with the laws and rights of children and adolescents.
2. In some countries violence is permitted as a form of discipline, while in others any form of violence is punishable by law.
3. Structural violence is the effect of an unjust global capitalist system that is responsible for the impoverishment of most of the peoples of our countries. For us, structural violence means the contamination of the environment and of people by major agro-business proprietors. This contamination affects the health and lives of children and adolescents and their families (peasants and indigenous people) who are forced to leave their communities and migrate to the cities.
There is little likelihood of this form of expression of violence being denounced, since instead of helping, the protocols in place obstruct such procedures; and in themselves they display many social differences.

This situation creates exclusion and inequality in access to basic rights; poverty; and greater likelihood of exploitation of children, adolescents and their families.

4. For many years the culture, customs, territories and ways of life of the indigenous peoples of the continent have been subjugated, and we believe that this is a form of cultural, physical and symbolic violence against the children and adolescents of the indigenous peoples.
5. In most cases the laws and actions of States facilitate the violation of our rights in general. For example, in some countries they are trying to lower the age of criminal responsibility, while in others, the police and institutions are agents of re-victimization of child and adolescent victims of ill-treatment, exploitation, sexual abuse and other crimes.
6. There are many laws in the region, but they are not being complied with, and there are few institutions responsible for enforcing their compliance.
7. We also know that institutional bureaucracy is an obstacle to the immediate and quality attention to situations of violence against children and adolescents.
8. In most countries there are no specialized institutions like ministries of childhood and adolescence.

9. There are difficulties in the birth registration and documentation of people due to inefficiency and lack of access to the centres of registration in communities into which children and adolescents are born.
10. The centralization of services for children and adolescents hinders compliance with our rights.
11. The lack of dissemination of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a form of violence present in all Latin American countries. Even so, children and adolescents have come together to make known, evaluate, propose and put into practice their rights.
12. The mass media of our countries overwhelmingly promote a negative image of children and adolescents, distorting information, publishing only what sells, and failing to educate. The mass media create negative stereotypes that re-victimize us, making us vulnerable to situations of violence.

We recommend that:

1. A regional body be created whose mandate is to review our different realities (including our differences) and that through this, children and adolescents can make their complaints to guarantee their rights. This regional body must centralize annual reports by each country on the situation of children and adolescents in relation to violence.
2. The countries approve laws that prohibit violence against children and adolescents, including violence with 'disciplinary' objectives.
3. Public employees in institutions charged with the compliance or vigilance of some of the rights of children and adolescents are properly trained.
4. The laws are respected and that ministries of childhood and adolescence are created in the countries of the region, and that services of care and protection for children and adolescents are decentralized.
5. Other types of violence, including structural and symbolic violence, are investigated, to create public policies that can reverse this situation. We particularly recommend that the Commission take into account this type of violence, which for years has been an unknown factor in many States, in order to prevent and educate children and adolescents, young people and adults in a culture of respect and peace.
6. The Commission demand that States promote the rights of children and adolescents and monitor their application in families, institutions and society in general.

We demand that:

1. The States legally guarantee the rights of children and adolescents. That the different types of culture are not discriminated against or looked down upon, but that a way for plural participation is sought.
2. The States commit to effectively comply with our rights, to comply with the laws and to sanction anyone who fails to respect them.
3. The media be educational agents reflecting the positive values and forms of expression of children and adolescents.

4. Culture, customs, traditions and dances and the restitution of the territories seized from the Indigenous Peoples of America are respected, to guarantee development and decent living conditions for children and adolescents of this sector.
5. That families expelled by agro-business from their communities of origin are protected.

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