

United Nations launch for global Justice for Children initiative

The ***Justice for Children*** global initiative is today (July 4) launching a ***Call to Action*** to place children at the heart of justice in every nation of the world, at the United Nations.

The work is being led by project director Professor Jennifer Davidson, Executive Director of the University of Strathclyde Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures, in collaboration with many outstanding internationally-recognised partners, including the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the Child Justice Advocacy Group, with Terre des hommes and Defence for Children International.

This ***Justice for Children, Call to Action*** provides a strategic vision that actively puts children at the centre, affirms children's rights and promotes their capabilities and opportunities, and vigorously targets the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

It is explicitly focussed on injecting momentum into the next steps for the implementation of the UN SDG16; the goal to "*promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*"

The ***Call to Action*** highlights ten critical *Challenges* that create injustice for children, impoverishing not only their lives but every society in which they live. The *Call* - most importantly - addresses the crucial *Responses* that must be urgently addressed throughout the world in order for us to accelerate progress towards delivering the rights and opportunities that every child deserves. Only then will we have *left no child behind*.

Implementing the strategies that will deliver our vision is critical. And so the *Call* emphasises the paramount importance of sustained political commitment in every nation, supported by the necessary resourcing. Moreover, it highlights the need to engage all society in this effort, including both those who have traditionally championed the rights and needs of children, but also those whose decisions have a huge impact on children – albeit sometimes less directly - and have not typically been engaged in justice for children.

The launch event will be held at the Human Rights Council at the UN's Palais de Nations. It will be hosted by the UN Ambassadors for Belgium and the Republic of Botswana.

Peggy Hicks, Director of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Professor Philip Jaffé, Director of the Centre for Children's Rights Studies, will be amongst the leading human rights experts speaking at the launch.

Peggy Hicks, Director of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said: "This is a key moment. As we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), there is no better time to demonstrate global leadership, not only on behalf of those who are children today, but for the approximately 1 billion children who will be born in the coming decade: the children who will inherit a post-SDG world.

"In spite of near-universal ratification of the CRC, millions of children around the world continue to be left behind and their rights denied, particularly those who are the most

discriminated against or living in precarious situations of vulnerability – such as children in detention, on the streets, in institutions or in migration situations. Children also suffer the impacts of poverty, violence, inequality and exclusion disproportionately, due to their sensitive phase of life and development.

“This *Call to Action* goes to the heart of our challenge. Unless we identify, and then seek to resolve - and, ideally, prevent - the critical challenges that obstruct the fulfilment of their rights; that preclude the meeting of children’s critical needs; and that inhibit the securing of their opportunities, for many children we will continue to fall far short.”

Professor Philip Jaffé, Director of the Centre for Children's Rights Studies said:

“Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child should compel us to be bold and address the reality of the continued injustices that many children experience in their daily lives. As a Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, I am proud to join this *Call to Action* to secure justice in all its forms for children everywhere. A child justice system entails secure pathways to access child-friendly institutions that will act based on the rights of the child as a primary consideration.”

The newly appointed **UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children** is also championing the Call; **Dr Najat Maalla M’jad**, said: “Countless children involved with the justice system have a history of exposure to violence. In many states, the justice system is still not child-sensitive and used as a substitute to weak or non-existent child protection systems, leading to the stigmatisation, criminalisation and deprivation of liberty of children, including those who are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, those living or working on the street, and those who have fled home as a result of poverty, armed conflicts, humanitarian disasters and violence.”

Professor Davidson, Executive Director of the Strathclyde-based Institute for Inspiring Children’s Futures said:

“The Sustainable Development Goals commit to *‘leaving no one behind’* but this cannot be fulfilled if the rights of children - and justice for all children - are not made a reality.

“Children account for 30% of the global population. With such a large proportion under 18, we must make sure that children are at the forefront in our effort to implement the SDGs. This *Call to Action* aims to do exactly that. We won’t succeed around the world with our global goals, if we don’t get it right for children.

“Justice systems affect children in many ways; children are rights holders and can be human rights defenders, but also, children may be victims, witnesses, or accused of an offence, or intervention may be required for their care and protection. In each of these contexts, children must have access to specialist and differentiated justice systems that are in line with their stage of development, and recognise international law. Only then will children experience meaningful justice and be adequately protected from injustice.

“It is so important to stress that this is something that affects us all, not just children. By creating justice for children everywhere, and leaving no one behind, we are creating a fairer, safer world and society for us all to live in and flourish.

“We’re delighted that this valuable work has come to fruition after the dedicated efforts of our partners and supporting organisations; however, this is very much the start of our journey. We look forward to the launch and beyond, when we will focus on the implementation of the *Call to Action Justice for Children*, promoting legislation, policies and practices that will better realise children’s rights in their day-to-day experiences around the world.”

Kristen Hope, Terre des hommes said:

“Ensuring that no child is left behind in the SDG agenda requires not just national commitments to change policies and practices. It also requires a shift in collective consciousness to realise that children themselves are agents of change. Children have a right to express their views and have them taken into account, and children have lived experiences which must be acknowledged.”

Benoit Van Keirsbilck, Defence for Children International said:

“This is why the *Call to Action* places particular emphasis on participation. As NGOs working in this field, we will make sure that children are at the table and meaningfully contribute to the next steps of the *Call to Action* and the achievement of the ambition for Justice for All.”

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Notes to Editors:

About Justice for Children, Justice for All: The Challenge to Achieve SDG16+

The Ten Challenges highlighted in the *Call to Action* - and for which the *Call* articulates the necessary Responses - are set out here:

**Justice for Children, Justice for All: *The Challenge to Achieve SDG16+*
The Ten Challenges**

A. Promote justice as an enabler of children’s development

1. Guarantee the wellbeing and inclusion of all children.
2. Promote justice systems, whether formal or legally plural, that guarantee equal access, benefit, protection and support to children.
3. Prevent unnecessary contact with the justice system and the criminalisation of children.
4. Ensure the right to a legal identity for all children.

B. Accelerate action to respond to the urgent and critical challenges

5. Prevent all forms of violence against children.
6. Safeguard the rights of children who have been recruited, used by or associated with armed, violent extremist and other criminal groups or accused of national security-related offenses.
7. Eliminate arbitrary and unlawful detention and restrict the deprivation of children’s liberty to exceptional circumstances.

C. Establish and sustain the foundations for change

8. Promote and ensure the empowerment and participation of children in all decisions that affect their lives.
9. Secure sustained political commitment to accelerate the achievement of high-quality justice for children.
10. Ensure responses are based on international standards and evidence-based policies.

Justice for Children, Justice for All: The Challenge to Achieve SDG16+ (in short, *Justice for Children: Call to Action*) was commissioned by the *Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies* and the *Task Force on Justice*.

The ***Justice for Children Project*** is led by the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS) and the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures at Strathclyde, in partnership with experts in the wider international community from the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children and the Child Justice Advocacy Group (CJAG), coordinated by Terre des hommes and Defence for Children International.

The ***University of Strathclyde's Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures*** is a partnership between the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS), Associate Centres such as the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ), and the wider research community, with a collective vision of ensuring that children and young people have what they need to reach their full potential, particularly those who face adversity.

The development of the ***Justice for Children: Call to Action*** was informed by a wider Technical Working Group made up of globally-recognised experts on children issues from across the world.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. They provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The University of Strathclyde is a strong supporter of the SDGs as an integral part of its global socially progressive vision.

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