

Geneva, July 2015

Dear DCI members,

From the International Secretariat of Defence for Children International (DCI-IS) we would like to share the latest updates from Geneva, particularly the recently concluded **29th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC-29)**, which took place from 15 June – 03 July. Generally the June session of the Council focuses on gender and women's rights. In this light, DCI held a specific training session on **"Together for Justice: Mainstreaming gender equity within the DCI movement – Equal opportunities for all"**, to which various DCI representatives from around the world participated (more information to follow below).

With regard the [Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty](#), the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) is in communication with various UN agencies, discussing potential means of implementation. A decision will be made soon on how the Study is to be carried out; we hope to see an Independent Expert appointed to broker cooperation between all stakeholders. We will be sure to keep you updated on any developments.

DCI actively participated in the HRC-29 wherein many important issues were addressed. Below we will go through the main themes & activities. Please note that all [HRC-29 documentation is available online in English, French, Spanish and Arabic](#).

➤ **JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN**

Defence for Children International (DCI) co-organized a **side event on Girls in Detention** (18 June) together with Penal Reform International (PRI) and the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence against Children (O/SRSG/VAC). The event was sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. Panellists included representative from the O/SRSG/VAC, representative from the Women Human Rights and Gender Section of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as well as representative from Penal Reform International (PRI) and our colleague Vilma Amparo Gomez Pava of DCI – Colombia. The discussions identified the obstacles and challenges which compromise the realisation of girls' rights in the criminal justice system. Panellists & participants discussed the need to better prevent girls' detention and better protect further violations in cases of detention. Discussions also covered how to foster the adoption of gender-responsive policies; establish child-friendly justice systems that are sensitive to girls' particular needs; set effective complaints mechanisms and remedies accessible to girls; ensure that justice systems are accessible and do not discriminate and re-victimize girls. For more information on the discussions, the full report of the event will soon be available on our website (www.defenceforchildren.org).

The **Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges & Lawyers** (SR/IJL) presented her annual report (A/HRC/29/26) to the HRC, focusing on **protecting children's rights in the justice system**. The report examined the essential role of judges, prosecutors and lawyers in upholding children's human rights, and applying international human rights norms, standards and principles at the domestic level. DCI contributed to the drafting of this report, and also made



a related statement in order to further underline the need for child-friendly justice systems, which is available on the [DCI website](#).

The HRC also adopted a **resolution on the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, jurors and assessors, and the independence of lawyers** (A/HRC/29/L.11), calling upon States to guarantee the independence of judges and lawyers, and the objectivity and impartiality of prosecutors. Furthermore, States are encouraged to put in place legal and policy frameworks conducive to the development and reinforcement of a child-sensitive justice system.

➤ GENDER

During its 29th session, the Human Rights Council held its **annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women** (19 June) with a relevant panel discussion on the elimination and prevention of domestic violence against women and girls, followed by a panel focusing on women's participation in power and in decision-making.

The Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights presented a report on good practices and major challenges in preventing and eliminating **female genital mutilation (FGM)**. The report noted that the practice is still far too prevalent, fuelled by social norms and harmful stereotypes about women's sexuality and role in society. The critical need for change in societal and individual thinking and its criminalisation by governments was stressed.

The Council adopted a **resolution on accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women** (A/HRC/29/L.16/Rev.1) urging States to support initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and at preventing, responding to, and protecting women and girls from domestic violence, and to take effective action to prevent domestic violence, including by publicly condemning, addressing and penalizing perpetrators.

The Council also adopted a **resolution on the elimination of discrimination against women** (A/HRC/29/L.7/Rev.1), promoting the equal and full access, participation and contribution of women and girls in all aspects of life, and rejecting any discriminatory practice and gender stereotypes. The resolution urges States to ensure that women have equal access to all economic, financial and social services and benefits without discrimination.

A **resolution on strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate early and forced child marriage** (A/HRC/29/L.15) recognized child marriage as a human rights violation and a barrier to sustainable development, and urging States to enact, enforce, harmonise and uphold preventative laws and policies. Furthermore, States are required to strengthen efforts to ensure free birth registration.

DCI-IS organized a **training session on "Together for Justice: Mainstreaming gender equity within the DCI movement – Equal opportunities for all"** (15-19 June). The training session aimed to raise awareness and strengthen the capacity of DCI representatives on issues relevant to gender equity and on the existing international human rights standards and mechanisms aimed at reducing gender inequality. The training also aimed to inform and effectively enact the



DCI Gender Policy & Code of Ethics document which was adopted in 2014 by the International Executive Council (IEC), and entered into force in January 2015. Through roundtables and presentations, participants met experts of gender equality from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Young Women Christian Association (YMCA); World Health Organization (WHO), among others. On the last day of the training, DCI representatives presented their analysis of the gender context at regional levels and defined regional plans of action on mainstreaming gender equity. Report of the training session will be available on the DCI website soon (www.defenceforchildren.org).

➤ EDUCATION

The Council held a **High Level Panel on Realizing the Equal Enjoyment of the Right to Education by Every Girl**, which focused on a broad spectrum of situations and obstacles girls face when accessing education. Such obstacles include: gender stereotypes and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage. DCI delivered a **joint statement** on the issue together with Plan International, Arigatou International and Save the Children.

A **resolution on the right to education** was also adopted (A/HRC/29/L.14/Rev.1), urging States to give full effect to the right to education by, inter alia, complying with their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education by all appropriate means, paying particular attention to girls, marginalized children and persons with disabilities.

DCI organized a **side-event**, sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, on **"Girls' right to education – a West-African perspective"** (16 June). The event was set to launch the new DCI report, "A mountain to climb", which focuses on gender-based violence and girls' right to education in Sierra Leone. The report is available on the DCI [website](#). The event involved speakers from DCI-Sierra Leone, representative from Ghana NGOs Coalition on Rights of the Child (GNCRC), and author of the report "A mountain to climb", Ms. Robinson of the Human Rights Centre of the University of Essex. Discussions focused on social, cultural and financial barriers to girls' schooling in the West-African context. Ms. Hawanatu Mansaray (DCI - Sierra Leone) presented the Girl Power Project, explaining the national section's commitment to "increase access to justice, break cultural and social barriers, empower girls and strengthen governmental institutions and community-based mechanisms". Since its implementation, through sensitization activities, training and socio-legal support, the Project has reached over 2'500 girls and young women, and over 10'000 children indirectly. Mr. Abdul Manaff Kemokai, President of DCI-Sierra Leone and regional representative for DCI Africa, went on to explain the relevant advocacy efforts on girls' human rights at the community, district, national and international levels.

DCI also delivered a statement on **girl's right to education**, during the interactive dialogue with the Working Group on Discrimination against Women. The statement was delivered by DCI intern, Cecile Pilot, and is visible via [webcast](#) ('01:15:39). The full text of the statement is available on the [DCI website](#).

➤ MIGRATION



The Council adopted a **resolution on the protection of the human rights of migrants: migrants in transit** (A/HRC/29/L.3), calling on all States that have not yet done so, to consider signing and ratifying or acceding to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and members of their families. The resolution also requests the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to submit a **study on the situation of migrants in transit** at the 31st session of the Council (HRC-31), in March 2016.

A **resolution on unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents and human rights** (A/HRC/29/L.24) was also adopted and calls on countries of origin, transit and destination to facilitate family reunification, in order to promote the welfare and the best interest of migrant children, noting also that the detention of children based on their migrant status constitutes a violation of the rights of the child. It was requested for the United Nations Advisory Committee to develop a **research-based study on the global issue of “Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Adolescents and Human Rights”**, which is to be presented during the 33rd session of the Council (HRC-33), in September 2016.

➤ **FAMILY**

A resolution (A/HRC/29/L.25) was adopted on the **protection of the family: contribution of the family to the realization of the right to and adequate standard of living for its members, particularly through its role in poverty eradication and achieving sustainable development**. The resolution urges States to create a conducive environment to strengthen and support all families. DCI, together with other child rights NGOs, lobbied (formally and informally) for the inclusion on an additional paragraph on children's rights in order to underline the rights of individual members of each family member. Nevertheless, albeit the inclusion of such paragraph, the text remains problematic as a whole, as focus remains on the family rather than individual members / rights-holders. To this end, DCI together with other child rights NGOs, delivered a joint statement on the issue (22 June), underlining that children are autonomous human rights holders, independent of the family structure. The webcast of the statement is available [here](#) ('00:33:13).

➤ **POST-2015 GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

DCI, as member of the **Working Group on Children and Violence (WG/CAV)**, co-organized a roundtable discussion on 11 June (the week before the HRC-29) in order to provide concrete examples on proven effective programs that can inform the development of new means of implementation for the **Post 2015 Global Sustainable Development Agenda** (to be formally adopted by States in September 2015). The event stressed the importance of financing targets on violence against children as key to ensuring children's potential and development, as well as concrete examples of cost-effective implementation that contributes to end violence against children. Panellists included, Susan Bissell, Chief of Child Protection, UNICEF; Azfar Khan, Head of Policy Research and Knowledge Building, Governance Department at International Labour Organisation (ILO); Joanne Dunn, Senior Adviser Strategic Partnerships, World Vision International. A full report on the event is available upon request.



➤ ARMED CONFLICT

The **Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Gaza** formally presented its report to the Council (29 June). The CoI on Gaza was established during a special session of the HRC in July 2014 to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, in the context of the military operations conducted since 13 June 2014. The report of the CoI found credible allegations of war crimes committed in 2014 by both Israel and Palestinian armed groups. The Chairperson of the CoI told “the extent of the devastation and human suffering in Gaza was unprecedented and will impact generations to come”. Many United Nations member states expressed their horror of the widespread and systematic violations of human rights, the killing of 551 children last summer, and condemned the absence of cooperation by Israel.

In a **resolution on ensuring accountability and justice for all violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem** (A/HRC/29/L.35), the Council called for the implementation of all the recommendations in the report of the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on the 2014 Gaza conflict and called upon concerned parties to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Council also requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to present a report on the implementation of the resolution, as well as on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the reports of the CoI on Gaza and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, during the 31st session of the Human Rights Council (HRC-31), in March 2016.

DCI – Palestine presented an oral statement during the general debate on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. The webcast of the statement is available [here](#) (‘01:29:24). <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/human-rights-council/regular-sessions/watch/item7-general-debate-34th-meeting-29th-regular-session-of-human-rights-council/4328108186001>

A **side event on “No More Impunity: Gaza Under Attack”** was organized by Medical Aid for Palestinians. Our colleague, Mr. Ivan Karakashian, Advocacy Unit Coordinator of DCI-Palestine actively contributed to the debate as a panellist. Mr. Karakashian informed that 64 Palestinian children were killed by Israeli drones during *Operation Protective Edge* last summer. He told child friendly and safe spaces like schools no longer exist in Gaza and that resources are not able to cope with the dire needs of children suffering.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, in an oral update on **Boko Haram** to the Council (01 July), denounced the abduction of children on a massive scale, child recruitment, girls forced into sexual slavery, early marriages, rapes and forced pregnancy in violation of human rights and international humanitarian law principles. A report on the issue is to be presented during the next session of the Council (September 2015).

In a **resolution on the grave and deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic** (A/HRC/29/L.4), the Council demanded that the Syrian authorities cooperate fully with the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Syria. Furthermore, the Council strongly condemns the continued gross systematic and widespread violations and abuses of human



rights by the Syrian authorities and affiliated militias, and also strongly condemns the terrorist acts and violence committed against civilians by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Daesh), al-Nusra Front and other extremist groups.

30TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (SEPTEMBER 2015):

The next Human Rights Council session will take place from 14 September to 02 October. Issues to be addressed include: administration of justice, arbitrary detention, death penalty, contemporary forms of slavery, indigenous people. We will be keeping you updated as things develop on this regard (i.e. the formal program of work is yet to be finalized by the UN).

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC COMMITTEE):

During its **69th session** (18 May – 05 June), the CRC Committee reviewed the following countries where DCI has presence: **Mexico, Ghana, and the Netherlands**. DCI – Netherlands had presented a stakeholders report to the Committee for the review, and DCI representatives from the Netherlands travelled to Geneva to follow the discussions and meet with Committee members directly. The impact of the advocacy work of the DCI section, together with the IS, was proven when key recommendations were put forward by the Committee to the government of the Netherlands, particularly on the issue of juvenile justice.

The next session of the CRC Committee (**70th session**) will take place from 14 September to 02 October. The following countries where DCI has presence will be reviewed: **Brazil** (under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols). For further information you can visit the official [website](#).

It has been decided that the next **Day of General Discussion** of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (to be held in September 2016) will focus on “**the right of the child to a healthy environment**”, in relation to the protection of the environment in the context of sustainable development and climate change.

Please feel free to contact me for any further information on any of the aforementioned points.

With many thanks & my best wishes,

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