## Child Rights and the Media

# Putting Children in the Right

## Guidelines for Journalists and Media Professionals

International Federation of Journalists

with the support of the European Commission

# CONTENTS

*Introduction by Aidan White, General Secretary of the IFJ* ........................ *3*

*Why journalists need guidelines for reporting on children* ........................ *11*

*What human rights do children have ?* ........................ *14*

*How are young people abused or exploited ?* ........................ *21*

*The media role in reporting on abuse* ........................ *26*

*Topical issues of child abuse and exploitation* ........................ *29*

*Unions seek 'relationship of trust' with media* ........................ *31*

*Can you link street children and the global economy ?* ........................ *33*

*Reporting on sexual exploitation of children in tourism* ........................ *39*
*A West African perspective — by Kabral Blay-Amihere*

*Awareness training for media professionals* ........................ *43*
*by Charlotte Barry & Mike Jempson*

*Interviewing, photographing and filming children* ........................ *50*

*Guidelines and principles for reporting on issues involving children* ........................ *61*

*Recommendations for raising awareness of child rights* ........................ *64*

*Cover story: The Out of Focus Group* ........................ *67*

*Appendix: Tourist industry against exploitation* ........................ *69*

---

*Putting Children in the Right* written, edited and designed by Peter McIntyre, Oxford UK
with thanks to Lesley Campbell, children's rights officer.
Cover design Alan Hughes.
Illustrations — Cover Picture, Drik Picture Library Ltd, Bangladesh.
Title Page and Page 13 New Internationalist. Pages 25 & 42 World Health Organization.
Page 10 Peter McIntyre. Page 3, IFJ.

---

*Putting Children in the Right – Guidelines for Journalists*

Published January 2002 by the International Federation of Journalists
with the support of the European Commission

International Press Center, Residence Palace, (Bloc C)
155 rue de la Loi
B–1040 Brussels, Belgium
☎ 32 2 235 22 00
e-mail ifj@ifj.org website www.ifj.org

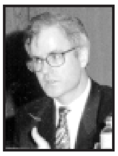
Set in Minion 10.5pt on 13.

Printed by IMP, Hoeilaart, Belgium

# Introduction

## by **Aidan White**

**General Secretary**
**International Federation of Journalists**



If children's rights figure prominently in mainstream media it is usually in the context of child abuse, exploitation and sensationalist news making. Children are generally seen and heard at a distance, reflecting a weakness that resonates through any discussion on media and the rights of children, that young people are seldom allowed to speak for themselves.

Raising awareness about the rights of children and the promotion of children's rights is a challenge to media. Media must not just report fairly, honestly and accurately on the experience of childhood, but they must also provide space for the diverse, colourful and creative opinions of children themselves. Whether it is news and current affairs, or the complex world of creative and performing arts, all media professionals, and the organisations for which they work, have a responsibility to recognise children's rights and reflect them in their work.

But how do we raise awareness? To answer requires examination of the way media work, of how existing principles of accountability apply, and how media must be freed from reins of political and economic control which limit professionalism and undermine ethical standards.

It will not be easy. In a world of rapid technological change and globalisation of information, commercial competition has led to a perceptible fall in standards within traditional media. At the same time, many governments and state authorities manipulate information through regulation or forms of censorship, often to satisfy narrow political objectives rather than to meet the needs of people or to protect the rights of children. Whether driven by commercial objectives or subject to political controls, journalists and media professionals are under increasing pressure.

## Raising awareness

Media play an important role in raising public awareness of children's rights, but can be ambiguous partners. While journalists can uncover cases of abuse and raise awareness of children's rights, media also infiltrate the public with tolerant attitudes towards child pornography and prostitution or provide the means (for example through advertisements) by which children are exposed to abusers. On the one hand, news media tell the stories of abused and abuser, through news reports, photographs, documentaries, and drama. But on the other, they can themselves become the exploiter, by creating sexually provocative images of children in news or advertising, or, at worst, as the vehicle for child pornography, or a source of information for paedophile networks.

The way the media portray children has a profound impact on society's attitude to children and childhood, which also affects the way adults behave. Moreover, the images of sex and violence that children see influence their own expectation of their role in life. There is increasing alarm in a number of countries that the way children are portrayed may increase the risks they face. There is concern about how far children's behaviour is influenced by what they see on television, particularly with regard to violence. Another crucial question is whether media encourage children to become, or seem to become, prematurely sexually active, especially though coverage of pop music and fashion.

Journalists need to be aware of the consequences of their reporting. The co-operation of media organisations and journalists and their orientation towards safeguarding the rights and the dignity of children and young adults is extremely important for all who strive for wider recognition of children's rights. Sensational coverage may distort and exploit a serious problem, doing more harm than good. Some editors claim that sensationalism permits serious social issues to capture the attention of readers and viewers. However, such coverage rarely analyses the social and economic causes of abuse of children: the dislocation of communities and families, homelessness, corrupt employers, pimps, the drug culture or why parents in poverty sell a child to support the rest of the family. The positive story of children, their lives and their rights is not being told in full. To examine how this can be changed requires examination of the professional conditions in which media work, a review of the principles or guidelines journalists and programme makers should follow, and the obstacles that stand in the way of good journalism.

## Standards, regulations and self-regulation

Reporting well on child rights requires access to a great deal of information about children, much of it held by the state authorities. Media cannot report effectively if information about education, health, employment, development and social conditions is not generally available. Too many governments and state institutions are secretive and hoard information.

Respect for independent journalism is an essential condition for a media culture of openness about children and their rights. Journalists need to be confident that they can uphold ethical standards — rather than 'following orders' — and that they can protect confidential sources of information. Many cases of the exploitation of children will never be revealed unless the people who provide the media with information can be confident that anonymity will be preserved.

The right to freedom of expression is always important to media professionals, but has to be balanced against other important rights — most notably the rights of the child to freedom from fear and exploitation.

Journalists are wary of regulators. They have much evidence that outside intervention inevitably leads to forms of censorship. However, it is legitimate to question whether media self-regulation is a sufficient answer to public concern over standards of journalism, particularly in an age when the growth of global media enterprises and the Internet appear to put media beyond the range of national public accountability. How effective are the voluntary codes and guidelines that set out the professional obligations of journalists? As in all forms of self-regulation, effectiveness depends upon the professional confidence of journalists, their knowledge of the issues, and the conditions in which they work.

A study carried out for the International Federation of Journalists by the UK based *Presswise* revealed that few journalists' organisations had specific codes of good practice covering the rights of children. In May 1998 the IFJ drew up the draft of the first international guidelines for journalists covering children's rights, at a conference attended by journalists from 70 countries. Regional discussion on these guidelines took place in Latin America, Africa and Asia and they were formally adopted at the Annual Congress of the International Federation of Journalists in Seoul in 2001. The guidelines were presented at the 2nd World Congress against Commercial Exploitation of Children held at Yokohama, Japan, in December 2001. The aim of the guidelines—Pages 61-63—is to raise the standards of journalism in reporting on issues involving children, and to encourage media to promote children's rights and give them a voice. The code promotes:

- respect for the privacy of children and protection of their identity unless it is demonstrably in the public interest;
- the need to give children access to media to express their own opinions;
- the obligation to verify information before publication;
- the need to consider the consequences of publication and to minimise harm to children.

The code will also help media to avoid:

- sexual, violent or victim-focused programming and images that are potentially damaging to children;
- stereotypes and sensational presentation of journalistic material.

Codes do not guarantee ethical reporting, but identify the professional dilemmas that journalists and media face when reporting about children. They challenge journalists and media to be aware of their responsibilities.

## Commercial pressures on journalists and media

Fierce commercial competition is one factor leading media to exploit children. The exposure of emotions and sensationalism attract audiences and sell news. Cash-conscious media organisations apply greater pressure on news teams for productivity. Journalists, therefore, sometimes take an ill-considered, easy route to newsgathering, perpetuating myths and stereotypes.

An uncomfortable balance of interests prevails where ethical standards are too often sacrificed in defence of commercial imperatives. Self-regulation may not be convincing when media organisations appear to ignore the process or to use professional codes to support their narrow interests. Very often even regulatory bodies lack the power to enforce sanctions that bite.

Media professionals need to challenge the constraints that bind them to markets. Journalists, writers, and producers must work towards a system of popular culture that addresses the needs of children without devaluing them. The competitive nature of the industry means that media will often cut corners to beat a rival network or publication. However, journalists must remain aware of the need for fair, open and straightforward methods in obtaining information. Journalism should always be ethical, above all when considering the needs of children.

## Advertising and the impact of new technologies

Strongly commercial motives, primarily the need to win audiences and advertisers, influence the content of mass media communication, and these commercial motives are at their strongest when it comes to advertising. Advertising is also subject to a combination of legislation and self-regulation in the way it appeals to children. It is also one of the most controversial areas of media activity. Henry Danthan, Executive Manager of the World Federation of Advertisers, which represents national associations and multinational advertising companies, believes that an ‘anti-advertising climate’ is being fostered in some parts of Europe because of a misguided moral panic about its influence on children.  The advertising industry is, without doubt, sensitive about allegations over its use of children.

There are problems with the concept of self-regulation in advertising. Mechanisms are only equipped to deal with grave breaches of regulations, while the main problems arise from the accumulative effect of banal stereotypes that are used everyday without sanction. Secondly, advertising codes, like those covering journalism, often rely on notions such as 'good taste', 'bad taste' and 'decency'. But how are these terms to be interpreted and implemented particularly in an industry where image is a powerful motor for selling? Moreover, in an era of global communication, material prepared in one country may be broadcast in a region with different cultural values and expectations.

The development of new forms of communication such as the Internet has raised international concern, particularly because of the widescale availability of pornography on the Internet, and because people who target children for abuse use this technology to ensnare children or to share information. The major problem in controlling material on the Internet is that nobody controls it. Nevertheless, recent international strikes against paedophile networks by police have shown that on-line services do not have to be safe havens for people who exploit children.

Free-speech campaigners both in the United States and Europe have defeated government attempts to control content on the Internet, but the need for safeguards remains. Technical resources for parents and children to put up protective barriers to online exploitation are only part of the answer, and this question will need to be addressed as more children gain access to the Internet.

In fact, most of the world's children are excluded from the Internet because of a poverty of technical and financial resources — it was recently reported that only 0.1 per cent of Africans have access. Ensuring access to the Internet while protecting children from exploitation is a major challenge.

Strategies to extend children's rights will have to be linked to this rapidly-changing media environment; one that offers much less scope for centralised control and regulation than before. Solutions will have to be found in mechanisms that empower adults and young people themselves to exercise control over the on-line world.

## Children should be seen and heard

The issue of identity is at the heart of journalistic endeavour. It is in the nature of journalism, from the first lesson in journalism school onwards, to provide facts, including personal details about whoever is involved in a story. The decision to suppress information has to be carefully considered, but a journalist should always respect, above all, the rights of the child.

This booklet explores how journalists can both give a voice in the media to children, listening to their views and aspirations and protect the identity of children who should not be exposed to the glare of publicity.

International conventions and recommendations emphasise the right of children to have a say in decisions affecting them, and call for a change in the way children are regarded. The Council of Europe has recommended documentary programmes on young people's lives in different countries, with the aim of giving children aged from 7 to 18—including poor and migrant children—an opportunity to air their opinions.[1]

As part of their learning children also need to be educated to be knowledgeable and critical about how the media work. There are a few projects worldwide that seek to give children opportunities to create their own media. These include the children's news agency *ANDI* in Brazil and *Children's Express* in the US and the United Kingdom. These may appear to threaten traditional notions of professional journalism. However, in an age when electronic services allow everyone access to unfiltered information, the challenge to mainstream media is not to create obstacles to participation, but to promote access that will bring children into the picture without diminishing professionalism and standards.

New means of giving children access to the media as sources should be investigated. Media outlets might consider the appointment of 'children's correspondents', with a brief covering all aspects of children's lives, and specific training to enable journalists to express the child's point of view. Another measure to assist journalists in covering children's issues accurately would be for NGOs in each country to compile a directory of reliable experts on different topics, which could be available on every news desk.

International bodies have called for more information to be given to children — both through the media and at school — so they can protect themselves about the dangers and risks of sexual exploitation. But children, from primary school upwards, also need media literacy training, to help them understand and decode the messages they receive from programmes and advertising, to become critical and well-informed media consumers.

[1] *Björnberg, Dr Ulla; Children and their Families, Childhood Policies, Council of Europe 1994.*

## Conclusion

This publication includes a number of practical recommendations intended to make media and journalists more responsive and to encourage debate within media about the portrayal of children and their rights. Media professionals need to play a leading role in this debate or they will find that others grow impatient and seek to control them through regulations. Such regulations will not be effective in protecting children, but they will make it more difficult for good journalists to do their jobs.

Although there are no easy answers to complex issues or to ethical dilemmas, there are standards and benchmarks by which media can judge how they portray children in society. The need for journalistic training in reporting on the rights of children has never been greater, both at the entry point to journalism and in mid-career courses. Bad habits in the newsroom and the tyranny of deadlines, always a handicap to good reporting, can be overcome if journalists and programme-makers at all levels are exposed to good practice and information about the importance of children's rights.

It is possible for journalists to depict children in a way that maintains their dignity, and avoid exploitation and victimisation. There are many examples of good journalism that act as a counterweight to media indifference and lack of awareness and that challenge myths. There is a need for media to identify good practice, to applaud high standards and to encourage improved coverage.

*Aidan White*
*January 2002*

# Why journalists need guidelines for reporting on children

Journalists are expected to work with a high degree of autonomy, making decisions about whom to interview, photograph, film or record and how to shape the material they collect into a story or for a programme. In the course of this work officials or members of the public often make suggestions, or attempt to instruct them about what material to use or not use. Journalists generally resist attempts to tell them how to do their jobs. On the plus side, this means that journalists do not easily succumb to pressure to alter a story to suit vested interests. On the debit side, it means that journalists rarely engage in discussions about ethical issues with people outside the industry. Unfortunately, many journalists are hard on the outside and soft on the inside—resisting attempts by ‘outsiders’ to influence what they write or film, but succumbing without protest within their media organisations to instructions that contravene their code of professional conduct, or to drastic editing that damages the integrity of their material.

The purpose of guidelines is to influence the way that journalists do their jobs. The best guidelines are not a set of dos and don’ts, but rather a framework for thinking through ethical issues. This kind of guideline helps journalists to apply their professional judgement, and give them extra

> ‘The best guidelines are not ‘dos and don'ts’ but provide a framework for thinking through ethical issues’

confidence as they address problems and decide how to resolve them.

Journalists who think through ethical issues are liberated rather than constrained, confident that they can apply principles in a consistent way. Such guidelines also give front line journalists – those who come face to face with the public – a basis for challenging improper use of that material or distortions introduced during the editing process. Guidelines are of great use to professionals who direct the work of other journalists or who edit and process material. Finally guidelines can educate members of the public about how journalists approach their work, and allow journalists to defend their decisions in public.

Journalists subscribe to a code of conduct, published by their media union, professional association or employer. However, in practice most journalists have a hazy idea of the detail in the codes and rely on a general understanding of their principles.

Children on the other hand require precise protocols if their human rights are to be protected. These guidelines will help children to see that journalists do take their issues and views seriously.

They also seek to ensure that journalists, photographers, camera operators and other media professionals do not violate children’s rights. Most adults are capable of deciding what involvement they want to have with the media and of making informed decisions as to

### The distorting lens

An international NGO organised a media visit to a refugee camp, where photographers took pictures of weeping children. Their pictures appeared across the world the following day.

The NGO press officer was mortified to discover later why the children were crying. They thought that the long lens cameras were guns and that the photographers were soldiers who had come to kill them.

Photographers had created the very fear they thought they were simply recording.

the extent of their co-operation. Children and young people have neither the knowledge nor the experience to make such a decision. A child is likely to be excited (or afraid) at the sight of cameras or TV crews, depending on their age and experience. The issue of naming or filming children and of gaining consent is discussed in detail in the section *Interviewing, photographing and filming children* which begins on page 50.

There is no equality between the journalist, photographer or programme maker and the child, and where there is an imbalance of power there is the potential for exploitation. Journalists who take these guidelines seriously will protect children and protect themselves.

# What human rights do children have?

## The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) came into force in 1990 and has been ratified by almost every member state on earth. It is far and away the best-supported Convention that the UN has adopted—although, inevitably, some states are attached to the Convention in words rather than in action. By 2002, only the United States of America and Somalia had failed to ratify the Convention, and the USA had signified its intention to do so. The UNCRC has 54 articles, which can loosely be divided into protection, provision (of services) and participation. Numerous campaigns for child rights are based on the Convention, which for the first time set the child agenda in the language of rights, instead of the language of welfare. This is a conceptual leap that many media professionals still need to make in their own work.

Human rights are often said to be intrinsic to being human—not something that can be given and taken away. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, marking the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, said: “Human rights are the foundation of human existence and coexistence. Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. Human rights are what make us human. They are the principles by which we create the sacred home for human dignity. ” The UNCRC emphasises that children have the same human rights as adults, but in practice the Convention is *aspiration* because many children do not achieve the rights it contains. One defining characteristic of childhood is a relative lack of power, and few children have the ability to exercise rights without support. In practice rights for children are *conditional* on adults delivering them. The full text of the UNCRC can be consulted on the UNICEF website (www.unicef.org/crc). Here we outline those of most direct relevance to journalists.

### The right to have views and to express them

One of the most important rights promised by the Convention is the right for children to form their own views and express them. The Convention places an obligation on states to ensure that young people are heard and appropriate media is available. Article 12 of the CRC states that:

> Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

### Freedom of expression and access to the media

Article 13 gives children the right to freedom of expression, and the right to access to media:

> The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.

States can legislate to restrict this right but only if to the extent necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others; or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals.

### The right to privacy

States are expected to legislate to protect the privacy of children as well as to protect them from slander and libel. Journalists should know about such legislation and have clear policies and protocols for interviewing young people. Article 16 says that:

> No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

## Positive role of media

In general, the UNCRC sees the role of the mass media as a positive one in the development of the child. Under Article 17:

> States Parties recognise the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

States undertake to

- Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child;
- Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;
- Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;
- Encourage the mass media to pay attention to the language needs of the child who belongs to a minority group;
- Encourage the development of guidelines for protecting children from material 'injurious to his or her well-being', bearing in mind Articles 13 (freedom of expression) and 18 (parental responsibility).

## Protection from abuse

The UNCRC encourage states to protect children from exploitation or sexual abuse. Under Article 19:

> States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 34 says that states must protect a child from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, and specifically the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

In 1990 the United Nations also adopted Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines) which place a social responsibility on the media towards young people, especially in relation to pornography, drugs and violence.

## The Optional Protocols

In May 2000 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted two Optional Protocols to the UNCRC. One covers the involvement of children in armed conflict and the other covers the sale of children ('trafficking'), child prostitution and child pornography. States are encouraged, but not compelled, to ratify these Protocols and to enact legislation and take other measures to implement them. Both of these Protocols challenge member states in various ways and provide journalists with opportunities for holding Governments to account for the way that they implement them.

### Involvement of children in armed conflict

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict came into force in February 2002. This seeks to make it illegal for children to be coerced into military service before the age of 18. Under the Protocol, Governments must publish age limits and criteria for voluntary recruitment below that age and ensure that younger soldiers do not take part in armed conflict. The Protocol says that armed groups (as distinct from the armed forces of a State) should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years. The International Criminal Court has agreed that conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into military groups or using them to participate in hostilities is a war crime.

### The sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography came into force on 18 January 2002. It covers a range of issues as well as pornography, adoption and forced labour and anything that falls within a broad definition of trafficking. The preamble to the Protocol expresses concern at:

> the significant and increasing international traffic in children for the purpose of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, … the widespread and continuing practice of sex tourism, to which children are especially vulnerable, … child prostitution and child pornography.

The Protocol lists contributing factors as:

> underdevelopment, poverty, economic disparities, inequitable socio-economic structure, dysfunctioning families, lack of education, urban-rural migration, gender discrimination, irresponsible adult sexual behaviour, harmful traditional practices, armed conflicts and trafficking in children. It calls for action at global and national level.

States that adopt the Protocol must legislate to prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and also outlaw the sale of a child's organs for profit, forced labour and illegal adoptions. Penalties for offences should "take into account their grave nature".

The Protocol seeks to tackle transnational offences, such as 'child sex tourism' and offences over the Internet. States must establish jurisdiction to prosecute their nationals for offences committed abroad, and make extradition possible even where no general extradition treaty exists. Offences are to be treated as if they were committed in the place where they occurred, and also where the perpetrator is a citizen. States are urged to pass laws to seize and confiscate goods and assets, to seize profits and to close premises. They should make multilateral, regional and bilateral arrangements:

> for the prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution and punishment of those responsible for acts involving the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and child sex tourism.

Under Article 8, States must protect the rights and interests of child victims, keeping them informed of their rights and allowing their views, needs and concerns to be presented in proceedings. Of particular note for journalists is the provision (Article 8 Section 1 e):

> protecting, as appropriate, the privacy and identity of child victims and taking measures in accordance with national law to avoid the inappropriate dissemination of information that could lead to the identification of child victims.

Legal measures may also forbid publication of the address of a safe refuge for abused children or other information to protect:

> the safety and integrity of those persons and/or organisations involved in the prevention and/or protection and rehabilitation of victims of such offences

The Protocol does not mention the media by name, but Article 9 says that States shall:

> promote awareness in the public at large, including children, through information by all appropriate means, education and training, about the preventive measures and harmful effects of the offences.

Media organisations pursuing a story of child exploitation across borders could find support in Article 10 which says that States shall promote international co-operation to address root causes, such as poverty and underdevelopment, contributing to the vulnerability of children to the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and child sex tourism.

## Opportunities for scrutiny

The UNCRC and the Optional Protocols have some built in measures to monitor what countries are doing and these provide opportunities for journalists to investigate the human rights records relating to children in their own countries. Each country must submit a report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child every ten years, giving comprehensive information on what it has done to implement the UNCRC. In addition, a state must submit a report outlining the extra measures it has taken two years after it adopts either of the Optional Protocols. This provides an opportunity for media to highlight children's rights, to publicise the Convention and the Optional Protocols and to scrutinise the strengths and weaknesses of national action.

## Children – different needs at different ages

Childhood is by definition a time of change and development, and what is appropriate for a child at one age is unsuitable at another. The CRC defines children as young people up to the age of 18, but the point at which someone ceases to be a child and becomes an adult cannot so easily be pinned down.

Children are different and they grow up at different rates. Most countries extend adult rights to young people at a variety of ages, including the right to marry, the right to vote, and the right to join the armed forces.

In the first decade of life most children are totally dependent on adults for food, shelter and personal care. A child below the age of ten cannot, for example, make an informed decision about being interviewed or filmed.

Over the second decade of life the child gradually becomes an adult. Adolescence is a time of rapid change and experimentation. As young people mature physically they can look and behave in many ways as adults, they become more autonomous and expect to take more decisions for themselves. At the same time this can be a period of maximum vulnerability, in a world full of conflicting advice and messages. For many young people this is a time when dreams are destroyed by poverty, by the drudgery of enforced labour, by the consequences of early and unprotected sex or by drugs, alcohol, accidents or violence. For example, according to the World Health Organization, 7,000 young people are infected with HIV every day.

Journalists, like other adults, should respect young people and give them opportunities to express themselves and have their opinions and experiences used and valued. At the same time they should recognise that a young person may not be as confident as he or she looks, and not exploit this vulnerability. Journalists should consider whether even older teenagers properly understand how material are to be used and whether they can give informed consent. Media influences, particularly TV, music shows, fashion and drama are perhaps at their strongest with young people, who often adopt ways of dressing, speaking and behaving that reflect what they see on television or in advertising.

There are often complaints that young people have been encouraged to ‘act up’ for the cameras when a TV crew is investigating crime by young people or simply filming behaviour that may shock their parents. The onus should be on media and journalists to show that they acted ethically and properly in their dealings with young people, properly informed them why they were filming or asking questions, did not exploit the vulnerability of young people and sought and received permission from an appropriate adult, where the child or young person could not give informed consent.

# How are young people abused or exploited?

If the rights in the UNCRC were delivered universally, children would be brought up in a safe and supportive environment and would receive unconditional love and support from at least one adult. They would play with other young people of their age, and enjoy a full education and family life. They would gain opportunities to speak, choose and act for themselves according to their age. They would eventually develop and take their place as adults in the world with the potential to earn their living and, if they wish, to form families of their own.

We do not live in a world that delivers that package to all. Indeed the most widely accepted method of measuring the poverty of a country is by measuring the number of children who die before the age of five.

Children may be abused either through acts of commission (e.g. physical or sexual abuse, child labour), by acts of ommision (e.g. neglect) or through circumstances beyond the control of their families. Children in poor communities are often undernourished and poorly housed, and subject to illnesses which can be avoided or cured. They lack access to clean water and to hygienic sanitation. In conflict areas, as refugees, or because they have to work from an early age children miss out on the education that is supposed to prepare them for life.

Many children miss education and the right to play, because they have to take up a burden of work at much too early an age. Girls are much more likely to miss out on school. These issues too should be investigated by journalists.

Children are abused physically and sexually in all kinds of communities in all kinds of countries, and this is often hidden and denied. The emphasis in international conferences and agreements has been on the commercial exploitation of children. This is both because children are increasingly targeted by this industry, and because this organised and cynical exploitation of children requires international action as well as national action. It is important to remember however when planning or working on stories the degree of hidden abuse that exists in the community, either within families or within institutions. Most sexual abuse occurs within the home by people related to or known to the child. This takes place in all kinds of societies. The commercial exploitation of children targets families living in poverty, either because they live in poor countries or live within poor communities within rich countries. Children may be at extra risk of all kinds of exploitation where poor communities exist within rich countries (as in the United States or in Europe), or where impoverished countries exist side by side with richer neighbours, as for example in the case of Albanian children trafficked to Greece or Italy. Surveys of adults, in rich Western countries or in poorer developing countries, indicate that the degree of child sexual abuse is usually underestimated and under-reported.

## Why does abuse happen?

The primary role in defending the rights of children is the responsibility of adults, parents, extended families, communities, the state. Children are at risk because the adult world has failed in some way. Reporting on the rights of children can rarely be done without reporting on the state of their communities, and the value placed on children. What are the pressures that mean some young people in gun culture countries end up in armed gangs? Why are girls taken out of school more often than boys? What happens to the children of mothers who are sent to prison? What are the pressures on this mother that she is using her child to beg on the streets? Why, if we love our children, do we hit them so often? Do our welfare services help families to protect children, or do they help families to break up? What goes on behind the wall of that institution where children with disabilities are sent? These are not questions only for journalists, but for everyone interested in the rights of children. They are focused not only on the immediate problem, but at discovering root causes of abuse.

For example, in some poor communities girls are handed over straight from childhood into marriage, as young as 13 years old, starting to bear babies before their bodies are fully formed, and putting their own lives and those of their babies at risk. This child—not yet a women—goes to live with the family of the husband who is probably at least twice her age. This child may be sexually abused by her husband and psychologically or physically abused by her in-laws. If her husband is not faithful to her she is at risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. She has no power over the decision to use contraceptives, and no independent means of obtaining them, and so has no control over her fertility or birth spacing. She may not have access to health care. She may come last in the family pecking order for food. Such a girl has almost no control over any of the major aspects of her life. A girl who has undergone this experience will not be in a strong position to defend her own daughter from a too early marriage when her time comes. Researchers or reporters who look for reasons why this girl's own daughter is given in early marriage and conclude it is because her mother does not love her, will have misunderstood the issues.

## Children face multiple risks

What all forms of abuse have in common is that children lack the power to control their lives and the adults in their world either will not or cannot protect them. Children may be powerless because they are physically under threat and afraid, or because protective adults have been taken away from them, or because they or their family unit is economically dependent on an abuser, or because they are under the control of a bureaucracy which is not attentive to the needs of a child. A child who has no power or protection may be vulnerable from a number of different sources, where others exercise power over them. Children who grow up exposed to danger or unprotected by adults, are often at risk from multiple causes, including sometimes from those who are supposed to protect them. The impetus for this guide grew out of a world conference on the sexual exploitation of children, but that is not the only form of exploitation or abuse that journalists should investigate.

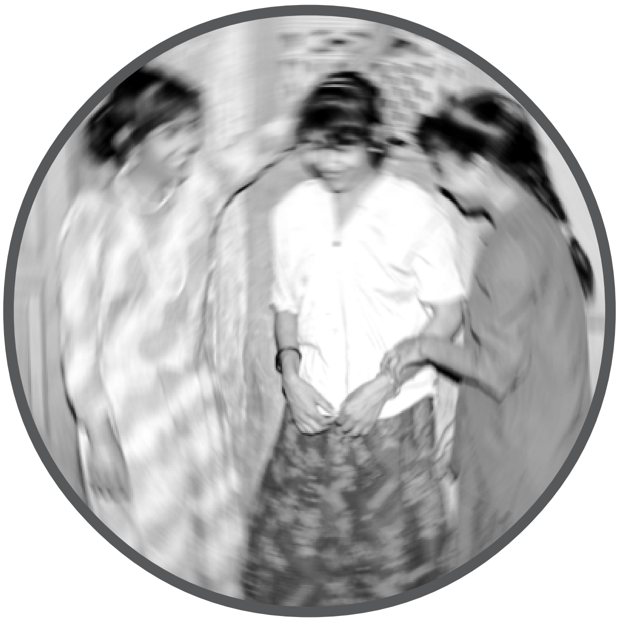
- Children may suffer from neglect, in poor communities because there is no-one to care for the child while parents work to feed the family, or in better-off communities because parents have substituted material possessions for their own time and love.
- Millions of children have to work long hours, either directly to support the family or in commercial exploitation.
- Girls are discriminated against in many ways; from not being given equal rights with their brothers to food, to education or to choose their own futures.
- Children are displaced by war, drought or natural disasters and become refugees. Many are caught up in wars not of their making.
- In most major cities there are homeless children who live by their wits. Street children are vulnerable to every form of exploitation and abuse.
- Children in closed institutions are at high risk of abuse, because there is no-one to see what is happening and to blow the whistle to protect them. Children at extra risk include those in boarding schools, penal institutions, or institutions for children with disabilities.
- Children with disabilities may lose their rights, because they are not valued as children by society. Even where the right to physical care is accepted, the rights to play, education and self-expression may be denied.
- Children who are in a country illegally, or semi-legally, are at extra risk of exploitation through begging or sexual trafficking.

Sexual exploitation is one of a range of threats to vulnerable young people that rarely exists in isolation. Children in all the above categories are at risk of sexual abuse, as an additional oppressive factor in their lives.

For example the conscription of children into the armed forces, or the kidnapping of children to fight in non government armies, is a fundamental abuse of children's human rights, since it explicitly brings an end to childhood and immediately puts the children's lives at immediate risk. However, sexual abuse of boy child soldiers is also very common, while girls are often abducted to act as 'wives', to act as sexual slaves and for domestic labour.

For street children too, sexual assault or sexual exploitation may constitute one of a number of risks. Sexual exploitation may also be connected with commercial child labour, in that the young people are often dependent on adults who are willing to exploit them in exchange for money.

Children have become still more vulnerable since the rise of HIV/AIDS partly because of two persistent myths. One is that sex with a virgin can lead HIV infection to be reversed. This (obviously totally untrue) myth has made young girls vulnerable to rape, and at its most extreme has contributed to the horrifying 'baby rape' cases in South Africa. The other myth is that sex with a young person is less likely to lead to HIV infection. This has made the commercial sex trade pursue young girls ever more ruthlessly, since they can obtain a higher price for them. In fact, according to the World Health Organisation, a young person is physiologically less able to resist infection that a fully grown woman or man. A child who is turned into a prostitute is therefore more likely to become infected with sexually transmitted diseases.



# The media role in reporting on abuse

The media has a crucial role to play in reporting on children's rights and in reporting abuses. In exposing and highlighting abuse, the media can also explore how exploitation of children can be stopped. The media has the task of bringing these abuses to the attention of politicians and the public, and of giving unheard children a voice. It also has an important audience in the children themselves.

This is the high ground that the media often claims, and sometimes occupies. Well-trained and motivated professionals, working to a clear set of aims and ethics can indeed achieve these results. The usual journalistic virtues of having good contacts, investigating carefully, checking facts, using a variety of sources and giving affected people an opportunity to speak all apply. This in turn requires that adequate time and resources are given to investigations and that there is consistent follow up over time, so that instead of creating a single splash the media can create a current of informed opinion that will lead to change.

However, it is easier to create sensation than to investigate background. A quick feature on child prostitution can be put together with few resources and little investigation and may entertain or divert the audience, but at the cost of reinforcing rather than challenging myths and stereotypes.

Features and investigations into children's issues may achieve a variety of aims, in increasing order of effectiveness:

## Generating noise and heat

The article or programme identifies a problem, often a problem about children rather than one that children face. Examples are features on delinquent behaviour, street children or child prostitution, where children are condemned for their behaviour but there is no real attempt to present the situation from the point of view of the child. Such features may be hurriedly put together following a statement by a political leader or a court case. They generate sensation but do little to illuminate. Such coverage is often coupled with calls for 'something to be done'. In this coverage, children are either villains or victims.

Children can be made villains by the media once they are judged to have lost their innocence. In a survey of five Taiwanese daily newspapers[1], a general hostility towards young prostitutes was discovered. Out of 133 news items about arrests for offences involving underage prostitutes, 34% used unsympathetic headlines, and 35% were unsympathetic in content, using language such as *childish; selling herself; deflowered; doesn't study but sells her body* and *slut*. Researcher Chai Hui-Jung concluded that crime reporters do not see the juveniles as minors, and rarely as victims, but judge them by adult standards. The same reporters were tolerant towards their clients — 91% of the headlines and 71% of the reports did not refer at all to the clients who were sexually exploiting the children.

Families in developing countries, people living in poverty, or displaced by war or disaster often lose their individuality and humanity. Children in these communities have even less opportunity to be heard in media coverage. They are seen as helpless sufferers, unable to act, think, or speak for themselves. Whole communities are typecast in this victim role, and children can simply become window dressing. Their pictures are used to illustrate hunger, fear or poverty, but their views about their circumstances and solutions are rarely sought, published or broadcast. The Children's Express, the newspaper produced by children in the UK, pointed out that portraying children as victims "justifies not taking them seriously".[2]

*1. Teenagers' Sexual Crimes and News Analysis, Chai Hui-Jung, August 1995.*
*2. Children's Express, 1998.*

## Generating light

Reporting can go beyond identifying a problem and includes interviews with young people and others that show how the problem arose, what are its consequences and describe the issue from a variety of points of view. This may be through a series of features, articles or programmes over a period of time. Such an approach is more likely to influence public policy by informing policy makers and those in a position to take action.

## Generating understanding

At its best the media can go beyond even what is described above and cast genuinely new light on a situation. This may be the result of a long-term investigation by the media itself, or through the media working with a support group or NGO. In these cases the media may reveal an unsuspected link with a problem, or investigate a new angle, or even bring to light an unseen problem or solution. In such cases the media reaches a degree of excellence that can have a profound effect on readers, listeners and viewers and create a real climate for change.

When media reach this degree of excellence, each programme or series of articles has its own unique features. They play a double role in promoting rights and positive coverage of children and they do not themselves damage those rights in their coverage. Excellence of this sort can only be achieved with time, resources and a determination to put the interests of the children at the centre of programme making or journalism. The focus of reporting is on the rights of children, not the ratings or circulation figures.

# Topical issues of child abuse and exploitation

Many journalists and media organisations would express unease at the thought of an international convention (or an IFJ guide!) telling them what to produce or how to report social issues. However, most would subscribe to the principles expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Media organisation should therefore be able to spell out how they put these principles into practice, and what steps they take to show that they do not abuse the rights of children. This section looks at three topical issues—street children, child labour and sexual exploitation and trafficking in children—and outlines some of the issues. This is not to dictate the story or angle to journalists. Each story can be different, and it may change over time. However, it is as well for journalists and media organisations to be aware of these issues.

## Child labour

Child labour is high on the political agenda, in relation to globalisation and the way in which products for the consumer market in rich Northern countries are often made by young people on tiny wages in developing countries. Trade unions estimate that 250 million children worldwide are exploited for profit or forced to work in order to survive. In fact, most child labour is used in the home or on family farms. Children in poor communities are often seen as an essential part of the family labour force. It is girls in the family who are most likely to miss out on school.

This may not be as exciting as the (true) stories of children in sweat shops making trainers for rich European and American markets, but it also needs telling and is a story that requires context and explanation. Since parents (usually) love their children and children (usually) want to help the family, the pressures on poor families are considerable.

Even where children work outside the home, there are different views on the right approach. The International Labour Organisation and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) both run active campaigns to eradicate child labour. The ICFTU says that generations of children are being deprived of the chance to take their rightful place in the society and economy of the 21st Century, and points out that if recruitment of new child workers ends now, child labour will disappear in a decade.

However, UNICEF points out that some young people resent being ‘rescued’ from a job that brings in a vital income and status.

Clearly there is room for debate. In practice most campaigners focus on work that is clearly exploitation and that prevents children going to school. Many NGOs seek alternatives to the slave work/no work options, and focus on creating space and opportunity for education as the number one issue. The UNICEF view can be found on its web site at www.unicef.org. The trade union view can be found on the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions web site on www.icftu.org (see also Pages 32 & 33).

It is important when reporting on labour to ensure that children are no worse off after the intervention of the media.

- Journalists should, wherever possible, talk to children involved in work.
- Journalists should follow up what happens to the children afterwards.
- Western journalists who write about exploitation in developing countries, might also ask questions closer to home. Many children in rich countries work long hours or in dark early mornings (e.g. to deliver newspapers). What do they think of their wages? How tired are they when they get to school? Are they safe? What do they think that the law should say?

# Unions seek ‘relationship of trust’ with media

The fight against child labour is a priority for the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which developed a specific strategy for working with journalists.

The Confederation links the eradication of child labour to access to education and to the recognition of trade union rights in the workplace. It focuses on two International Labour Organization legal instruments: Convention 138 on the minimum working age and Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

In 2001, the ICFTU launched a new campaign to prompt its affiliated unions to do all they could to ensure that their governments ratify these conventions. The success of this campaign also depends on raising media awareness.

Natacha David, co-ordinator of the ICFTU’s Press Department, says:“We want to give the media tools to help them gain a better understanding of the issues that lie at the heart of the ICFTU’s priorities, including child labour. We seek to forge a relationship of trust with journalists that is based on the credibility of the information so that they instinctively know exactly whom to call. The ICFTU can provide a wealth of information, and our experts are always available for interviews.”

The Press Department provides a limited amount of audio-visual material for TV journalists, and with local contacts for departing journalists. Natacha David says: “It is only by talking with working children and local unions that they can fully appreciate the intricacies of the problem.”

The ICFTU website (www.icftu.org) carries ICFTU’s press releases, along with useful studies or reports. Links are provided to ICFTU departments, international trade secretariats, affiliates and organizations sharing similar aims. ■

## Street children

In most of the world's big cities children live rough, drawn to the city from surrounding rural areas in the belief that they will be able to improve their lives, but then struggling for survival without home, or anyone to care for them. Street children are at risk from violence, disease and exploitation.

They may be targeted by forces of law and order or by criminal gangs. Those who survive become street wise, and may partly rely on crime to keep themselves alive. In many cities there are NGOs which run special programmes to support street children and which may be able to help journalists who are seeking to focus on this issue. An investigation into street children may:

- include extended interviews with young people;
- look at the likely consequences for them in terms of risk of violence, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, ill health, crime and punishment;
- report on problems they face from authorities and from abusers;
- report on sources of help and support;
- report on the problems reported to police and authorities about the young people;
- interview police officers and those with a role in public policy.

The media may also follow young people who have succeeded in coming off the streets, and include their perspective as to how others can be helped to do the same. It may point to some of the underlying causes, and return to this topic over time to see if the situation has improved.

This sustained approach is more powerful because it includes the words and viewpoint of young people, not only of people who see them as a problem. It is rare for the media to ask how the children came to be homeless in the first place. If this seems the better option to children, what does that say about how they were living in their rural communities?

Western journalists might interview homeless children in their own communities, even if they are not labelled as 'street children'. Are there any similarities with 'latchkey children' who may have to look after themselves for several hours each day? Drawing links between children in different parts of the world can help to generalise a problem and may help 'home' audiences to understand the issues better.

## Can you link street children and the global economy ?

The Kuleana Centre for Children's Rights in Mwanza, Tanzania, sees the media and journalists as important allies. Young people make up half of Mwanza's 800,000 population including a large number of street children.

After the centre opened in 1992 street children began to put their views onto wallpapers pasted up around the city. Today the *Mambo Leo* poster magazine is put up in every school.

Kuleana approached editors of regional papers with the challenge: "These are your children: what are you going to do about the situation?" At first coverage of street children was sensational. As the media became more confident, they began to look at underlying causes, to investigate conditions that led rural children to the streets in the first place.

Local radio stations set aside 15-minute slots for street children with prizes for competition winners. Regular articles appeared in national English and Swahili newspapers. The Centre worked with the Tanzania Association of Media Women (TAMWA) to improve coverage about violence against children.

Rakesh Rajani, co-founder and former Executive Director of the Kuleana Centre, says that the media can generate opportunities for the public — including children — to become engaged in child rights as 'thoughtful citizens'.

He also says that journalists should be able to uncover children's rights in economic news. "A small change for the worse in the economic arrangement can reverse decades of social progress achieved through committed social action. A one per cent change in the national budget can mean 100,000 additional children go without access to safe water."[1]

*1. The Politics of Raising Awareness for Child Rights: Lessons from Tanzania. At the Tenth Anniversary Meeting on the UNCRC, Geneva 30 Sep–1 Oct 1999.*

## The commercial sexual exploitation of children

UNICEF estimates that a million children a year are recruited into the commercial sex trade in the developing and developed world. A UNICEF investigation into the sexual exploitation of children—*Profiting from abuse*[1]—shows how poverty and dislocated communities are the highest risk factors.

- The commercial sex trade targets mainly, but not exclusively, girls. Boys are also at risk.
- Refugees are vulnerable to demands for sex by camp officials, border guards and even the police who are supposed to protect them.
- Girls in conflict areas may trade sex to protect their families from armed groups.
- Where very poor and richer countries exist side by side trafficking increases.
- Trafficking children across or within borders is increasing rapidly.

### Sex tourism

The form of abuse that brings together personal and commercial exploitation in its sharpest form, and which violates most obscenely the rights of children, brings paedophiles from the rich countries of the West to prey on children from poorer countries. The higher profile given to this by the media has contributed to attempts to prevent abuse and to catch offenders.

Although this is an important issue for media to investigate, it should be emphasised that this represents a small part of the total sexual abuse of children, or even of the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The World Health Organisation estimates that in Asia the sex industry accounts for 1–14% of gross domestic product in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Japan.[2] Although the sex tourism industry is highly visible

1 *Profiting from Abuse: An investigation into the sexual exploitation of our children. Published by UNICEF, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017 USA, 2001 in English, French and Spanish. ISBN 92-806-3733-9. $7.95. Order online, or download a pdf version at www.unicef.org (click on resources).*

2 *WHO unpublished report Sex Work in Asia, quoted in The Lancet 25 August 2001.*

and lucrative it remains much smaller than the domestic markets. There is a high demand—and therefore a higher price—for children aged 12 to 16 years. The sex industry thrives where men have money to spend. The sex tourist trade has increased because relatively rich tourists from overseas use their money to exploit other societies. However, while tourists from the West fuel this trade, there is a growing domestic market wherever economies are liberalised, leading to increases in prostitution in China and Vietnam.

Journalists have a valuable role in revealing and explaining facts and causes of the increase in prostitution and the tendency for ever younger children to be exploited.

- Journalists should always be clear in their reporting that the young people being exploited are children.
- The language that journalists use is important. The sex industry shrouds its trade in the language of fantasy and desire. Journalists can cut through the advertising and call it for what it is—child abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child trafficking.
- Reveal the trail. How did the children come to be put on sale? How did the tourists know where to find them?
- Who profits? Not just the pimps and brothels, but the 'respectable' clubs who attract custom because they allow children to be sold on their premises, the media outlets who advertise and act as go-betweens.
- The health risks. In some countries almost half of sex workers are infected with HIV. Children are more likely to succumb to sexually transmitted diseases, because their immune systems are not mature. Journalists can counter the myth that says that younger children are 'safer'.
- Journalists can describe the excellent work that is done in some countries by organisations working with sex workers to try to protect them from HIV and other life threatening sexually transmitted infections.
- Where the story does involve the sex tourism trade, media from different countries can form a partnership to investigate from both ends of the market and agree to publish at the same time. Such investigations might include the role of the Internet and what can be done to prevent this being a medium for fuelling the trade in children.

One of the most important things that journalists can do is to talk to the children who are being abused, and to tell their story. Interviews should only take place under conditions where the children are safe, both from the risk of further exploitation and from reprisals. Journalists can work with an NGO which is trusted by the children and has a record of support. Journalists should never conduct such interviews alone, and should take special measures to ensure that children do not feel pressured or a 'customer' of the media. It is not enough for the journalist to be well-intentioned—the children must be seen to be safe. An adult who has a protective role should be present. However, it is especially important to be sure that nobody present could be reporting back to anyone connected with the sex trade.

Children in these circumstances may be fearful of talking. Reprisals may not only be against the child, but against their family 'back home'. Journalists should be wary of making promises to protect people that they cannot keep. Offering anonymity is one form of protection. Media professionals must then take special measure to ensure that material is not seized or stolen and that anything published will continue to protect the identity of the child even under repeated scrutiny (for example of a video tape).

If the outcome of such interviews is for the public to see this trade for what it is and to identify child abuse more clearly, then the media will have done its job well. However, sensational reporting that glamorises the sex industry or that implies that children freely enter into these sexual encounters, adds to abuse and exploitation.

Sex tourism is an issue that demands investigation, and requires time, commitment, resources and good contacts. However, there is a danger that in focusing on one dramatic aspect of child sexual abuse that the 'routine' sexual abuse of children will escape detection and attention. For example, the international publicity about 'baby rape' cases in South Africa in 2001/2002 is hardly surprising given the awful details of the cases. However, the cumulative effect of dramatic and horrific court cases may be that the public gains a false idea of the most common forms of sexual abuse.

The media should also report on common forms of abuse and remind the public about the relative risks of a child being abused (or murdered) by a stranger, against the risk of being abused (or murdered) by someone in or known to the family. Journalists also have an opportunity to shatter myths that make children especially vulnerable—notably that HIV infection can be reversed or AIDS cured through sex with a virgin, or that young prostitutes are less likely to be infected with sexually transmitted diseases.

Journalists can open up a debate about the legal framework around the sex industry. Would the legalisation of prostitution in general make it easier to protect women in the sex industry and to target legislation on protecting children? Are there calls for a 'clampdown' on the sex industry that target the women, girls and boys who are working as prostitutes?

The Second World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Yokohama, Japan, in December 2001, said that, while the commercial exploitation of children in all forms should be a criminal offence, child victims should not be criminalised or penalised. This would mean for example that child prostitutes should be rehabilitated not prosecuted. This position has been strongly supported by Mary Robinson[1], UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who told the Committee on the Rights of the Child, meeting in Geneva: "Children who become victims of such abuses should never be considered to be the perpetrators of these offences under domestic law."

Finally, journalists who report on these issues ought to be aware of the main international efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of children.

- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography *(see pages 17 and 18)* came into force on 18 January 2002, as the culmination of a series of international agreements and measures to try to tackle the trade in children and all forms of organised and commercial abuse.
- The first World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was held in Stockholm in 1996. Government organisations and NGOs agreed to work together on a global basis.
- An International Conference on Combating Child Pornography on the Internet, in Vienna in 1999, called for the worldwide criminalisation of the production, distribution, exportation, transmission, importation, intentional possession and advertising of child pornography. It called for co-operation between Governments and the Internet industry.

[1] *Opening statement by Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at the 29th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, January 14 2002.*

- In 1999, the International Labour Organisation adopted Convention No. 182 on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, calling on states to take measures to eliminate, inter alia, the trafficking of children for sexual purposes or forced recruitment of children into armed conflict. This came into force in November 2000.

In the UK in 2000-2001, *The News of the World* led a campaign for men who appeared on the sex abusers register to be publicly named. As part of its campaign—a response to the murder of an eight-year-old schoolgirl—the newspaper named some of the men each week. The campaign divided public opinion. Some families were angry that they had not been informed that they were living close to known paedophiles. But some police and social workers said that naming people on the register caused them to 'go underground' so they could no longer be monitored. The campaign also led to some of the wrong people being targeted as vigilantes hurled stones at the homes of suspected child sex offenders.

NUWHRAIN, a trade union representing hotel workers in the Philippines, is one of many bodies which has joined the fight against sexual exploitation of children. "Sexual exploitation of children for commercial reasons is a complex problem which requires a multilateral approach", says Daniel Edralin, General Secretary of NUWHRAIN.

One of the most striking aspects of NUWHRAIN's work against sexual exploitation of children has been the inclusion of the issue in its collective bargaining with hotel managers. Where the latter accept the union's demands, hotel employees are obliged to notify to the hotel any requests from customers connected to child prostitution. The model agreement provides protection for workers who refuse to help customers find child prostitutes.

# Reporting on sexual exploitation of children — a West African perspective

### by **Kabral Blay-Amihere**

West African countries face a dilemma as they make a pitch for a share of the multi-billion dollar tourist industry. With abundant natural resources in tourism, ecosystems, wildlife, beautiful beaches, friendly people and great hospitality, some countries in the sub-region are becoming major attractions for tourists from North America and Europe.

However, government officials, the press and the general public are beginning to raise concerns about the negative side of tourism. Such concerns range from ideological and cultural fears about tourism undermining national cultures to pressing concerns about health and the spectre of AIDS/HIV.

As the tourist industry grows in West Africa, so does paedophilia — sexual exploitation of children. This brings a problem for the press of West Africa. How does the press successfully cover a taboo subject in an area that rarely throws the searchlight on sex. The media of La Cote D' Ivoire a few years ago faced this problem when a child alleged that a highly-placed Minister of State and his friends had repeatedly abused him sexually. The story did not receive the coverage that a story of this nature should have received.

The West African Journalists Association, the umbrella association for journalists associations in the sub-region, made a firm commitment in The Gambia in June 1999 to promote and defend child rights. The Banjul Declaration said that child rights should be a core issue for journalists in the sub-region and pledged its commitment to work with governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The Gambia itself is not bereft of the negative side of tourism, including the sexual exploitation of children. A disturbing aspect is the shroud of secrecy and culture of silence, which can only be broken by the press. Some journalists have started reporting on tourism and sexual exploitation of children.

A rare headline in the *Ghana Dispatch*, reported *British child sex convict arrested in Ghana*. The Briton who admitted a conviction in the United Kingdom for indecent assault on a 14-year old boy, was in Ghana, said to be abusing a 15-year-old boy. The newly created Women and Juvenile Unit of the Ghana Police rescued the boy from the paedophile. The case was not without problems, since the family of the victim saw the contact between the boy and the Briton as a blessing. The Briton had purchased a vehicle for the boy and his family, which was providing a regular source of income. For this benefit, the family members were prepared to stop the Ghana Police from arresting the Briton and terminating the relationship.

This family is not alone in its attitude to the sexual exploitation of children as a source of bread for poor families. Investigations show that a number of kids, mainly boys are making money by selling their bodies to tourists.

Given the economic benefits that some families derive from the illegal relationship between their children—girls and boys—and the sex trade, journalists who make it their business to report on such matters certainly face some dangers.

Ben Ephson, editor of the *Dispatch* in Ghana says that journalists who attempt to cover such stories face the wrath of those who benefit from the child sex trade. Another reporter, Edwin Arthur, of *The Independent*, was threatened with physical harm when he exposed a sex network on the Internet.

There are other problems in a culture where there are many taboos about sex. Whilst homosexuality is not alien to Africa, it is almost a social taboo for the subject to be brought up at any meeting. A journalist with a story involving a child and an adult should not expect to find people freely talking about the issue.

Victims and families do not readily talk about abuse. Families would rather leave things to God or destiny. There are many children who refuse to reveal the harm done to them for fear of social shame or the repercussions of having a curse placed upon them. With century-old legislation that commits officialdom to secrecy, many public servants maintain a disturbing silence on cases of sexual exploitation and other forms of abuses.

Since 1998, the West African Journalists Association, working within the framework of the IFJ Recife Conference on Child Rights and The Media, has been collaborating with UNICEF to improve coverage of child rights. Together WAJA and UNICEF highlighted various aspects of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the issue of Child Trafficking, the exploitation of children, particularly the girl child, as targets of domestic labour and sexual exploitation.

Another positive development has been the emergence of a number of non-governmental organisations, which deal with child rights. Journalists have formed clubs for the protection of child rights whilst governments create national commissions.

The way forward is through a conscious policy to mobilise organisations and journalists' associations to do more work to highlight the growing phenomenon of sexual exploitation of children in tourism. The intent must be to create an information explosion on child rights. Information from the West on known paedophiles in Europe should be made available to enable journalists in West Africa to have background on paedophiles who transfer their evil deeds to other parts of the world.

It is clear that not many publications in the region are doing enough at the newsroom level.The IFJ and the European Commission have launched the Lorenzo Natalie Prize for Human Rights Reporting. Since the coverage of child rights falls within this area, it is hoped that journalists in the region would be encouraged to enter this competition and focus on children.

The Banjul Declaration on Child Rights and The Media called on journalists in the region to collaborate with relevant national and international agencies and NGOs on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Articles 19 and 34 of the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child rewritten for children by Alexander Nurnberg spell out a mandate that the media cannot ignore when it comes to sexual exploitation of children.

The revised versions read as follows:

> Article 19: No one should hurt (the child) you in anyway. Adults should make sure that (the child) you are protected from abuse, violence and neglect. Even parents have no right to hurt (the child) you.
>
> Article 34: (The Child) you have the right to be protected from sexual abuse. That means nobody can do anything to (the child's body) your body that the (child) you do not want them to do to, such as touching you or taking pictures of you or making you say things that you do not want to say.

These are fundamental rights that every child born and living everywhere in the world must be allowed to enjoy.

# Awareness training for media professionals

**by Charlotte Barry & Mike Jempson**

**Journalist trainer** **Director PressWise Trust**

If investigative journalism is to make a difference it has to go beyond superficial stories that rely on sensational styles of presentation and portray children as innocent, helpless victims. For example, there are many journalistic angles to the sexual exploitation of children by 'tourists':

- Economic circumstances which underpin the trade in children as sexual objects – including poor wages and lack of organisation among hotel staff who act as pimps.
- Local and international legal sanctions to prosecute abusers; the sexual proclivities of those who abuse children.
- Criminal networks through which the trade is conducted.
- Stories of the children themselves, including rescue and recovery programmes for those who survive abuse.

If media professionals are to report with appropriate sensitivity, they also need to appreciate children's rights and the consequences of their own output. Journalists need to become familiar with the legal, social and economic circumstances in which abuse flourishes. They need to consider what protective measures may be necessary both for their informants and themselves.

## What kind of training ?

Awareness training targeted at working journalists can help them to recognise that children's rights are important and to reflect upon the special responsibilities they carry when researching, writing and producing children's stories. It can give them the confidence to address common newsroom dilemmas.

The training approach described here does not impose standards or ready-made solutions. It is designed by working journalists to inspire colleagues to develop practical strategies for dealing with complex issues, and establish their own 'codes of conduct' to inform coverage of stories about the abuse of children.

If such training is to be effective, it must assist media professionals to strike an appropriate balance between the protection of children's rights and journalistic independence and freedom of expression.

On the most basic vocational or in-service training courses, ethical issues are addressed rarely and may only arise tangentially. Children's rights are even less likely to feature, except insofar as they are reflected in the law and regulations governing reporting of children in the care of public authorities or involved in court cases.

PressWise Trust has carried out research and run training courses for journalists on children's rights and the media in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Latin America, in conjunction with the International Federation of Journalists and UNICEF.

The Trust has concluded that awareness training leads to higher ethical standards. It encourages media professionals to rethink the way they handle stories involving children. They begin to approach children with more sensitivity, appreciating the value of listening to young people and providing space for their views and opinions. One result of training is that journalists are better able to achieve a portrayal of children that avoids stereotyping and condescension.

Training can also assist in resolving conflicting pressures faced by journalists covering stories about abused children, and help journalists to report effectively while still respecting young people's dignity.

## What type of trainers?

It is crucial to use journalism trainers or working journalists who have extensive practical experience of covering stories about children at risk, to devise the content and format of training modules and to lead the training sessions. Experienced, working journalists bring authority and credibility to awareness training which might otherwise be dismissed by other media professionals. Journalists are used to working under pressure. They understand and appreciate the legal, political, professional and commercial constraints that make it hard to balance sensitive and responsible reporting with the demands of strict deadlines and a competitive working environment. Their involvement is an especially helpful way of engaging mid-career colleagues in the issue of children's rights.

## What training style

Media professionals are naturally sceptical, so awareness training cannot be didactic. It should try to achieve a process of exploration so that professionals can challenge their own assumptions and conventional production techniques through debate and discussion.

Trainers need to be 'skills sharers' who facilitate rather than lecture. Their strategy should be to encourage the free exchange of information and experiences, with an emphasis on a co-operative competitive approach to problem solving. They also need to be open-minded and open to challenge themselves, and prepared to acknowledge the difficulties and dilemmas they have themselves faced when covering stories about children.

This approach works most effectively when participation is limited to no more than 20 people, split into four or five smaller working groups for practical exercises. Where possible the setting should reflect workplace conditions, and avoid a classroom or boardroom layout.

## Course structure

Participants should be available for at least one very full day. Two days is better. A long weekend away from the workplace is ideal, or, failing that, an opportunity to come together on two separate days, without a long intervening time gap.

## Course content

It is helpful to begin with an introductory session to encourage participation, and get journalists to identify the basic needs of children and the extent to which they differ from those of adults. An oral quiz about the status of children in society will allow journalists to test and share their knowledge and value base. It will also provide opportunities to discuss the role of the media in highlighting shortcomings, ambiguities and contradictions in the way that public authorities respond to their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Where appropriate, journalists can talk about their own children and their own role as parents in defending their rights. What role would they like the media to play, and what do they fear about the media role?

Topical examples of good and bad practice from the print and broadcast media can be displayed alongside existing professional codes of conduct and guidelines, media regulations and the IFJ Guidelines published in this booklet.

Discussion should focus on the legal and ethical implications of media portrayals of children. How far can voluntary codes and guidelines work under professional working conditions? How effective can they be in a) promoting child rights and b) minimising the harm done to vulnerable young people? In the context of children's rights and 'sex tourism' legal, ethical and practical issues include:

- identification,
- permission to photograph or film,
- privacy,
- the public interest,
- confidentiality and protection of sources,
- undercover investigation methods,
- the media's relationship with law enforcement agencies,
- access to official sources,
- use of official and non-official sources - including the Internet.

Participants can be invited to share examples of good practice that tell children's stories accurately, fairly and non-sensationally but still have market appeal. Trainers can encourage discussion of gender and cultural issues as they relate to children, and of ways to challenge myths and stereotypes surrounding media portrayal of children, particularly those from minority groups.

Participants can divide into working groups for practical 'case studies' exercises that reflect everyday working conditions. Role-play can re-enact real-life 'newsroom dilemmas', reworking some existing media stories. Groups should be prepared to defend or reconsider their deliberations in front of the full group. The following topics are among those that lend themselves to this approach:

- Images of children - how do we take and use striking images of children while at the same time respecting their human dignity?
- Interviewing children – what special skills are needed to collect reliable information from vulnerable children about their feelings and experiences without abusing their trust or putting them at risk?
- HIV/AIDS – where do the myths come from, and how can media professionals assist children to appreciate the facts?
- Stereotypes – to what extent does the media perpetuate gender and cultural stereotypes about children, particularly in developing countries? What sort of coverage would challenge these attitudes?
- Alternative sources – how can we build reliable relationships of mutual trust with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) ?

One important aspect of awareness training is to focus on the voice of children. Time should be devoted to discussing how media professionals can give children the chance to speak about their lives and to express their own views freely. Particular attention should be paid to techniques for interviewing children. Participants could be encouraged to share their experiences and draw up their own recommendations for successful engagement with young people. If it is possible to involve a relevant NGO in the training day, it might be possible for journalists to 'interview' children working with the NGO, so long as the children are fully aware that this is training, and that confidentiality is respected once the course is over. Children who have been interviewed can give feedback on what they did and did not like being asked, and of the kinds of things that they like and dislike about media coverage.

Face-to-face interviews with vulnerable children can raise the issue of identification and confidentiality, so journalists need to think of compelling alternative ways of telling a child's personal story and representing them visually. Participants can devise practical ways of helping young people to participate in the media, for instance through children's magazines, consumer programmes or radio workshops and web-sites.

Finally the training course should allow time for participants to devise and evaluate their own practical strategies for dealing with children's issues in the future.

## Who can benefit from this training?

Ethical training should be part of basic vocational training as well as mid-career, in-service training. Pressure for such training needs to come from those working within the industry—especially though their unions and professional associations—rather than just from agencies working with children. Colleges and universities preparing would-be journalists and programme makers for the job market need to attach more importance to ethical matters and to allocate more time and attention to analysing and debating issues such as coverage of children and their rights.

Media organisations can be persuaded to support short, work-based awareness training if it is seen to foster good journalism, well-informed newsroom debate, and a better relationship with younger readers, viewers and listeners. Mid-career, in-service training strategies should not be aimed solely at news and current affairs journalists and broadcasters. Media executives, programme directors, travel writers, fashion editors and sports reporters all need alerting to the importance of treating children's issues more sensitively. Specialist courses on the use of children's images should be run for photographers, camera operators and picture editors.

## Working with agencies and NGOs

Journalists are sceptical of public relations approaches which try to 'sell' story ideas and angles, even when these come from NGOs rather than commercial companies. An awareness of children's rights will help media professionals to assess the validity of campaigns and to work more effectively with NGOs. It will help them to appreciate the anxieties that children's organisations and other agencies have about the media and journalists. Training strategies will assist media professionals to enter into dialogue with NGOs and other agencies. When the best interests of the children come first, it is possible to build trusting (but not uncritical) alliances which do not compromise media independence.

If journalists are to play their part in the process of eradicating commercial sexual exploitation of children, they need the factual information and real-life stories that agencies provide. Those who work with children need to be sure that they can trust their media contacts not to put children at risk.

Media professionals are ideally placed to help non-media bodies to understand how the industry operates. They can advise them on how to compile and present background information—facts, quotes and contacts—to enable different media to engage their different audiences.

One way to develop these relationships is to involve relevant NGOs in training courses. This will give each party a deeper insight into the way that the other works, and a deeper understanding of the constraints under which each works.

NGOs can play an invaluable role in encouraging children's participation in the media. Through their relationships with media professionals they can develop projects that assist children to present their own stories and perspectives—through children's radio or animation workshops, the production of newsletters or websites. These can become stories in themselves, as well as vehicles through which children present their lives.

*The PressWise Trust is a UK-based media ethics charity that works to:*

- *promote high standards of journalism,*
- *provide assistance to those with complaints about inaccurate, intrusive or sensational coverage in UK newspapers, magazines and radio or television programmes,*
- *encourage understanding about how the mass media and media regulators operate,*
- *conduct research into all aspects of media law, regulation, policy and practice.*

*Examples of training modules produced by The PressWise Trust, are available free of charge in English, Czech, French and Spanish on www.presswise.org.uk*

# Interviewing photographing and filming children

The guidelines that accompany this booklet are not designed to, and will not, resolve ethical questions for journalists. As already emphasised, they provide a framework for media professionals to work through difficult issues. This section is designed to address some of the practical issues that journalists have to consider.

## Each child is an individual human being

Media sometimes contribute to myths that damage the public perception by showing children only as sinners or victims. In 1995, Dr Magda Michielsens of the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands analysed the portrayal of victims in the news output of seven TV channels across Europe[1]. She concluded that victims generally are given low status, and those from Africa are much less likely to be identified as individuals and offered the chance to speak, than those from Europe. In words and pictures children can often become cyphers, representing youth, hope, joy, misery or despair, but not properly existing as individual people in their own right. Each child is of course an individual human being and, while the image of

[1] *Michielsens Magda, and Ten Boom Annemarie; The Portrayal of Victims on Television; presented at the European Broadcasting Union/European Commission conference* Reflecting Diversity, *in May 1995.*

a girl or boy may be thought representative of a generation, the person does not in fact 'stand for' anything else, but is a unique person with full human rights. The same principles should apply when interviewing children as when interviewing adults, even if the principles sometimes have to be applied in different ways. The first requirement is that each child should be treated with respect and as an individual. This poses complex issues for reporters, and even more complex issues for photographers and those who are filming children.

## Gaining consent to photograph or interview

Some people who work in the field of children's rights would argue that children should never be photographed without their specific consent. If strictly applied, this would mean that children in spontaneous groups could seldom be filmed or photographed, and that film or still photography of refugees, or street children or even children at play, would be rarely seen, since these pictures are often taken at a distance, and without even meeting the child. It is hard to see how making children disappear from our TV screens or newspapers advances their rights.

One of the photographs credited with changing Western opinion over the Vietnam war is the famous picture by Nick Ut of 9-year-old Kim Phuc, running up the road outside the village of Trang Bang, naked and crying. The photograph, taken in 1972, showed the horror of war through the image of a child. Kim Phuc was not asked for her permission, and nor did a social worker give consent.

One of the main functions of a journalist (whether working with a laptop or a camera) is to be curious about other people's business, to observe and record and to tell others what happened. When events are moving quickly, journalists have to act quickly and without asking for leave. Kim Phuc's rights were undoubtedly infringed when this photograph was taken, but they had been far more profoundly abused when napalm was dropped on her village. Most people would conclude that there was a strong public interest in this picture being taken and shown. One could say that a lesser intrusion was justified to show a greater abuse. We might feel differently if Kim had been crying because she had argued with her brother, and the picture had been taken to illustrate a travel feature, as pictures of this sort often are. We might feel differently about the use of a naked child's photo in a travel spread if the child was laughing and playing, oblivious that the picture was being taken. Would the issues have been different if Kim had been an adult, not a child?

Photographers who take pictures in one country for use in another often feel that the pictures are not intrusive because they will not be seen by anyone who knows or can identify the child. Not every picture becomes famous and not everyone grows up as Kim did to become a UNESCO Ambassador invited to reflect on the merits or otherwise of her own image being used to epitomise a brutal war and then later, used again to illustrate a seminal moment in the history of photo-journalism.

Photographs (films) tend to tell two stories — one about the subject of the photo (film) in front of the lens, and the other about the photographer (camera operator), behind the lens. This second story is harder to make out. Does an image have a morality? The answer is yes, but the ethics of a picture vary, not only with what is in the picture, but with how it was taken, by whom and why, and according to how it is used, by whom and why. At the extreme, a picture of a child taken 'innocently' may be later used by a paedophile for sexual gratification. But there is also less clear cut potential for abuse. A photograph taken for a feature and properly used, may later be pulled out of the picture library and used as a dressing picture on a story about children in difficult circumstances. The publication and the photographer probably have no idea what has happened to that child in the meantime, and what the (now older) child feels about this use of their picture. Consent can have a timescale and lapse after an interval of time.

There has long been a tension between photographers and those who are photographed, over who 'owns' the right to an image. Such tensions rise to the surface on all kinds of occasions, and today are often raised by celebrities, who argue that they own their own image, and everyone else should have pay to reproduce it. Photographers rightly resist this and defend their rights. Photographers, however, should give children, some extra consideration. They have done nothing to deserve the attention of intrusive or insensitive paparazzi style behaviour.

There are some principles that can be applied to interviewing children, and also (albeit with less clarity) to photographing or filming children. The first is that children have a right to privacy, and that this right should only be overridden where it is in a child's own interests or in the public interest, and when permission has been given. One might argue that a picture taken in the street of a group of children laughing on their way to school does not infringe their rights because it does not expose them to harm or ridicule, and was taken in a public place. Others might question why was it necessary to take a picture in this way. Most would agree that it would be absolutely wrong to take a picture over a school wall of children in the playground, without the knowledge of children, parents or staff. This is not a public place, and children are entitled to privacy.

A journalist who interviews a child should be sure that the child understands that what he or she writes will be published or broadcast. Clearly the child should consent to this process, and depending on the age of the child, so should a responsible adult. The interview should never normally take place without another adult being present. The adult would normally be a parent, but might be someone else who was acting in the place of a parent, such as a teacher, or someone working for a children's agency. Older children can speak for themselves, but there is a danger that even young people in their teens may be misled or make a snap decision they later regret. Journalists should consider whether even older teenagers properly understand how material is to be used and whether they can give informed consent. Indeed the older the child, the more necessary it is to explain the use of material fully and let them make a decision.

With younger children, permission must always be sought from a responsible adult, and even if the journalist believes that a relevant adult has made a poor decision or one designed to protect their own interests, the decision should be respected, except where there is a clear and strong public interest to do otherwise. The writer of this section interviewed a young teenager with a learning disability about a sporting success she wished to dedicate to the memory of her mother, who had recently died. The interview took place with the permission of a grandparent, but the child had a local authority foster parent who had a personal distrust of the media and who withdrew permission. My own view (shared by the grand parents) was that the child would gain self-esteem from seeing her photograph with her winners' medals and reading about herself in the newspaper. However, the piece was spiked because the foster parent was the legally responsible adult. Had the child being alleging abuse or ill treatment or revealing a scandal, the decision would have been different. In this case there was no public interest, and we could not presume to know the child's best interests.

In 2001, the British Press Complaints Commission upheld a complaint against the London Evening Standard after a reporter spent a week pretending to be a classroom assistant, to write an 'exposé' about a school. The PCC is widely regarded as a toothless tiger which too often fails to hold print media to account, but on this occasion it upheld 'serious breaches' of the Code of Practice on two grounds. One was that the reporter used subterfuge to gain access to the school. The other was that his reporting had accidentally made it possible for people who knew the school to identify a child who had been subjected to a sexual assault. The PCC rejected a defence that the report was in the public interest, because the newspaper had picked the school more or less at random and was not investigating any particular concerns. Lying to the children (essential to carry out the assignment) was a factor that weighed heavily with the PCC.

The issue of seeking permission is often more clear cut for reporters than for photographers. It is therefore important for media professionals and media organisations to discuss these issues in advance and decide on guidelines and how issues will be resolved. The worst decisions are usually made when deadlines are tight, and a news editor or producer is under pressure to produce results. Ethics are then inconvenient and someone who has not been trained or prepared for these decisions will simply try to impose it as a 'management decision'. One not very scientific but useful guide for the photographer and camera operator is that if what they are doing feels shabby, it is almost certainly wrong.

## Naming or not naming

One of the most difficult ethical issues is whether to name children or show their faces in photographs or on film. The IFJ Guidelines say that media professionals should:

> guard against visually or otherwise identifying children unless it is demonstrably in the public interest; (Clause 5)

How are we to interpret this clause?

Interestingly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child includes one right that has not yet been mentioned. Article 7 says:

> The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

While Article 8 reiterates that the state must:

> undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

Those who framed the convention may not have the media in mind, but it is significant that one of the fundamental rights of a child is the right to a name. Journalists should not lightly dispose of this right where there is no harm. If a child is featured in a story that reflects well on the child and where the child is not a victim, and where coverage has the agreement of the child and parents, and where it does not put the child at risk, there is a positive argument for respecting the identity of the child and using his or her name. Worries over identification are often associated with negative media coverage— which does not cover children's issues except when some kind of problem is involved. The IFJ clause is drafted to put the onus on the media to show that where they name a child they can justify it in the public interest, rather than it being the responsibility of the family or of media critics to show that harm was done to the child.

There are many cases, where a child is involved in a legal case or is a ward of the local authority, where it is illegal to name the child in relation to proceedings or the issue that led to proceedings. Such laws vary between countries, but journalists in any event should never name a child who is the victim of a sexual assault or a rape. All journalists should be very familiar with the legislation protecting disclosure in the country where they are working.

When working on sexual abuse stories, the media must work within the spirit of two key parts of The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The first urges states to protect:

> the privacy and identity of child victims …to avoid the inappropriate dissemination of information that could lead to the identification of child victims.

The second key principle tells states to:

> promote awareness in the public at large, including children, through information by all appropriate means, education and training, about the preventive measures and harmful effects of the offences,

which means that the media has to do its job effectively.

Between the two extremes of a good news story and reporting on sexual abuse lies a variety of circumstances and stories which demand individual decisions about whether a child should be named.

The reason why media like to show people's faces and give their names is that what journalists do is about real life and real people, and that real people give news coverage humanity. There is a danger that, if names are routinely changed, then attachment to the individual and their reality is weakened. Then the temptation arises to maybe change one or two other facts to 'improve' the story, since after all it is now about a fictitious person. One advantage of using real names and faces, is that a journalist can be held accountable for what he or she produces. By giving particular information about a particular child, the media emphasises that the individual child is valued in the story and is not being used as a cypher.

The first duty of the media is to avoid inflicting further harm on a child, and in many cases further harm will be brought by publicity which identifies a child and brings him or her to public attention. However, in considering the public interest and the rights of the child to privacy, media professionals should take into account the attachment that a child has to its own name. If a child's name is automatically changed, regardless of the context, that also dehumanises a child, who is entitled to look at the final piece and wonder why that journalist who seemed so nice has got his or her name wrong. Often, it is sufficient just to use one name, and in an era of rising concern about paedophiles it would clearly be irresponsible of the media to identify the address of a child under any circumstances.

Clearly this approach needs to be balanced against the occasions where there will be harm to the child. The journalist should not need to be reminded of this. A media professional should point out to a young person, even an older teenager, that the pleasure of seeing themselves on television or their picture in the paper, needs to be balanced against what they may think a year later, if the publicity has damaged their prospects in some way.

## Interviewing children

We have already established that abuse is based on an imbalance of power, and in an interview the media professional has far more power than the child. How can an interview be carried out effectively while still respecting the rights of a child?

- Interviews with children should, except in exceptional circumstances, always take place with someone acting in the best interests of the child on hand, to protect the child and to call a halt if necessary.
- The interviewer should sit or stand at the same height as the child and not 'talk down', either literally or metaphorically.
- In the case of radio or television interviews it is essential that the child is relaxed and not distracted or overawed by the camera or technology. This may mean that camera crews have to spend time around children until they stop focusing on the cameras and lights.
- Questions should be directed to the child, not to the adult, and the adult should observe and not intervene—otherwise you get the adult's story, rather than that of the child.
- An interviewer should adopt a calm, friendly and neutral voice and not react with shock or amazement.
- Questions should be clear and straightforward, and should not lead the child. At first ask open questions (so the child is not pressured to respond in any particular way) and then use closed questions to narrow down on facts that you have to check.
- Questions can be repeated in a different form to cross-check that the child has understood and has expressed himself or herself clearly.
- It is better to ask factual questions about what someone said and did, than to ask about how they felt. A child will often reveal, when he or she is comfortable with the interview, how he or she felt, but may be pressured by direct questioning about feelings.
- Wherever possible corroboration should be sought (good practice for all kinds of interviews).
- If interviewing through a translator, care should be taken that the interpreter translates exactly what the child says and does not mediate or summarise answers.

Journalists are usually advised to establish eye contact when interviewing. This is not always good practice with a child, particularly one who is nervous or upset. When interviewing children who had been abducted by a rebel army and were describing horrifying mistreatment, I was struck by how often they would look into the middle distance, and talk as if to an inner self.

One reason why abuse of children has been under-estimated, is that the word of an adult was accepted against the word of a child. In fact, children are probably less likely to lie than adults, and experienced court systems now recognise that with the right support children make excellent and generally honest witnesses. They also make excellent, direct and open interviewees.

Although generally truthful, children who have been in trouble (connected with crime or sexual exploitation) do sometimes paint themselves as a passive observer of events happening around them. It may be necessary to gently ask particular questions about their own role. "Where were you when this was happening? What were doing at that moment?" It is worth reminding a child that you are not a police officer and are not judging them, but you also have a duty not to trap a child to incriminate himself or herself. If a child appears to contradict himself or herself, be patient, and go back over the ground, asking the questions in a different way. Don't push if the child is reluctant to answer. Move on. Limit the length of the interview and be guided by the adult who is there on behalf of the child.

## Conclusion

Those looking for a check list to work from may find this section annoyingly imprecise. The overall duty of a journalist or other media professional doing this kind of work is to act in the best interests of the child and of children and to try to deal with ethical issues with clarity and honesty. This will not guarantee that they make no mistakes, but would dramatically improve the quality of media coverage of children's issues.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is based on the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. Journalists should extend those qualities to children. As the preamble to the IFJ guidelines says: “Informed, sensitive and professional journalism is a key element in any media strategy for improving the quality of reporting concerning human rights and society. The daily challenge to journalists and media organisations is particularly felt in coverage of children and their rights.”

The primary responsibility to ensure that young people are not harmed or exploited by media coverage lies with media organisations. They should put into place clear protocols for deciding when it is appropriate to film or interview young people, whether and how permission needs to be sought and how well this will be explained to the young people themselves. In addition, media organisations should have clear methods for discussing and resolving difficult cases. These procedures must go beyond naming a responsible person to take decisions. They must outline a method of holding a professional discussion, even (especially) when deadlines are tight.

There is not only a collective responsibility on an organisation. Each individual journalist and media professional also has an individual responsibility to act ethically, even if he or she are under pressure to bring back results. ‘Following orders’ cannot be used as excuse for inflicting harm on children. Journalists and media professionals have their own obligation to follow their own codes of conduct and to work according to their consciences, even if that means falling out with managers.

## Refuse to accept no-go areas for standards

This booklet has been written mainly with media professionals connected to news and current affairs in mind. But it applies with equal force to those working in sport, fashion or entertainment. There should not be ‘no go’ areas for standards. Many media outlets seem to adopt a split personality—news and features departments which work to standards, and entertainment sections that push the boundaries in every direction.

For the popular music industry, international TV channels like MTV, where pop videos make up a large proportion of output, are a very significant means of reaching young people and children — even those too young to attend concerts or buy CDs. Women often appear as childlike, asexual yet provocative, dangerous, yet also victimised. In an analysis of

166 videos broadcast by MTV, WTBS and NBC in 1984, Barry Sherman and Joseph Dominick drew attention to the portrayal of young women as either aggressors or victims[1]. The media are too often oriented towards 'markets and power' rather than by young people themselves. In television, children have no power. They "take on the characteristics of a social minority with less than their share of attention, values, and resources, and consequently diminished life chances."

The question of freedom of expression is relevant in particular to children. What is the distinction, for instance, between pornography, and the justifiable portrayal of 'childhood sexuality' in the arts and cinema? It has been argued[2] that the US Supreme Court, in its anxiety to protect children, has thrown out 'important speech-protective features of the law', including 'the traditional protection afforded to artistic expression'.

But American lawyer Andrew Vachss, a specialist in child abuse cases, believes that the controversy over art is a red herring thrown up by the paedophile community: The issue is not "what is art?" but "what is victimisation?" I can no more accept a child pornographer saying he is a victim of censorship than I could a mugger claiming his field of activity was performance art.[3]

Media professionals are not expected to arbitrate on cases where courts are the appropriate bodies to do so. However, if the publication for which a journalist works, carried advertisements that attract paedophiles, or the TV station which hosts a probing documentary team also exposes children to harmful material at a time when they are watching, then all media professionals have a duty to play a wider role in persuading the media to clean up its act.

---

[1] *Sherman, Barry and Dominick, Joseph; Violence and Sex in Music Videos: TV and Rock'n'Roll; Journal of Communication, winter 1986.*

[2] *Adler, Amy; Photography on Trial;* Index on Censorship*; 3/1996.*

[3] *Vachss, Andrew; Age of Innocence;* Uncensored, *in The Observer; April 1994.*

# Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children

*These guidelines were first adopted in draft by journalists organisations from 70 countries at the world's first international consultative conference on journalism and child rights held in Recife, Brazil, on May 2nd 1998. After regional conferences and workshops they were finally adopted at the Annual Congress of the International Federation of Journalists in Seoul in 2001. The guidelines were presented by the IFJ at the 2nd World Congress against Commercial Exploitation of Children held at Yokohama, Japan, in December 2001.*

## Preamble

Informed, sensitive and professional journalism is a key element in any media strategy for improving the quality of reporting concerning human rights and society. The daily challenge to journalists and media organisations is particularly felt in coverage of children and their rights.

Although the human rights of children have only recently been defined in international law, the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child is already so widely supported that it will shortly become the first universal law of humankind.

To do their job of informing the public effectively, journalists must be fully aware of the need to protect children and to enhance their rights without in any way damaging freedom of expression or interfering with the fabric of journalistic independence. Journalists must also be provided with training to achieve high ethical standards.

The following guidelines for journalists have been drawn up by the International Federation of Journalists on the basis of an extensive survey of codes of conduct and standards already in force across the world. The purpose is to raise media awareness of children's rights issues and to stimulate debate among media professionals about the value of a common approach which will reinforce journalistic standards and contribute to the protections and enhancement of children's rights.

## Principles

All journalists and media professionals have a duty to maintain the highest ethical and professional standards and should promote within the industry the widest possible dissemination of information about the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implications for the exercise of independent journalism.

Media organisations should regard violation of the rights of children and issues related to children's safety, privacy, security, their education, health and social welfare and all forms of exploitation as important questions for investigations and public debate. Children have an absolute right to privacy, the only exceptions being those explicitly set out in these guidelines.

Journalistic activity which touches on the lives and welfare of children should always be carried out with appreciation of the vulnerable situation of children.

The following statement was also endorsed at the Recife Media and Child Rights Conference:

'The IFJ is deeply concerned at the creation of paedophile Internet sites and the fact that certain media publish or broadcast classified advertisements promoting child prostitution.

The IFJ calls on its member unions to:

- intervene with media owners over the publication or broadcasting of these advertisements;
- to campaign with public authorities for the elimination of these sites and advertisements.'

## Guidelines

Journalists and media organisations shall strive to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children's affairs and, in particular, they shall

1. **strive** for standards of excellence in terms of accuracy and sensitivity when reporting on issues involving children;
2. **avoid** programming and publication of images which intrude upon the media space of children with information which is damaging to them;
3. **avoid** the use of stereotypes and sensational presentation to promote journalistic material involving children;
4. **consider** carefully the consequences of publication of any material concerning children and shall minimise harm to children;
5. **guard** against visually or otherwise identifying children unless it is demonstrably in the public interest;
6. **give** children, where possible, the right of access to media to express their own opinions without inducement of any kind;
7. **ensure** independent verification of information provided by children and take special care to ensure that verification takes place without putting child informants at risk;
8. **avoid** the use of sexualised images of children;
9. **use** fair, open and straight forward methods for obtaining pictures and, where possible, obtain them with the knowledge and consent of children or a responsible adult, guardian or carer;
10. **verify** the credentials of any organisation purporting to speak for or to represent the interests of children.
11. **not** make payment to children for material involving the welfare of children or to parents or guardians of children unless it is demonstrably in the interest of the child.

Journalists should put to critical examination the reports submitted and the claims made by Governments on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in their respective countries.

Media should not consider and report the conditions of children only as events but should continuously report the process likely to lead or leading to the occurrence of these events.

# Recommendations for raising awareness of child rights

Media professionals need to develop strategies that strengthen the role of media in providing information on all aspects of children's rights. The following recommendations are designed to raise awareness about the importance of the rights of children.

## 1 Training for journalists and media education

a) Ethical questions should have a higher profile in journalists' training, particularly with regard to standards of conduct in reporting issues affecting children.

b) Materials outlining the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implications for media as well as examples of good practice within media can form the basis of training courses and manuals for journalists and other media professionals.

## 2 Creating conditions for professional journalism

a) Governments and authorities should work with media and other civil society groups to create a legal and cultural framework for professional journalism, including freedom of information legislation and respect for independent journalism.;

b) Media professionals should recognise that freedom of expression must go hand in hand with other fundamental human rights, including freedom from exploitation and intimidation. They should give careful consideration to the facts when weighing up the relative merits of the different claims, and not allow themselves to be swayed by commercial or political considerations;

c) Dialogue between media organisations, journalists and programme makers and relevant groups within civil society should be supported to highlight problems and concerns and give better understanding of the needs of journalists and media when reporting children's issues.

d) National NGOs should consider compiling a directory of reliable experts on the rights of children and related topics, to be distributed to media. Such information could also be accessible on computer data banks.

## 3 Codes of Conduct and self regulation

a) Codes of conduct and reporting guidelines can be useful in demonstrating that something needs to be done. Such codes are weapons in the hands of journalists and campaigners who can use them to take up issues with editors, publishers and broadcasters.

b) Specific guidelines on child rights reporting, such as those adopted by the IFJ, should be drawn up by professional associations to accompany their general ethical codes.

c) Journalists and programme makers have a duty to increase public awareness of the violation of children's rights. However, reporting needs to be carried out with enormous care. In particular, media should adhere to the highest standards of professional conduct when reporting on the rights of children.

d) They should avoid, or challenge, the myths and stereotypes that surround children, particularly those from developing countries. For instance, the myth that parents in developing countries do not value their children; that girls are inferior to boys; that children are drawn into crime through their own fault; or that child labour and sex tourism alleviate poverty for the victim, or the host nation.

e) Journalists should never publish details that put vulnerable children at risk. Journalists should take particular care not to reveal information that damages the dignity of children, and avoid identifying them, while at the same time should tell their stories in a compelling and newsworthy way.

## 4 The need for newsroom debate

a) A constructive and supportive debate should be encouraged between media professionals, about reporting of children's rights and media images of children. Such dialogue should take place between media managements, editorial departments and marketing sections.

b) Media editors and managers should implement — and make explicit— a policy which makes clear their opposition to biased and sensationalist coverage of children, and their support for high ethical standards among journalists and programme makers. This could be done through the elaboration, in consultation with media professionals, of guidelines, which should be seriously implemented and monitored.

c) Media organisations should consider appointing specialist 'children's correspondents', with responsibility for covering all aspects of children's lives. Specific training to help journalists to express children's points of view. This might include: child growth and development, child abuse, risk factors, children's sexual terminology, the law, interviewing techniques, communication with children, etc.

d) New means of giving children access to the media, as 'sources' or commentators, should be investigated. Children should know that information or opinions offered in confidence would be protected as such.

## 5 Children, media and the community

a) Children, from primary school upwards, should undergo media literacy training, to help them understand and decode the messages they receive from both programmes and advertising, so as to become critical and well-informed media consumers.

# The Out of Focus Group,Bangladesh

Pintu (11) , Phalan (10) and Zakir (10) trying out new cameras during one of the first outings of the Out of Focus group in Bangladesh. *Picture: Shahidul Alam/Drik Picture Library Ltd.*

In 1994 a group of people set up a picture agency in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Named Drik, the Sanskrit word for vision, the agency set out to represent media professionals that other agencies did not cater for, practitioners living and working in the majority world. In the years that have followed, many others from Asia, Africa and Latin America have joined the original group. All of them share a common vision; one that sees the majority world, not as fodder for disaster reporting, but as a vibrant source of human energy and a challenge to an exploitative global economic system.

One of the Drik initiatives is to train children from poor working-class families in Dhaka as photojournalists. The *Out of Focus* children have been able to turn the tables on convention by deciding what images of their communities they choose and how they should be represented. Shahidul Alam, founder of the project, writes of it: “Children of working class backgrounds, form a unique aspect of Bangladeshi culture. While being children with all the curiosity, mischief, and playfulness that we associate with that age, they have a maturity developed through survival, a razor sharp ability to separate rhetoric from the genuine, and a remarkable self confidence, that make them very special commentators of their own reality.

"Mainstream journalism in Bangladesh has long suffered from an inability to question power. In recent times, it has become more acceptable to question politicians, and indeed depending upon the camp the journalist belongs to, it is fashionable to take an often partisan and critical stand of powerful groups, including the establishment. Certain areas of power however, have remained sacrosanct. A major one being the media itself, which has ruthlessly stifled any attempt to question its integrity.

"Stories that have emerged about working class people have invariably been stories arousing sympathy for the poor and respect for the benevolent, and have not addressed the politics of inequality and exploitation.

"In a country where most people can neither read nor write, images remain a powerful method of communication and entertainment. It was felt that images produced by working class children, could perhaps most effectively overcome the stranglehold on information flow that continues to suppress values other than the mainstream. This collective attempt by these working class children of Mirpur, and Drik, remains one of the few examples where such complete authority has been questioned."

Drik has been working with the children for over six years with considerable success. One of the children, Rabeya Sarkar Rima won second prize in the South Asia photography contest organised by UNICEF for her work on domestic violence.Stories by the children have been published in mainstream magazines, and the children have appeared in national television. Four of the children work on the children's television newsround up programme "Mukto Khobor", one works as a freelance cameraperson, and two work at Drik. The children take on professional photographic assignments and have worked for Save The Children organisations and Ain O Salish Kendra a legal help and human rights group. The Drik 2001 calendar features recent work by Out of Focus.

Some of the work can be seen on http://www.drik.net/chobimela2k/htmls/bangladesh/bdourlang/bdourlang.html.

# Appendix:

# Tourist industry against exploitation

## World Tourism Organization

The WTO is the leading intergovermental organization in tourism. WTO is entrusted by 138 countries and territories with the task of promoting and developing tourism. It is running an Awareness-raising campaign to:

1. Prepare a study on the incidence of child sex tourism to measure the effectiveness of the international campaign against sexual exploitation of children in tourism.
2. Develop and implement guidelines and procedures for national tourism administrations and tourist destinations.
3. Develop training material for tourism curricula.
4. Support regional activities against sexual exploitation of children in tourism in Africa and the Americas.
5. Development links to the WTO Internet service Child Prostitution and Tourism Watch with other relevant online sites.

World Tourism Organization - Marina Diotallevi, Capitán Haya, 42
E-28020 Madrid, Tel: +34 91 567 8165, Fax: +34 91 567 8219
E-mail: campaign@world-tourism.org

## ECPAT/respect

ECPAT International is a network of organisations and individuals seeking to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

## Code of Conduct of the Tourism Industry

The Code of Conduct (CC) of the Tourism Industry to protect children from sexual exploitation commits tour operators to raise awareness among the public, their employees, their suppliers (in the home country as well as at the destinations) and the travellers. Each tour operator who has adopted this code must undertake the following:

1. Establish an ethical policy regarding the protection of children against sexual exploitation;
2. Train tourism personnel in the country of origin and travel destinations:
3. Include a specific clause in contracts with suppliers that proclaims a common repudiation of child sex;
4. Provide information to travellers by appropriate means;
5. Provide information to local “key persons” at the destinations.

The Code of Conduct was elaborated by ECPAT Sweden in April 1998 in collaboration with a group of Scandinavian tour operators (Star Tour). Valuable comments and suggestions on the contents of the Code were received from the WTO, UFTAA, and other experts in the field.Respect Austria — Centre for Tourism & Development — and ECPAT Germany, supported by the European Commission have been project partners since November 1999. In year 2000 the Code of Conduct promoted by ECPAT Italy was adopted by the Italian Tourism Industry. In 2001 also, ECPAT Netherlands and ECPAT United Kingdom decided to work on the implementation of the Code. Further European countries are interested.

The Code was adopted by British Thomson Holidays in 2000, in February 2001 by the German Travel Agencies’ and Tour Operators’ Association (DRV) and in April 2001 by the Austrian Travel Agencies’ and Tour Operators’ Association (ÖRV).

ECPAT Italy, together with the tourism industry, is further working on the National Implementation Procedures of the Italian Code of Conduct . The Code is being negotiated with The Dutch Association of Tour Operators. There are continuous negotiations with single tour operators and umbrella organisations for medium and small scale tour operators.

All partners are involved in awareness building measures. ECPAT Italy will produce ticket jackets and information brochures; ECPAT Netherlands has started a postcard campaign in which travellers are asked to pressure the tourism industry to take concrete measures. Respect Austria produced an in-flight video which won an international in Berlin in March 2001. ECPAT Germany produced and distributed a training brochure which was also adapted and distributed by respect Austria. ECPAT Netherlands has developed with TUI Netherlands training material and a fact sheet for tour leaders, which has been distributed by TUI brands (FiT, Arke, Holland International, De Boer en Wendel, Zuiderbreedte) to their personnel as of March 2001.

Destination countries like Brazil, Cuba, Dominican Republic, India and Thailand have become involved. Governments in Austria, Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden have been asked to lobby for the Code. In Germany and the Netherlands combating Child sex tourism is part of the National Action Plan.

For further information, contact:

ECPAT - Helena Karlén/Elis Envall, Nybrokajen 7, S-111 48 Stockholm
Tel: +46 8 611 99 34 Fax: +46 8 611 34 99 E-mail: info@ecpatsweden.org
Co-ordinator of the CC-Project: Anita Orlovius-Wessely, Holzgasse 48,
D-53721 Siegburg Tel +49 22 41 25 94 40 Fax +49 22 41 25 94 41
e-mail: Orlovius.Partner@t-online.de

## *terre des hommes*—Deutschland e.V.

The International Federation of *terre des hommes* is a network of 10 organisations *terre des hommes* that works for the rights of the child and promotes equitable development without racial, religious, cultural or gender-based discrimination. The international federation of *terre des hommes* works in collaboration with the relevant bodies in the UN system to promote and implement the rights of the child.

Detailed responses to the problem of the sexual exploitation of children in tourism are outlined on the Internet at www.child-hood.com. The aim is to raise awareness on the issue of sexual exploitation of children in tourism through the creation and the development of an Internet site providing:

1. Information facilities for tourists who are using the Internet for travel preparation, by means of a user-friendly system,
2. A common platform for actors in the fight against child sex tourism, in the form of a searchable information-pool,
3. Information facilities focusing on the practical needs of the travel and tourism industry, and facilitating its further involvement in this fight.

The website offers travellers on-line information on problems and laws, and explains the different ways tourists can respond to the situation in their destination countries. Tourists can find tour operators who are engaged in the campaign against the sexual exploitation of children. The objective is to support tourists in their personal efforts to combat this problem. This is communicated by the website slogan: "Please disturb!" .

The tourism industry - from major travel companies to local travel agents and tour guides - can also find practical information related to the problem. For example, how should professionals in the tourism industry react when confronted with the sexual exploitation of children? The website offers specific responses (What can I do?), along with practical tips and information on local laws. Information on organizations dedicated to the prevention of the sexual abuse of children through tourism is also included at www.child-hood.com, a site co-financed by the European Commission.

Since the early nineties, *terre des hommes* has been actively involved in preventing the sexual exploitation of children in tourism with campaigns including the 'toys' spot shown by several international airlines on long-distance flights, as well as on European television networks.

For further information, contact:

terre des hommes, Deutschland - Christa Dammerman
Ruppenkampstrasse 11a, D-49084 Osnabrück
Tel: +49 (0)5 41 71 01-0 Fax: +49 (0)5 41 70 72 33
E-mail: kampagne@tdh.de website: www.child-hood.com