

children's rights, awareness raising activities to strengthen the prevention of crimes against minors and the development of data in order better to identify and apprehend perpetrators.

D. General discussion on the child and the media

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

250. After the introductory statements in plenary session, the participants were divided into three panels to discuss the various issues identified. Panel I on "Child participation in the media", was chaired by Ms. Marilia Sardenberg, Vice Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Rapporteur was Ms. June Kane from UNICEF; Panel II on "Protection of the child against harmful influences through the media" was chaired by Mr. Yourri Kolosov, a member of the Committee on the Rights of the

Child and the Rapporteur was Mr. Carlos Arnaldo from UNESCO; Panel III on "Respect for the integrity of the child in media reporting", was chaired by Ms. Sandra Mason, a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Rapporteur was Ms. Bettina Peeters from the International Federation of Journalists.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Child media. A dossier should be compiled on positive practical experiences of active child participation in the media, such as "Children's Express" in the United Kingdom and the United States.
2. Child forum within Internet. The UNICEF-initiated "Voices of Youth" at the World Wide Web should be promoted and advertised as a positive facility for international discussion on important issues between young people.
3. Active child libraries. The experience of dynamic child libraries, or child departments within public libraries, should be documented and disseminated.
4. Media education. Knowledge about the media, their impact and functioning should be imparted in schools at all levels. Students should be enabled to relate to and use the media in a participatory manner, as well as to learn how to decode media messages, including in advertising. Good experiences in some countries should be made available to others.
5. State support to media for children. There is a need for budgetary support to ensure the production and dissemination of children's books, magazines and papers, music, theatre and other artistic expressions for children, as well as child oriented films and videos. Assistance through international cooperation should also support media and art for children.
6. Constructive agreements with media companies to protect children against harmful influences. Facts should be gathered about various attempts at voluntary agreements with media companies on positive measures, such as not broadcasting violent programmes during certain hours, clear presentations before programmes about their content and the development of technical devices, such as "V-chips", to help consumers to block out certain types of programmes. Likewise, experiences with respect to the introduction of voluntary ethical standards and mechanisms to encourage respect for them should be assembled and evaluated; this should include an analysis of the effectiveness of existing codes of conduct, professional guidelines, press councils, broadcasting councils, press ombudsmen and similar bodies.
7. Comprehensive national plans of action to empower parents in the media market. Governments should initiate a national discussion on means to promote positive alternatives to the negative tendencies in the media market, to encourage media knowledge and support parents in their role as guides to their children in relation to electronic and other media. An international workshop should be organized to promote a discussion on this approach.
8. Advice on implementation of article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A study should be conducted with the purpose of

developing advice to Governments on how they could encourage the development of "guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being". Such a study should also serve the purpose of assisting the Committee on the Rights of the Child in drafting a general comment on article 17.

9. Specific guidelines for reporting on child abuse. To encourage further discussion in newsrooms and within the media community as a whole guidelines should be drafted by appropriate journalist bodies on how to report on abuse of children and at the same time protect the dignity of the children involved. Special emphasis should be placed on the issue of not exposing the identity of the child.

10. Material for journalist education on child rights. Material should be produced to assist journalist and media schools on child rights standards, established procedures for child rights monitoring, existing international, regional and national institutions working with children, as well as basic aspects of child development. The manual planned by the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations as a tool for journalist education on human rights should be widely disseminated when produced.

11. Network for media watchgroups. The positive work of media watchgroups in various countries should be encouraged and "good ideas" transferred between countries. The purpose is to give media consumers a voice in the discussion on media ethics and children. A focal point for exchanges should be established.

12. Service to "child rights correspondents". Interested journalists should be invited to sign up on a list of "child rights correspondents". They should be provided regularly with information about important child issues and with interesting reports by others, and be seen as media advisers to the international child rights community.

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