

children's PRESSLINE

America unconventional?!?

By **OMAR HERNANDEZ**

Special to the AmNews

According to the United Nations, there are many children in today's world who are denied their rights. In many regions, this begins before the child is even born. Nineteen million infants are born with low birth weight, and 4 million newborns end up dying within a month into their lives.

Of those who do survive, day-to-day life is often substandard by Western standards. For instance, children living in impoverished parts of Asia and Africa are often deprived of even the simplest of resources. As of now, 2.5 billion children lack access to any sanitation facilities. Other rights denied to children may be related to family or criminal trials.

Two decades ago, many countries dealing with these issues assembled to create the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to preserve children's rights with 54 binding standards and obligations of signatories. Some of these guidelines state that children should have a right to life, education and health.

The U.N. hopes that by having countries sign on to this treaty, the countries will take it upon themselves to create laws to support the treaty's guidelines, and this has been happening in some countries. For example, Canada enacted a law to change the way that juvenile criminals were dealt with, and lawmakers there cited Canada's commitment to the CRC as the reason it changed its laws.

UNICEF's website describes the CRC as "an international

treaty that recognizes the human rights of children, defined as persons up to the age of 18 years." It further states, "The convention establishes in international law that States Parties must ensure that all children—without discrimination in any form—benefit from special protection measures and assistance; have access to services such as education and health care; can develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential; grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding; and are informed about and participate in achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner."

The U.N. emphasizes a child's importance and the importance of the CRC by saying on its website, "This compilation and clarification of children's human rights set out the necessary environment and means to enable every human being to develop to their full potential."

Late last year, the CRC celebrated its 20th anniversary. UNICEF, Save the Children and many other nonprofit organizations attended an event at one of the U.N.'s buildings to commemorate the CRC's achievements in gaining rights for children over the past two decades.

"Children came with problems from school; they come with problems from the parents, because the parents have beaten them. Some time ago, there was a child, a girl, and she had a purple eye because her mother had beaten her. She didn't want to tell me that. I knew

that because I saw," said Mayra Avellar, a youth speaker at the event, speaking about the conditions of "favela," or slums, in Brazil.

She also explained how the CRC can be used to end these problems. "It helps because the government, when they have ratified the convention, they have a commitment," she says. "Then...if our rights are being violated, we can say, 'You have to do this and this and this,' because it's not a local convention. It's a worldwide convention. It's really important because they can get pressured by the other governments and UNICEF."

Since the CRC was presented in 1989, more than 190 nations have signed on and supported the CRC's efforts to enforce the rights of children throughout the world.

America is one of the few nations left to ratify the CRC. Because of its power and status, America's ratification of the CRC is something that is advocated for throughout the world.

One obstacle to the U.S. ratifying the CRC is that many of the articles address issues governed by individual states. The CRC would restrict what children can and can't do, as well as scale back the power of individual states in making legislation over issues that have always been decided by them. For instance, in the U.S., some states allow the death penalty for crimes committed as a minor.

Jessica Lenz, a campaign coordinator for the Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the Convention's on the Rights of the

Child, explains that there are some other reasons why some Americans are hesitant to ratify the CRC. "One of the issues being argued is that parents would have no responsibility in raising their children and that the government would come in and make decisions for them," she said. "This is actually wrong."

She added that the CRC can change and better America's children. "We would actually have a framework to use to change our laws to advance policies and programs for children in education and in health, and also making children participate in making decisions that affect their lives daily," she says.

However, even if the CRC is ratified in the U.S., the changes would not happen overnight.

Avellar explains how Brazil is still struggling to give children the rights they've promised to deliver: "It was difficult for me and my friends to get a good education. If you don't have the money, you don't really get a good education. I see a lot of children in my neighborhood are not going to school, and it hurts me because education is the most important thing you can develop.

"We don't have good programs from the government in any way, not with the drug people, not for children who are being abused, not for education, not for health. There's still a lot of things lacking for me to have a good quality of life."

Additional reporting by Bountouraby Soumah and Tatyana Bellamy-Walker

Children's PressLine reporter on reporting

By **BOUNTOURABY SOUMAH**

Special to the AmNews

As a youth journalist, I first visited the United Nations for the Convention on the Rights of the Child's 20th anniversary. At first, I didn't know or understand the CRC well. Afterwards, I understood better its goals and purpose.

I found the 20th anniversary ceremony very interesting because my family is from a country that is very poor, and it felt like children and young people were able to speak up about their point of view without being ignored.

From my research, I learned that the CRC is a human rights treaty introduced by the U.N. in 1989 and countries from around the world have since signed it. It seems like the CRC helps poorer countries with their health problems by pressing for change, although the pressure doesn't always work. I also learned that children who have been taken advantage of are taken care of by associations, which help them open up about their stories.

I hope this article will make more people involved and aware of the CRC and what's happening to other children around the world. I think it will interest people to find out more about this. I hope that people associated with the CRC will help change children's rights and reach their main goals.



Touro College hosts "Healthy Home Cooking Night"

Touro College's Project Aspire and The Palette Fund instructed Harlem's P.S. 197 pre-kindergarten to second grade students and their parents on how to prepare healthy meals using whole foods at "Healthy Home Cooking Night." Professional chefs, trained by the Natural Gourmet Institute, showed families how to prepare fresh guacamole, vegetarian black bean chili and homemade corn tortillas.

Project Aspire, a public health initiative of the Children's Health Education Foundation at Touro College, brings real-life, interactive health education lessons and demonstrations into schools to encourage students to lead healthy lifestyles and to explore health-related careers.

Johanna Santa and her son, Jayrion Cruz, a kindergartner at P.S. 197

(Touro College photo)