

16th Session of the Human Rights Council
ANNUAL FULL-DAY MEETING ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

**Joint oral statement by International Movement ATD Fourth World, Franciscans
International, International Catholic Child Bureau, International Council of Women
on root causes and factors leading children to live/work on the street
Wednesday, 9th March 2011**

Thank you, Mr. President,

Many of the major factors leading children to live or work on the street have been well documented and referred to this morning:

- Unbearable situations of insecurity and deprivation within a family,
- Traumatic events that have resulted in the break-up of the family
- Problems of poor living conditions, strained relations, exploitation, etc. when they have been sent by their family to the city to work with a member of the extended family or a family friend.

We would like to emphasize two other factors.

1. In addition to suffering from high levels of material insecurity and deprivation, families living in extreme poverty also suffer from exclusion and stigmatization. As children who took part in an event here in Geneva to commemorate the anniversary of the CRC stated: “Without a family, we cannot live and we cannot grow. But the family cannot live without friendship in the community.” In addition to being stigmatized as lazy, ignorant, or criminally minded, the adults are often judged to be unfit parents. For in countries in both the north and south, children whose parents have to work continuously because of poverty do not always have the time, energy and resources to give their children the attention and the protection they aspire to provide. The children are aware of this lack of respect, and suffer from the humiliation felt by the entire family. They flee the family in the hope of finding a way to live in dignity.
- 1) A second factor that can undermine respect for one’s family, is inappropriate schooling that alienates children from their traditional cultures rather than providing the skills they need to improve their lives within their community. This factor is present especially in impoverished rural environments where the family is not necessarily excluded from the rest of the community, but continues to follow traditions that are not valued by the urbanized or the dominant population. The educational system alienates children from their families, rather than building on positive traditional values and involving parents in applying new knowledge to improve their lives – such as the agroecology put forward yesterday by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

It is very important to search for a balance between supporting the relationships that bind young people to their family and community and respecting their personal aspirations for socio-economic progress and independence. We know that the optimal environment for children is a positive family environment. And the majority of families living in extreme poverty go to great lengths to do the best by their children. Their efforts should be supported.

We therefore call on States:

- 1) To immediately refrain from criminalizing children living/working on the street
- 2) To work to better understand the specific reasons why children in their country end up living/working on the street and then to address these root causes
- 3) To develop with the children and their families policies and programmes to ensure support for families in meeting their responsibilities towards their children.

Thank you.