

WHO ARE WE

The International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE) is an organization that aims to bring together and animate a network of stakeholders committed to promoting and defending the dignity of each child, a fully-fledged human being, subject of rights¹.

MISSION

To promote and defend the child, as a protagonist of his life and within his community. To this purpose, to work jointly for the respect of each child's dignity, rights and spiritual life while accompanying him on a path towards resilience.

Research, training, advocacy in order to influence public policies and field projects for children in situations of vulnerability all aim at achieving this mission.

VISION

BICE contributes to build a world of justice and solidarity that guarantees the growth of each and every child.

VALUES

The respect of :

- the human life and dignity of each child, created at God's image;
- the values of the Gospel ;
- freedom of thought, conscience and beliefs;
- cultural diversity.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- The principle of non-discrimination.
- The best interests of the child.
- Child participation.
- The family as the best place to support the child.
- Networking as well as working with other networks.
- The principle of subsidiarity.
- Long-term action.
- Transparency and integrity.

¹ Bice is recognized by the Holy See as an association of lay faithful. Along the years, Bice was granted consultative status by the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the International Organization *la Francophonie* and the African Commission of Human and Peoples' Rights.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU

- **BICE historic background:** In response to the encyclical *Quemadmodum* (1946), on 2nd February 1947, Father Gaston Courtois² presents the project of creating an international Catholic child bureau to Pope Pius XII. It becomes a reality in Paris in January 1948 during a founding congress under the auspices of the Apostolic Nuncio in France, Mgr Angelo Roncalli, future Pope John XIII. Representatives from 8 countries and 4 Church organizations (Brothers of the Christian Schools, Oeuvre Pontificale de la Sainte Enfance, Salesians and the Jesuit review *Lumen Vitae*) were involved. The founding members are aware that the international component, the field presence and the spiritual and Christian dimension of life can favor reconciliation and encourage solidarity. Reaching out to every child, applying active educational methods that respect the child as such and providing children with advocates within society are the three main orientations. These continue nowadays as the core of the innovative strength of Bice and still guide its action.
- **BICE role in drafting the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):** It was in 1983 that the drafting of the CRC truly started. BICE and Defense for Children International led a group of organizations that contributed to its wording and adoption by the UN General Assembly on 20th of November 1989. Bice's watermark can be identified in the recognition of the global vision of the child, including his moral and spiritual dimension. The CRC also codifies three subjects close to Bice: the protection against all forms of exploitation, child participation and the promotion of a juvenile justice system that respect the dignity of children deprived of liberty as human beings and facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration in society.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **The principle of non-discrimination:** According to this principle, the rights set forth in the CRC for each child shall be respected and ensured. The term "discrimination" refers to any kind of distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference, irrespective of the race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or any other status that aim at destroying the recognition, the enjoyment or the exercise in equal terms of all human rights and fundamental freedom³.
- **The best interests of the child:** The concept of the child's best interests is aimed at ensuring both the full and effective enjoyment of all the rights recognized in the CRC and the holistic development of the child. The full application of the concept of the child's best interests requires the development of a rights-based approach, engaging all actors, to secure the holistic physical, psychological, moral and spiritual integrity of the child and promote his or her human dignity. The child's best interests is a threefold concept: (a) a substantive right, b) a fundamental, interpretative legal principle, c) a rule of procedure⁴.
- **Child participation:** this principle addresses the legal and social status of children, who, on the one hand lack the full autonomy of adults but, on the other, are subjects of rights.

² Father Gaston Courtois (1897-1970) is a French priest, founder of the movement *Cœurs Vaillants*, General Director of the Union des œuvres catholiques de France, cofounder of the International Catholic Child Bureau, General Procurer of the *Fils de la Charité*.

³ See article 2 of the CRC.

⁴ See article 3 of the CRC and General Comment No 14 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Therefore, every child capable of forming his own views, has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting him, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity. In particular, the child shall be afforded the right to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting him. The term “participation” has evolved and is now widely used to describe ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes⁵.

- **The family as the best place to support the child:** The CRC Preamble defines family as “the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children.” Therefore, the family should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community. Hence, States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the CRC⁶.
- **Networking as well as working together with other networks:** BICE is a worldwide network of organizations committed to the dignity and the rights of the child and a cooperation framework for research and action⁷. Also, Catholic organizations working with children constitute a global network⁸. They are called to join BICE as well as any other institution, Christian or not, that shares BICE objectives⁹. Similarly, BICE and its members belong to different local, national, regional and international networks in order to maximize and multiply the impact of their initiatives aiming at promoting and defending the dignity and the rights of the child.
- **The principle of subsidiarity:** BICE initiatives are permeated by the Evangelical principle of subsidiarity as enshrined in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the first formalization of the Catholic Church social teachings. It implies to recognize the creative capacity of every person or local community. Therefore, the principle of subsidiarity recommends that decisions are taken as closest as possible to the concerned stakeholders.
- **Log-term action:** The projects undertaken by BICE with its members and partners are developed in the long-term in order to guarantee lasting actions in view of attaining the child integral growth.
- **Transparency and integrity:** BICE financing is granted with the utmost transparency by private donors, ensuring its independence and by public and private sponsors. Since April 2008, Bice is member of the Comité de la Charte du don en confiance, a certifying body in charge of monitoring associations and foundations that appeal to the public generosity in France. Hence, BICE adheres on a voluntary basis on the respect of a Deontology Charter and submits itself to ongoing checks. BICE accounts are annually audited by an international independent cabinet. In addition, when BICE obtains a financial contribution for the initiatives undertaken by its field members and partners, it makes sure that it is used wisely and in accordance with all deontology rules.

⁵ See article 12 of the CRC and General Comment No 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

⁶ See Preamble and article 5 of the CRC.

⁷ See article 4.2 of BICE Statutes (last version 9 June 2017).

⁸ As of 28 February 2018, BICE network is composed of 80 organizations.

⁹ Extract from BICE Charter, June 2007.