Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1551 (2002)[1]

Building a 21st century society with and for children: follow–up to the European strategy for children (Recommendation 1286 (1996))

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly salutes the Unicef initiative to hold a special session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2001 devoted entirely to defining a world fit for children to live in, a concern it willingly shares and endorses.

2. Since 1989 the rights of children have been recognised and enshrined in a single document, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a landmark instrument that has been ratified almost universally, with the notable exception of the United States. To what extent are its provisions applied in practice, however? Much remains to be done to close the gap between principles and practice.

3. Lip service and declarations of intent are not enough: the commitments entered into must be put into practice. What is needed is an action plan, a plan for building a society in twenty-first-century Europe, with and for children, that is fair and fit to live in. The plan must be a worldwide one consistent with the United Nations convention – not a list of pious aspirations, but a document binding on the members of the Council of Europe.

4. The Assembly therefore invites the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to adopt a legal instrument that is binding on the Organisation's member states and asks them to endorse and honour the following commitments:

revise all their domestic legislation and make sure it is compatible with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

adopt a comprehensive, coherent, long-term national policy on children's rights with a view to fully applying the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

appoint a national minister of children's rights, with the aim of fostering an integrated approach to children's rights in every area of government policy;

ensure that children's rights, interests and needs are taken into consideration, particularly at the political decision-making level, at all times, by making it standard practice, for example, to draw up "child impact evaluations";

give a higher profile and greater priority to children in budget presentations and through the fair and appropriate allocation of resources;

set up a permanent interministerial body at national level with authority to deal with all matters relating to children's rights. Its function would be to foster a co-ordinated national policy on children's rights, and it would produce an annual report on such a policy for discussion in parliament;

establish a national ombudsman for children (or a similar independent institution) to foster children's rights and supervise their application;

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 26 March 2002 (see Doc. 9188, report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Cox).

set up a national children's observatory to collect and disseminate to interested parties all information and data, including statistical data, on children, their needs and their rights;

foster education in children's rights and related vocational training;

encourage maximum participation by children at every level of policy decision-making in every sector;

make special, priority provision for children in their policies giving aid to developing countries and include respect for children's rights in the requirements for receiving technical and financial assistance.

5. The Assembly also invites the Committee of Ministers to assert increasingly the Council of Europe's role, as a champion of human rights, in defending and promoting the rights of the child, and to do so in particular by:

instituting, preferably within the Organisation, an independent European children's ombudsman with powers of initiative;

giving the Forum for Children and Families the power to deal with all matters relating to children, draw up the broad lines of a co-ordinated European policy on children's rights and put forward a concerted development policy for children's rights outside Europe;

including in the forum's terms of reference the task of being a European children's observatory and preparing an annual report on the situation of children in Europe.

6. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to give further consideration to drafting a European convention on children's rights attuned to European realities, and to including children's rights in the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

7. The Assembly urges the Committee of Ministers, in co-operation with the European Union, to agree on arrangements for setting up a computerised European data centre on missing children, to centralise information on disappearances and provide the police, families and voluntary organisations, and so on, with the necessary information and assistance for their location and recovery.

8. Lastly, the Assembly requests the Committee of Ministers to take appropriate action on this recommendation and forward it to the governments of member states, the European Union institutions, Unicef and all non-governmental organisations working to protect children's rights.