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'Time has come to listen to the voice of children and to ensure they are full actors (…). The voice of children is true, direct and concrete.'

Luis Pedernera, President of the Committee on the Rights of the Child[1]

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EDITORIAL

Children stand up and act for their rights: Let us join them!

The ISS/IRC feels honoured to share in the present Monthly Review the speech given by a young person during the celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the United Nations. This event was an opportunity to witness the astonishing capacity of children to act, defend, promote and implement their rights. Children demonstrated, throughout these celebrations, through their personal stories, experiencies and outstanding initiatives, what it means to move forward with children's rights worldwide. At the end of this year of celebrations, they remind us that everything is possible, provided one chooses to believe.

'Wow… I can see many, many people here! Time goes by quickly… thirty years… that is incredible!

During all this time we have lived many things, and someone told me that I have helped a lot. But I sometimes feel bad, because of the countries which have ratified me, and have then forgotten me. Anyway, I am happy because all of you, who are here.

A few days ago, I was talking with a group of children from different countries and they told me about the many problems that they are facing. As written in my body, these problems should not exist anymore, but unfortunately, they are still alive.

Do you know what they told me? They told me that the reduced group of children, who have the possibility of being here are very tired. Do you know why? Because they feel used. They think that events like this one are held only to fulfil a request from society, for a photograph, and that everybody then goes back home, and life goes on.

However, from what I have been able to see and hear, children are together because they want to say ENOUGH, to say STOP. They also want to say that they must be heard and taken into account, because they are not only the future, they are the present.

For example, in that country, I cannot remember its name, the one where Donald Trump is the president, I have been told that they still have not ratified my existence. Imagine… if I do not exist for the government of this country, much less so the rights of its people. Am I so ugly that they do not want me?

Anyway, I cannot understand why they created, signed and ratified me 30 years ago, if they are going to ignore me. Have you seen what happens in the world? Problems at the border between the USA and Mexico, school drop out in Central and South America, constant poverty and low life expectancy in Haiti, dictatorships in Nicaragua and Venezuela, mass emigration from Central America, social outbreaks in Chile and Ecuador, the number of poor people in Argentina, burning and deforestation in the Amazonia, violent police attacks in Brazilian favelas, the increase in drug trafficking in Central America, water contamination, female genital mutilation in several parts of Africa, the endless war in the Gaza Strip, armed conflicts in territories disputed by major powers, child and adolescent confinement for terrorism purposes, migrants, who die at borders due to the refusal of governments, the health crisis in India, child labour and sexual exploitation in Central America, environmental pollution, difficult access to health services, educational systems that are archaic, censorship and the prohibition of women's freedom of expression in Iran, lack of access to information in North Korea and Russia, death sentence for LGBT people in countries like Saudi Arabia or Nigeria, and so many other problems, which are taking away the present and future of young people.

Children human rights defenders

'Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels.'

Article 1 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders [2]

It is difficult to believe all the things that are happening, because I am thirty years old, and we have been meeting for 30 years, and for 30 years, we have been committing to putting an end to problems, but year after year, we meet and repeat what we said the previous year, and time goes by, and children and adolescents continue to suffer from the same problems generation after generation. I have heard about the right to participation and expression of children and adolescents since the day I was created, but I have not seen any country placing a chair at the decision-making table for a child or adolescent to be able to participate with both a voice and a vote on public policy issues.

Last year, I heard a child saying that '***if the world looked at the problems through the eyes of a child, half of these problems would be solved and the other half would not even exist***'. Do you realise the profound and important message in these words? What are we waiting for in order to not invite them only for a photograph, but to start taking them seriously and to grant them decision-making power?

I am celebrating my birthday now, my 30th birthday, and as you know, you may ask for three wishes in birthday celebrations. Would you like to know what my wishes are? First, I would like that none of you forget the things we have talked about today when you leave this meeting and that you do not allow a single violation of my content, my principles, my articles. Secondly, I wish international organisations would work together with children because that would be a good way to have a direct source of information and an impact on all countries. Finally, I would like meetings like this one today to no longer exist, because when the day comes on which we will no longer need to celebrate a meeting, it will be the day on which problems will be over. Thank you very much for your time!'

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The ISS/IRC conveys its Season's Greetings and invites you to celebrate children and young people by including a new series in its Monthly Review titled 'Children and young people in action'. This series, which will initiate in January and will follow on from the personal contribution of Kurt Ottosen, intends to promote actions led by children and young people worldwide to ensure that their rights are a reality in their community, their country, their planet.

[1] Extract of a compilation of various authors under the leadership and in Zermatten, J. and Jaffé, P. (2019). *30 ans de droits de l'enfant : Un nouvel élan pour l'humanité.* Switzerland: University of Geneva.
[2] Extract of the report of the 2018 Day of General Discussion on protecting and empowering children as human rights defenders. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/Discussions/2018/CRC_DGD_2018_OutcomeReport.pdf.

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