



unborn child 11 weeks old

Upholding the rights of all children—born and unborn

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was a landmark agreement, and much progress has been made toward protecting the rights and ensuring the welfare of children. But much work remains to be done. All children, born and unborn, male and female, have an equal dignity and right to life. They deserve our respect, protection and care.



Declaration of the Rights of the Child (Nov. 20, 1959)—excerpts

Preamble

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom ...

Whereas the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth ...

Whereas mankind owes to the child the best it has to give ...

Principle 1

The child shall enjoy all the rights set forth in this Declaration. Every child, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, whether of himself or of his family.

Principle 4

The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. He shall be entitled to grow and develop in health; to this end, special care and protection shall be provided both to him and to his mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services.

Principle 5

The child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped shall be given the special treatment, education and care required by his particular condition.

Principle 8

The child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief.

U.N. CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD 25TH ANNIVERSARY



“The child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.”

Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Nov. 20, 1959

Convention on the Rights of the Child, Nov. 20, 1989

Child



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Convention on the Rights of the Child (Nov. 20, 1989)—excerpts

Preamble

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world ...

Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth” ...

Article 2

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s

or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Article 6

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.

2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Article 23

1. States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community.

Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:

- (a) To diminish infant and child mortality;
- (d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers.

On Nov. 20, 1989, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the dignity and rights of all children by adopting the Convention on the



Rights of the Child. On the 25th anniversary of this landmark human rights treaty, we should celebrate our progress on behalf of the youngest members of the human family while also acknowledging the ways in which the rights of children remain unprotected.

Prioritizing the first 1,000 days of life

States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have agreed to “recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.” They have also committed to “diminish infant and child mortality” and “ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers” (Article 24). Despite significant headway, an estimated 2.9 million children died within the first month of life in

2012, and most of those deaths were preventable. Undernutrition is estimated to cause 3.1 million child deaths each year; suboptimum breastfeeding leads to 800,000 deaths every year.

The first 1,000 days in the life of a human being—from conception to the second birthday—dramatically shape a child’s prospects for survival and future well-being. Lives can be saved by improving the quality of care during labor, childbirth and the days following birth, including essential newborn care. Prenatal care and nutrition are also important to ensure healthy development



and prevent fetal growth restriction and low birthweight. And adequate nutrition and optimum breastfeeding during early childhood help children develop into healthy and productive adults.

Prioritizing this 1,000-day window of time will save lives, improve health and contribute substantially to sustainable development.



Abortion violates the rights of children

Tens of millions of abortions occur around the world each year, and countries that protect unborn children face pressure to legalize the procedure. This is a profound injustice. The facts of biology show that the unborn child (the human embryo or fetus) is a living human organism—a member of the species *Homo sapiens*, like each of us, only at an earlier stage of development. And all human beings, at all stages of life, have a right to life that should be respected and protected by law.

The States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have agreed to “recognize that every child has the inherent right to life” (Article 6). The Convention also affirms that, quoting the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth”

(preamble). All children, born and unborn, deserve protection.

Protecting the girl child

The Convention calls for securing the rights of each child “without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her

parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin,

property, disability, birth or other status” (Article 2). But sex-selective feticide—when abortion is performed solely on the basis of the unborn child’s sex—is a massive problem in areas where culture and tradition favor boys over girls, including parts of

Asia, Southeast Europe and the Caucasus. One United Nations estimate indicates that as many as 200 million females are “missing,” and this



gender imbalance has already produced devastating social and demographic consequences, including sex trafficking and further violence against women. Legal and educational initiatives to protect the girl child must be more vigorously pursued.

