

IPA Global Consultations on Children's Right to Play

Summary Report

August 2010

International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play



Acknowledgements

IPA would like to express its appreciation of the support given by the Bernard van Leer Foundation to the Global Consultations on Children's Right to Play.

The project was led by the Steering Group of Theresa Casey (IPA President), Valerie Fronczek (IPA Communications), Roger Hart (IPA UN Liaison) and Selim Iltus (Bernard van Leer Foundation). Special thanks are due to Valerie Fronczek for providing the project coordination and the all important 'vital spark'. David Yearley (IPA Treasurer) worked tirelessly behind the scenes supporting the administration and the production of project publications.

Grateful thanks are extended to the facilitators of the eight consultations without whose commitment, perseverance and skills this project could not have been brought to life – thank you:

- Aruna Thakkar, Mumbai, India
- Cynthia Morrison, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Hitoshi Shimamura, Tokyo, Japan
- Ivaylo Sirkarov, Sofia, Bulgaria
- Kanaporn Sornsomrit, Bangkok, Thailand
- Maria Assi, Beirut, Lebanon
- Pamela Nereah Kola, Nairobi, Kenya
- Yolanda Corona, Mexico City, Mexico

This report was compiled by Harry Shier on behalf of the International Play Association

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the art.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

NOTES:

1. For this project, we used the definitions of play, recreation and leisure from the UNCRC Implementation Handbook (Hodgkin and Newell, 2007: 469).

- '**Leisure**' is a term implying having the time and freedom to do as one pleases.
- '**Recreational activities**' embraces the whole range of activities undertaken by choice for the purposes of pleasure.
- '**Play**' includes activities of children that are not controlled by adults and that do not necessarily conform to any rules.

To elaborate on the definition of play, this could mean play that takes place away from the oversight of adults; near adults who are not involved; or near adults who with sensitive support can enrich children's opportunities to play in their own way.

2. The Consultation project uses the term **infringement** to signify either:

- an action that denies or violates a human right, or
- a failure to act, where there is a duty to do so, with the consequence that a human right is denied or violated.

In relation to the child's right to play, recreation and leisure, this means infringements can be either actions that directly or indirectly prevent children from playing, or the failure to act by the guarantors of the right to play (principally local and national authorities) with the consequence that children live in conditions where they are unable to enjoy their right to play. Whilst this report collates extensive evidence of both types of infringements, many are of this second type.

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Introduction

The child's right to play, leisure and recreation is set out in article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). While the Consultations described in this document acknowledged the importance, and overlap, of each of these elements, an emphasis was placed on the *right to play* as it is one of the least known, least understood, least recognised rights of children and consequently one of the most consistently ignored, undervalued and violated of children's rights in the world today.

Early in 2008 the International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play (IPA) entered a partnership with seven other international organisations to propose that the UNCRC organise a *Day of Discussion* and/or develop a *General Comment* on article 31 for the purpose of elaborating on its meaning and increasing state accountability with regard to compliance. The supporting organisations (now eight) are:

- *Child Watch International*
- *European Child Friendly Cities Network*
- *International Council on Children's Play*
- *International Paediatrics Association*
- *International Toy Library Association*
- *Right to Play International*
- *World Leisure Association*
- *World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEP).*

In order to maintain the momentum and to gather material worldwide IPA and its partners organised the Global Consultations on Children's Right to Play.

Three specific objectives were set:

1. To mobilise a worldwide network of article 31 advocates and to harness expertise to raise awareness of the importance of play in the lives of children.
2. To gather specific material demonstrating the infringement of the child's right to play.
3. To formulate practical recommendations for governments with regard to compliance with article 31.

Working with regional and national partners, IPA identified eight Consultation sites worldwide: Bangkok, Beirut, Johannesburg, Mexico City, Mumbai, Nairobi, Sofia and Tokyo. Following a careful planning and preparation process, consultations were held in these cities between January and June 2010.

Part I: The IPA Global Consultation Programme

The Child's Right to Play

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely and rapidly ratified international treaty in the history of the world, is a standard against which a nation's treatment of its children can be measured. It has led to great improvements in policies, programmes and services contributing to children's protection and promoting greater respect for their rights. It is also a visionary document that is influencing the way we think about children.

However, in spite of the widespread recognition of the Convention, and a now extensive body of research demonstrating the vital role of play in human development, the right to play is not receiving the attention it deserves. Article 31 is gaining an unhappy reputation as "the forgotten article of the UN Convention".

Article 31 includes a number of related, but distinct, rights: rest, recreation, leisure, play, participation in cultural life and the arts. Although these areas often overlap, IPA's Global Consultation puts special emphasis on the right to play as it is the element of the article least understood and most consistently ignored.

The Consultation Process

Partnerships were established with national organisations to arrange and manage the consultation process in each country. The participants were for the most part adult professionals, invited because of their significant experience and expertise in the area of children's rights, children's play and related fields in their respective countries. Central to each event was the compilation of an "Infringement Chart", a tool which enabled all the infringements of the child's right to play identified in each country to be defined, quantified and their impact assessed in a single matrix.

It was considered important to incorporate children's perceptions into the consultation, and one of the criteria for selection of adult participants was that they should be people who habitually listen to and take on board the opinions of children. Some of the consultation organisers also chose to gather children's views in separate events or incorporated children's activities into the main consultation programme. The resulting information has been incorporated into this report.

The IPA Global Consultation Team



▼ (Clockwise from top left) Consultations in Nairobi, Mumbai, Johannesburg, Bangkok and Beirut



Part II: Infringement of the right to play around the world

The heart of the data analysis was a detailed comparison and consolidation of the eight infringement charts, which identified 115 infringements of children's right to play considered significant at national level. These ranged from the universal and generalised, like adults' lack of awareness of the importance of play, which was found in every country at every level, to the more localised, but nonetheless deadly, such as the cluster-bombs scattered over what were once children's favourite play areas in southern Lebanon. This analysis identified 14 main themes.

1. Adults unaware of the importance of play

The most widespread and generalised violations of the child's right to play, highlighted in every country, were those arising from adults' lack of awareness of the importance of play in children's development, their failure to recognise it as a human right, and the resulting denial or restriction of play opportunities to children.

Professionals, officials and policy-makers equally unaware of the importance of play

Adult denial of the importance of play has its most profound and damaging impact when public officials and policy-makers are oblivious to the importance of children's play, and negligent of their duties as guarantors of the right to play.

"Government and public officers don't understand child development through play."
Bangkok

Play is a poorly conceptualised social construct

In several of the consultations participants recognised that these damaging "adult attitudes" have deep roots in the socio-cultural construction of a concept of play in each society, where play is defined in terms of what is "not work", and by implication, what is not obligatory, not necessary and therefore not important.

"Lack of understanding and valuing of play at a socio-cultural level. A distinction is made between play and work: Work = productivity; Play = waste of time. Play is thus considered trivial or a waste of time, and is not considered as necessary for child development."
Mexico City

Parents' attitudes restrict play opportunities

In poorer communities, parents want their children to be working instead of playing.

- In both rich and poor communities, parents want their children to be studying instead of playing.
- Parents don't want children to get dirty or make a mess.
- Adults want children to be quiet and not disturb family or neighbours.
- Parents don't play with their children.

"Parents aren't aware that play is necessary for child development." Bangkok

"Children are seen as objects for exploitation; play is not valued". Mumbai

"The world of objects is considered more important than the world of people: 'the house was fine until you made a mess!' ". Mexico City

"Parents want to keep their kids clean. No water or mud, keep the house tidy, kids work to clean up. Parents keep their status". Johannesburg

"Children are taken to organised events and classes to learn how to play 'properly'." Tokyo

"Parents think that civilised children should not play with soil or sand." Bangkok

"Parents are worried about their children making trouble with other children and about being accused of their 'bad' child-rearing by other parents." Tokyo

2. Unsafe environments

The consultation confirmed that most of the world's children live in environments that are not fit to play in.

Physical dangers include: road traffic, risk of accidents in general, contaminated or polluted environments, illegal dumping of dangerous waste, inadequate sewage treatment, landmines and cluster bombs in areas where children play.

Human dangers include: high levels of crime and violence, community unrest and civil strife, effects of war, drug and gang-related violence, risk of kidnapping and child trafficking.

"In three southern border provinces children cannot play outside the house because there is random, sporadic violence." Bangkok

"Insecurity and violence in the streets, especially problems of drug trafficking, kidnapping, vandalism ... were identified as the most common violation to the children's right to play in Tijuana and in Acapulco. ... The inclusion of children in the activities of organised crime, linked with drug trafficking and child prostitution, was also identified in Acapulco." Mexico City

"The spread of cluster bombs and mines in various regions of Lebanon from the Lebanese civil war and Israeli wars.... Children do not play in villages but between cluster bombs". Beirut

"Migrant children live in temporary houses which have only space for living, so they don't have space to play. Some of them play on dump sites." Bangkok

"Lebanon has long suffered from multiple wars and lots of its children were denied their right to play." Beirut

Loss of play space

When faced with the lack of safe places to play, it is always easier for responsible adults – both parents and public authorities – to respond by restricting the movements of the children, rather than facing up to the cause of the problem. For an ever-increasing proportion of the world's children this means their options are limited to the home or to specially created and designated "play areas" or "play facilities".



3. Parents' fears

The culture of fear

Children who dare to go out to play, almost everywhere in the world, face very real dangers. However parental fear is not always related to the real risks. This issue is widespread and a major cause for concern in Japan, Europe and North America, where there is detailed literature on the prevalent "Culture of Fear". The culture of fear is particularly problematic in relation to children's play since current research identifies a fundamental role for play in helping children develop the capacity to deal with and respond to the uncertain and unknown, and

manage the stress that this may involve. If all risks are 'managed out' of children's everyday lives, not only will their play experiences be unduly limited, but it is impossible for their play to fulfill this vital function.

"Parents fear that their children will be exposed to risks when they go out."
Mexico

"Excessive anxiety over children's health and safety prevents children from expressing their interests and curiosity in play." Tokyo

"Stranger-danger"

A particular type of parental anxiety is that commonly known as "stranger-danger"; that is, that an unknown person may kidnap the child, or somehow gain access to them in order to sexually abuse or otherwise harm them. The unfortunate truth, however, is that the risk of abduction or sexual abuse by a stranger is very small compared to the risk from people already known to the child, particularly family members.

"Parents think it is wrong to let a child go out to play unsupervised". Tokyo

4. Local and national authorities' play policies inadequate or non-existent

Failure from national policy to local planning

Neither local nor national governments have adequate policies, plans or strategies for children's play. This was seen as just another example of a general disregard for children in public policy-making.

"The most important point is the absence of public policies and strategies affecting the right of the child to play." Beirut

The economics of play

Misuse of public funds destined for play and recreation, due to corruption or merely inefficiency, was identified as a common problem. In the few instances where public funds are available for recreation, there is generally no specific budget for children's play, with the majority of investment going on sports and recreation facilities for adults.

The underlying problem: politicians don't understand play

The failure of public authorities to develop and implement policies for children's play is perhaps an inevitable consequence of the underlying problem that politicians and policy-makers generally have little understanding of play and its importance in human development. Rarely do they recognise play as a human right, or if they are aware of this, they give it the lowest priority.

5. Inadequate spaces or facilities for play

Play in the local neighbourhood is no longer an option

The second most frequently-mentioned theme on the infringement charts (after negative adult attitudes) was the lack of suitable spaces or facilities for children to play. For many reasons already mentioned, the reality for the vast majority of the world's children is that they cannot safely go out to play in the neighbourhoods where they live.

Designated play spaces are failing children

Societies all over the world have defined and designated specific places where children are supposed to play. The commonest types are public parks and "equipped" playgrounds. In relation to these, the consultations identified many specific infringements of the right to play, including: lack of sufficient parks and play spaces, inadequate maintenance of play areas (allowing broken, faulty or dangerous equipment) playgrounds poorly designed with unsuitable equipment, playgrounds not accessible for disabled children, restricted access to parks and playgrounds, and no regulation of parks and public spaces.

"Lack of challenging and attractive playgrounds, dangerous playgrounds, badly-maintained playgrounds, very old playgrounds, uneven allocation of playgrounds, inaccessible playgrounds for children with disabilities." Sofia

"The equipment is old and out of date. It needs regular repairs or it may cause dangers to children." Bangkok

"Adults think that play means building expensive playground equipment, which cannot be played on in the rainy season because it gets dirty and children may get sick, and cannot be played on in the dry season because it is too hot and children may get sick as well." Bangkok



6. Authorities', institutions' and professionals' fear of litigation

The "compensation culture"

In this consultation public authorities' and institutions' fear of litigation was only highlighted as an infringement of the right to play in Tokyo. However the problem is of major concern to play specialists in industrialised countries where a "compensation culture" has developed and where local authorities and other service providers can be sued for compensation if any mishap occurs to a child. In order to minimise litigation suits there has been a trend in some countries toward a standardised repetitious approach to public play areas often resulting in boring playgrounds.

"Landowners fear children's injuries in playing on their land; they fear the parents will sue them for not showing signboards saying 'Don't play here'." Tokyo

7. Excessive pressure for educational achievement

Unhealthy competition

Infringement of the right to play brought about by excessive pressure for educational achievement was identified as a concern in every country.

Excessive hours of study

This academic pressure infringes the child's right to play because it always requires long hours of study, over and above the normal school day.

"Most Thai parents do not see the importance of play for children. They want children to have a tutorial class and compete with their counterparts to get a place in a famous university to get a well-paid job." Bangkok

"Many parents almost force their children to attend cramming schools. ... Cramming schools finish late at night with a load of homework to take back home." Tokyo

8. No recognition of or provision for play in schools

The threat to school play-time

For many children the school playground has traditionally been an important part of their play culture. However, the consultation revealed that here too the right to play is under threat in many parts of the world. Specific infringements identified were:

- No playgrounds or limited play space in schools and pre-schools.
- Where playgrounds exist they are unsuitable and/or in poor condition.
- Little or no play time at school (recess).
- Prohibitions and limitations imposed by adults: "No running", "Don't make a noise" etc.

"Educational policy doesn't respect children's right to play; this appears in the lack of spaces and time allowed for play in school and educational settings". Mexico City

"Schools emphasise studies. For example, children are punished because they take marble to play at school." Bangkok

No more “learning through play”

A related issue, highlighted in several consultations, is the increasing use of formal or traditional educational methods in the classroom that leave no room for a playful approach, and do not take advantage of opportunities for “learning through play”.

“Most of the professionals who work with children have outdated views on children, education and work with children. They use outdated education methods and to a great extent they neglect the role of play in education ... Education through play is not presented in the school programs”. Sofia

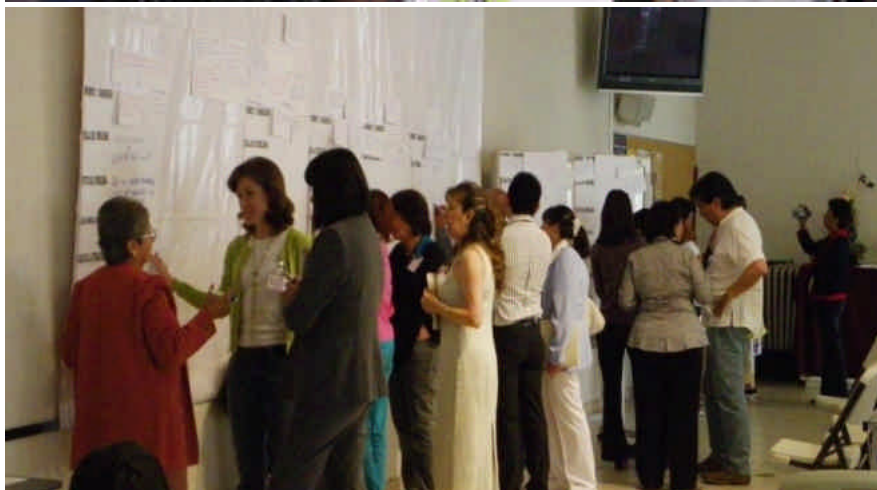
“Thai education doesn't emphasise active learning, but rote-learning, competition and academic success.” Bangkok

“Teachers don't play!” Mexico City



**Consultations
in progress**

◀ **Sofia, Bulgaria**



◀ **Mexico City, Mexico**



◀ **Tokyo, Japan**

9. Structured, programmed leisure time

Too many structured activities too young

For most of the world's children structuring their leisure time is not a problem, as they are burdened with work or study of one kind or another. However this still leaves many millions of children who do have leisure time to fill. With the traditional option of "going out to play" increasingly denied to these children, either by parental prohibition or by the unhappy reality of the environment in which they live, many parents around the world are arranging to fill their children's leisure time with organised activities to keep them occupied, and so fill the hole left by the denial of their right to play.

"The excess of extracurricular activities limit the time available for free and spontaneous play". Mexico City

"Children are in 'education' - learning piano, violin, English, and cramming for entering private schools.... Children are too busy after school to play together. They need an appointment to play together". Tokyo

Programmed activities are not a substitute for play

Children need to undertake freely-chosen, self-directed activity (play) because this supports healthy development in specific ways that complement other types of recreational activity. The "extra-curricular" activities referred to here may be of benefit in themselves, but are used to replace the free play that all children need, and are increasingly being denied.

"Children's lives are being highly directed, overscheduled with tuitions, study or directed extra-curricular effort leaving no time for play. This is affecting children from an early age." Mumbai

"Too many structured activities too young". Johannesburg



10. Technology and the commercialisation of children's play

Computer games replace active social play

The replacement of traditional play activities by television and computer games was identified as an infringement in every consultation except Nairobi. One specific type of play, with limited developmental benefits, is becoming a substitute for the wide variety of play experiences that children require for healthy development. This leads to a reduction in physical play, reduction in social play, loss of children's traditional play culture and loss of playful times shared with parents.

"The increasing time children spend watching television and playing videogames doesn't permit free and collective play." Mexico City

"Electronic games are cheaply provided and their over-use limits the physical, intellectual and psychological development of the child." Beirut

"TV is used to 'baby sit'." Johannesburg

"Free play is distorted as traditional games and toys are devaluated and/or forgotten." Mexico City

"Children spending less time with their parents ... Parents are too busy and are unaccustomed to spend time with their children without the help of media. ... Children spend more time watching DVD or TV programmes than with parents." Tokyo

Violence, addiction and mass-marketing

Lack of adequate government control over the marketing of computer games to children was seen as another cause for concern. A related issue is the addictiveness of computer games, now backed by considerable research from various countries.

"The mass media are converting children into consumers ... as children are a specific target of publicity and the game industry... The private firms that make a profit with these products have economical and political weight." Mexico.

"It is common to play computer games more than three hours a day and do no other activities. ... Adults overlook the addictiveness of computer games." Tokyo

"In slum communities, children spend a lot of time playing in the computer game shops." Bangkok

11. Treatment of children in institutions

The specific additional challenges faced by children living in institutions were identified as separate infringements in five of the consultations. The institutions in question include hospitals, orphanages, sanatoriums, residential centres for children with mental and physical disabilities, and centres for children in conflict with the law (young offenders).

Problems identified were: Staff not aware of importance of play (often unqualified and untrained), staff lacking personal motivation, no play space or unsuitable play equipment in the institutions, lack of control and supervision, inadequate funding and lack of resources. All of these contribute to long-term damage to children's development.

"The children... spend most of the time in the institutions; they can communicate only with children who are in the same institutions and with the people who work with them." Sofia

12. Exclusion, discrimination, segregation and marginalisation

No discrimination: a principle ignored

This theme requires us to face up to a global problem much bigger than the infringement of the right to play. Here we are concerned with one of the underlying principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, that of non-discrimination, found in article 2:

"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 31, like every other article of the Convention, must be consistently applied in accordance with this principle. The right to play belongs equally to all girls and boys of all ages and all races in all countries.

Discrimination and marginalisation of girls

The restriction of play opportunities for girls was noted in several consultations, and in some cases seen as linked to culture and religion. Girls are also more burdened with domestic work and care of younger siblings, and may be more restricted due to fears of kidnapping, trafficking or exploitation. Additional problems identified were gender stereotyping of children's play and gender discrimination in the provision of play and recreation facilities (more investment in sports facilities aimed at boys and young men).

"Discrimination and marginalisation of the girl child exists in all strata of society. Stereotyping of play, less time and freedom to play (for girls), a greater responsibility for home chores including child-minding, restrictions on adolescent girls and early marriage all contribute to this gender discrimination. Religion and cultural values all contribute to a lesser or greater degree." Mumbai

"Through play we exercise our body and mind. We are denied our right to play by being given too much work like taking care of children, washing clothes and plates and cleaning the house, while boys are left to play. We have a big playing ground but no time for play. I like play." Child participant, Nairobi



Exclusion, marginalisation and segregation of children with disabilities

Children with disabilities are segregated and marginalised, their needs ignored and their rights denied in most countries, and this affects their right to play as much as every other aspect of their lives. Many playgrounds and other play spaces are not accessible to wheelchair users and others with mobility needs. The fact that many disabled children live in institutions where their right to play is ignored is discussed in the previous section. Children with disabilities face prejudice and discrimination when attempting to use public play spaces.

"Lack of physical accessibility and inclusion deny the right [to play] to children with disabilities. There is a lack of awareness, ignorance and societal and state apathy towards children with disabilities". Mumbai

Exclusion through racism and other forms of discrimination

- Discrimination and exclusion due to racism (Johannesburg).
- Discrimination and marginalisation of children living on the streets (Mumbai).
- Discrimination against children of migrant workers (Bangkok, Mexico City).
- Children excluded due to social stereotyping, e.g. albinos (Nairobi).
- Discrimination and marginalisation of children living in institutional care (Mumbai, Mexico).
- Discrimination due to social class or religion (Nairobi).
- Discrimination against Indigenous children (Mexico City).
- Discrimination against children living with HIV-AIDS or cancer (Mexico City).
- Segregation and marginalisation of children living in refugee camps (Bangkok, Beirut).

"They are afraid to go to play at the playground, school or temple because they may get arrested for being illegal migrants." Bangkok

13. Poverty and the struggle to survive

This chapter, like the previous one, deals with an over-riding global issue where we are dealing not only with violation of article 31, but with another of the fundamental principles of the UN Convention, namely the right to survival and development set out in article 6:

"States Parties recognise that every child has the inherent right to life. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child."

One of the main ways that family poverty leads to infringement of the child's right to play is its role as a causal factor in the phenomenon of child labour (see next section). However, poverty was cited not only in relation to the problem of child labour, but as a contributing or exacerbating factor in infringements of the right to play time and time again. The message from the Global Consultation is that the child's right to play must be promoted and defended in the context of a wider framework such as the Millennium Development Goals, that can help to address the extreme poverty that intensifies the violation of the right to play in so many countries

"The lack of company and supervision that parents offer to their children because they are occupied trying to resolve the economic situation."
Mexico City

"Parents need to go to work early so they leave children to play by themselves or take care of themselves. In rural areas children are left with the elderly, and with babysitters in the cities. In migrant worker communities or communities of displaced people both in the cities and along the border children are left to play on their own." Bangkok

"Poverty obliges children to work". Mexico City



14. Child labour and exploitation

Working children have no time to play

Child labour was the third most often mentioned cause of violation of the child's right to play. Almost all forms of child labour infringe the child's right to play. There were many references to the long hours many children have to work, and how this leaves little or no time for play. Children themselves spoke of this problem in the children's consultations in Nairobi and Mumbai.

"Working children have too many responsibilities for their age and are not considered as children." Mexico City

"Thirty million suffer from stunted development, poor health, poor psycho-socio-emotional development and lack of joy in being a child." Mumbai

Children's work and exploitation take many forms

As well as formal working situations outside the home, responsibilities within the home also infringe the right to play of millions of children. The way girls in particular are overburdened with domestic chores and required to look after younger siblings has been discussed in section 12. In some countries it is increasingly common for children to take on the full responsibility of a head of household, and children in this situation are rarely able to exercise their right to play.



Part III: A Global Call for Action

1. Why is article 31 forgotten?

Play is not understood or recognised as a human right

For many consultation participants the fundamental underlying problem is one that brings us back full circle to our starting point: the child's right to play is infringed in so many ways in so many places for so many children, because that right is not guaranteed; and it is not guaranteed because it is not understood, acknowledged or recognised, either by the population in general, or by those in authority who carry the public duty as guarantors of children's rights under the UN Convention.

"There is lack of understanding of the concept of Rights in general and of the Right to Play in particular ... and confusion of play with other activities". Mexico City

"The State has paid lip service to children's rights". Mumbai

"The Right to play is not recognised in the Mexican Constitution, and only four of the 32 states of the republic recognise it in their legislation." Mexico City

Children's voices are not heard

If the right to play is discussed at all by adults it is often as an afterthought, or a long way down a list of other rights that are considered priorities. Even adults working professionally in education, children's rights or international development are often poorly informed about the true meaning and significance of the right to play. Children, on the other hand, once they are aware that they have the right to play, are likely to give it a high priority.

Children themselves have the potential to be the strongest advocates, activists and campaigners for the right to play; provided their voices are heard and they are given the necessary platforms and support to put forward their case.

"With no votes, children have no political representation... Children's voices are unheard". Mumbai

"Lack of mechanisms for children to demand their right to play". Mexico City

2. Messages from the Global Consultation

Messages to Governments

Towards the end of each Consultation, participants listed the actions most urgently required by the governments of their respective countries to address the infringements of the right to play they had identified. The following is a summary:

- **Develop a national policy on children's play.**
- **Raise public awareness through media and communication programmes.**
- **Provide training for officials and professionals.**
- **Promote play in schools.**
- **Invest in provision of play spaces and facilities for all.**
- **Protect the right to play of children with disabilities.**
- **Eliminate the worst forms of child labour.**
- **Promote children's participation as activists and advocates for the right to play.**
- **Complete the clearing of landmines and cluster-bombs from affected areas.**
- **Set and enforce standards for toys and play equipment.**

United action for children's right to play

In each Consultation, participants considered the steps they could take towards coordinated action on the right to play in their respective countries. The key recommendations were:

- **Improve networking and inter-organisational coordination.**
- **Monitor infringement of the right to play.**
- **Advocacy for the right to play with Government.**
- **Raise awareness of the importance of play and the right to play with the general public, especially parents and teachers.**
- **Support and strengthen children's own organisations.**

Conclusion

Over 350 adult experts in children's play from eight countries, and over 400 children, participated in the Global Consultations on Children's Right to Play. Between them they identified 115 infringements of the right to play across four continents that cover 14 chapters of the final report.

In conclusion it is important to stress that play is not a public service, much less a commodity. Play is a natural and universal human impulse. Children only stop playing if they are traumatised, abused or have a severe impairment which prevents them. Adults never have to *make* children play, and only rarely do we have to *help* children play. Adults have to *let* children play. In other words, we have to put a stop to the worldwide violation of the child's right to play.

It has been argued in the past, and will probably continue to be argued despite the overwhelming evidence assembled in this report, that many infringements of the right to play are due to underlying, more fundamental social problems: poverty, violence, discrimination, environmental degradation and so on and it is these problems that need to be addressed first. IPA believes this argument is fundamentally misconceived. We believe that poor children, disabled children, girl children, working children, and children whose lives are blighted by war and violence must not be made to wait until their circumstances improve before they can reclaim their childhood and enjoy the right to play. The right to play belongs to them now.



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