

The United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty: Deprivation of Liberty is Deprivation of Childhood #CRC30

- **18 November 2019, 11.30, Room III, Palais des Nations – Geneva**
United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty – United Nations Press Conference
- **19 November 2019, 13.00 - 14.30, Room XXII, Palais des Nations – Geneva**
Official Launch of the United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty – Presentation and Discussion
- **19 November 2019, 18.30-20.30, Intercontinental Hotel – Geneva**
United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty – Evening reception

More than 7 million children worldwide are suffering in various types of child-specific institutions, immigration detention centres, police custody, prisons and other places of detention.

It is a reality that stands in direct contrast to the requirement of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly states that the detention of children must only be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. This means that children should in principle not be detained and States should always look first for non-custodial solutions. While some progress has indeed been made in recent years, the Study highlights a dire need to do much more in terms of deinstitutionalisation, diversion, ending migration-related detention and other measures in order to comply with the Convention.

Children deprived of liberty belong to the most vulnerable, discriminated, excluded and forgotten groups in our contemporary societies. They come from the poorest segments, belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous peoples, migrant or refugee families, to children with mental or physical disabilities, often separated from or abandoned by their parents and forced to living in the streets. These children are victims of abuse, neglect and exploitation by others. Rather than growing up with their families or in family-type settings in the context of child welfare systems, children are detained in institutions or criminal justice detention centres and grow up without freedom.

Since every child has the right to grow up in a family environment, it is the responsibility of States to invest more resources to support families and child welfare systems. Detention of children is counterproductive, highly expensive and damages the health and development of children. Children deprived of liberty are invisible to the large majority of society and their fate constitutes the most overlooked violation of the Convention.

“The fact we are deprived of liberty, doesn’t mean we have no future!” – a child (Global Study)

Childhood is when children develop their personality, their emotional relationships with others, their social and educational skills and their talents. It is evident from the views expressed by children in the Study that for them deprivation of liberty essentially means deprivation of their childhood. From this perspective, the Global Study argues that depriving children of their liberty is a form of structural violence, which States actually committed to eliminate under SDG 16.2. As an initial step, this Global Study thus aims to help ensure that no child is left behind, and in particular, that no child is left behind bars.

“Our societies seem to have forgotten one very simple truth: Children should not be detained, because deprivation of liberty means deprivation of rights, agency, visibility, opportunities and love.” – Manfred Nowak

Many sectors of the society can contribute to implementing the recommendations of the Study. This is why the Global Campus of Human Rights has designed the free MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) “Children Deprived of Liberty: Learning from the UN Global Study”.

The MOOC is aimed at all professionals interested in the welfare of children and learning about the alternatives to deprivation of liberty in the area of: administration of justice (including children living with their caregivers), immigration detention, institutions, armed conflict and national security. Behind-the-scenes interviews with the experts of the Study and cross-cutting issues such as health, gender, disability and child participation contribute to a unique learning opportunity.

The MOOC can be accessed here: www.gchumanrights.org/mooc-un-global-study.

Contacts

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The Global Study in numbers:

- At least 410,000 children are held every year in prisons and pre-trial detention facilities where violence is “endemic”. Many are charged with ‘status offenses’ including truancy, disobedience, and underage drinking. This does not include the 1 million children held in police custody every year.
- Although UN experts have concluded that detention of children for migration-related reasons can never be in the best interests of a child, at least 330,000 children in 80 countries are held in immigration detention yearly.
- Around 670,000 children have been placed by judicial authorities in institutions that meet the legal definition of deprivation of liberty. However, the total number of children in institutions is more than 5.4 million.
- Children with disabilities are significantly overrepresented in detention in the context of administration of justice and institutions.
- The number of children detained in the context of armed conflict and national security has increased sharply, driven by aggressive counterterrorism measures that include detention and prosecution of children for online activity, including posts to Facebook and Twitter.
- Deprivation of liberty aggravates existing health conditions in children and can cause new ones to emerge, including anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and post-traumatic stress. Psychiatric disorders for children in detention can increase tenfold during detention, and detention is correlated with early death among children once released.

The full study can be found online here: omnibook.com/Global-Study-2019/Liberty