

OUR CHILDREN IS THE HOPE OF THE NATION: WORLDWIDE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE MELLENIUM GOAL

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If there is one thing that each and every filipino is proud of, it would be those values and cultural norms that are distinctly and characteristically filipino, especially those relating to family life. Particularly from birth, generations upon generations of filipino children were taught to observe and respect these customs.

One such norm that is markedly filipino is the great emphasis on respect for elders, which is manifested in different ways, such as the practice of greeting elders through pagmamano. Another manifestation is the rule that "children are to be seen and not heard". They are to speak only when spoken to. This would not have been nonrestrictive if it had also been practice of parents and elders to maintain open lines of communication with their children. Often, though, this is not the case. The end result, therefore, is that, generally, until children reach the age of majority (18 years old, as the law now stands), they tend to be passive features of society.

Perhaps, for this very reasons, it should come as no surprise that children remain to be one of the sectors that are highly susceptible to abuse and human rights violations. According to reports and case records from the regional offices of the commission on human rights, human rights violations against minors include: the infliction of physical and psychological harm; economic abuse; abuse of chastity; illegal deprivation of liberty; and recruitment of children as soldiers. In fact, in the country reports on human rights practices released by the us bureau of democracy, human rights and labor for 2007, the philippines was identified as country where problems such as child abuse, child prostitution and trafficking and child labor are prevelant.

In recent years, though, particularly in the last two or three decades, due in great part to advances in technology that translated to easier access to all forms of media and means of communication (television, the internet, radio, etc), the youth are rapidly becoming more assertive and eager to share their views, even political ones. Even primary school children are more in touch with current events. From a very young age, therefore, for better or for worse, they are already forming their own opinions and stance on issues.

This development, understandably, could cause a potential clash between generations. Fortunately, however, the world's perspective on children's participation is developing simultaneously with the growing maturity of the world's children. A clear indication of this development is the advent of the united nations convention on the rights of the child, often referred to as child right's center or united nations convention on the rights of the child, an international convention setting forth the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of

children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important document, made even more remarkable because of its near-universal acceptance. To date, all member states of the United Nations, except the United States and Somalia, have ratified it.

Under the convention, four universal and forward-looking principles were formulated: (1) non-discrimination; (2) best interests of the child; (3) right to life, survival and development; and (4) views of the child. It means that children should be free to have opinions on all matters affecting them, and those views should be given due weight "in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

We must listen to our children to know their views, the problems and their concerns. If we educate and empower our children about their rights, we will help them to eventually become responsible rights-holders and future protectors and defenders of human rights, instead of helpless victims of violations and abuse. From an early age, we have to equip them with the capacity to reason and think for themselves. We have to equip them with knowledge if we are to achieve our vision of a Philippine society where children are protected, nurtured and developed to their full potential through the promotion, protection, fulfillment and realization of their rights.

Parents, elders and people having authority over children have to realize that there are choices that only children can make for themselves. We won't always be there to substitute our judgment for theirs. The best that we can do is to educate and prepare them so that, when the time comes, they will make the right choices.

According to the Universal Periodic Review of the Philippines conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund as of 2007, the country's population is estimated at 88.5 million, of which 38.3 million are eighteen years old and below. We could no longer afford to neglect and ignore 43.3% of our population.

Although the future belongs to the youth, the duty and obligation to ensure that every child is, to quote the preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity" belongs to us today.