

Working towards the promotion of positive forms of discipline and the abolition of corporal punishment to ensure the realisation of children's rights to dignity and physical integrity.

article 19

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THE PARENTING PROJECT

Promoting positive alternatives to corporal and humiliating punishment

by Joan van Niekerk

Are you ever challenged as a parent or caregiver of children? If so, then read on!

In the past three years, Childline South Africa has experienced a significant increase in the reporting of physical and emotional abuse of children. If one looks at the year-by-year comparison of physical and emotional reports of abuse to the Childline crisis line displayed below, it appears that calls relating to both these forms of abuse have doubled over the three-year period.

CALLS TO THE CHILDLINE CRISIS LINE

	2006	2007	2008
Physical abuse	1775	2538	3428
Emotional abuse	2065	2914	4827
Neglect	2109	3356	3883

Many of the calls concerning the physical abuse of children appear to stem from efforts to cope with children's "misbehaviour", rather than as a result of deliberate and intended harm to a child. Much of the physical abuse reported relate to efforts to discipline that were either misguided, or during which the parent or caregiver lost their temper and control, resulting in harm to the child.

It is noted that pre-school children are particularly vulnerable to physical injury when corporal punishment is used, and that this is an age group that parents and caregivers find particularly challenging to parent without the use of smacking and hitting.

Many of Childline's crisis line counsellors have themselves been raised with the use of corporal punishment and in communities where violence is common. Counselling parents and caregivers on how to discipline children without hitting, smacking and other forms of violence is not easy without providing some training in alternatives to corporal and other forms of humiliating punishment. Hence, the Parenting Project began with the intention of developing culturally appropriate parenting materials to be used for the training of Childline's counsellors. However, this project has since expanded into exploring culturally congruent and non-violent positive parenting practices in countries across southern Africa, with a view to creating a much broader application of the materials that will be developed.

As a first step, representatives who volunteered to assist in exploring positive parenting practices from South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe attended a workshop in South Africa. At this workshop the participants developed a format that would be used during the intended focus group discussions with children and parents in these countries in order to explore non-violent parenting practices congruent with their culture.

The participants agreed to divide the focus group discussions with children into two age groups, namely 6 to 12 years and 13 to 18 years. With the younger age group, a decision was taken to also use a story in order to stimulate ideas from them about

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We are already more than halfway into 2009 and, as can be seen from this edition, much has been done regarding advocacy around prohibiting corporal punishment. At an international level, it is noteworthy that the Inter-American Court on Human Rights earlier this year confirmed the obligation of the member states belonging to the Organisation of American States to prohibit all forms of corporal punishment of children. Lorenzo Wakefield highlights some of the key questions addressed by the court on this issue.

This edition also highlights some of the advocacy initiatives and other activities undertaken at a regional level. Joan van Niekerk's article describes the research and focus group discussions that were undertaken in various countries across southern Africa as part of the Parenting Project, which is aimed at promoting positive alternatives to corporal and humiliating punishment of children. The development and awareness of alternative positive disciplinary methods is a key component in achieving a ban on all forms of corporal punishment.

In addition, the Southern African Network to End Corporal and Humiliating Punishment of Children held its fourth annual meeting in May this year. Carol Bower's article lists some of the activities that will be undertaken in 2009 in support of achieving a total prohibition of corporal punishment. Keith Vermeulen provides a brief overview of what transpired at the ninth General Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches held in December last year. His article documents the resolutions taken at the General Assembly, which provides great encouragement for child rights activists in pursuing their goal of ensuring a world free of violence against children. Amongst other things, the meeting also decided that in seeking to protect children, the church needs to incorporate children's issues in their core business and ensure participation from children and youth.

These ongoing initiatives are indicative of the commitment in wanting to ensure that children are indeed protected from all forms of violence in our society so that they may reach their full potential.

Finally, while we sadly bid farewell to Jacqui Gallinetti, former co-editor of *Article 19*, we welcome Lorenzo Wakefield as the new assistant editor.

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their perceptions of positive parenting. In addition, a standard reporting format was produced to assist the facilitators in collecting outcomes from the focus group discussions in a systematic way.

Altogether 30 focus group discussions involving 547 children were held across the countries involved in the Parenting Project. A number of common themes emerged across the different age categories, as well as from the discussions with parents. These included:

- Children themselves, even the youngest ones, acknowledged the need for discipline and structure in their lives.
- Children of all ages experienced that adults sometimes have unrealistic expectations of their abilities and capacities.
- Parents involved in the focus groups had a good academic understanding of the role and purpose of parenting.
- However, parents acknowledged a wide range of challenges which "get in the way" of being able to fulfil this role.
- It was also noted that many children who attended the focus group discussions were not living with their biological parents.

The following comments were made in respect of specific issues:

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN FAMILIES

- Children of all ages requested that parents treat them equally in a household and with consideration of their evolving capacities. For example, a child from South Africa stated, "When my uncle gives his child another chance, but punishes me, it doesn't feel fair and I feel very angry".
- Children want their parents to encourage a peaceful, happy environment in which children are affirmed; they want parents to set the example of what it means to be an adult. For example, a child from Lusaka in the age group 6 to 10 years said that "Aunty needs to be kinder and not always be so angry because that makes us frightened".

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL/CAREGIVER ROLE-MODELLING

- Children were very clear that it is not enough for parents to tell them what to do.
- Parents and caregivers stated too that they needed to lead by example. If parents and caregivers want children to be considerate towards others, they need to treat children with consideration; if they want children to be open and honest, they need to be open and honest in their dealings and interactions with children; if they want children to be respectful and polite, they as adults need to deal with children in a manner that is respectful and polite.
- The youngest children were adamant that parents should not be violent and aggressive with each other so that they (the children) can learn not to be violent and aggressive themselves. A 10-year-old South African child said, "If adults fight, children will fight too".

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

- All the groups involved in the project strongly stressed that communication between parents and children needs to be prioritised.
- Children felt that their parents should listen to them and take what they say seriously.

- Discussion of various issues with children was identified as a way of teaching children about the world.
- Children said that communication is a “two-way street” and therefore parents should also share with their children the problems they face; a lack of communication makes children feel isolated and insecure. This was in contrast to parents and caregivers believing that they should protect their children from knowing about the problems in the family and from creating unnecessary worry.

ESTABLISHING RULES

- All the children, even the youngest ones, understood the need for rules and discipline.
- Parents also need to understand that anyone can make a mistake, including parents.
- Children want to be involved in establishing the rules and the consequences for breaking them.
- Rules should be reasonable and should be equally applied to everyone.
- Rules should be focused on helping children to develop a sense of responsibility, self-discipline and an understanding of the consequences of their actions.
- Parents should set an example for their children by respecting rules and behaving appropriately under different circumstances.
- Parents should operate on the principle of “do as I do” and NOT “do as I say”.

RESPONDING TO MISBEHAVIOUR

- The younger children were particularly adamant that parents give them an opportunity to explain why they misbehaved and to consider the circumstances under which the child misbehaved before responding to their misbehaviour or disciplining them.
- When there are disciplinary issues to be considered, parents should be reasonable and not contradict each other when determining the consequences of the “misbehaviour”.
- Responses to misbehaviour should focus on the child understanding and taking responsibility for his or her wrongdoing, and provide the opportunity for making amends.
- Responses should also be age-appropriate, i.e. parents need to take the age and capacity of the child into consideration.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AFTER THIS PHASE OF THE PARENTING PROJECT

The focus group discussions, although held with the intention of gathering information from children and parents, had much value for the participants. The parents strongly emphasised the need for parenting support groups and access to information on child development, as well as positive alternatives to physical punishment. Parents realised that they needed to gain a greater understanding of the rights of children, and their own rights, linked to their responsibilities.

The following recommendations emanated from the focus group discussions:

- The focus group format and discussions should be developed further so that it can be used beyond researching the views of children

and parents on parenting, and should be expanded to facilitate the development of positive parenting practices and positive responses to children’s misbehaviour.

- Regular training and awareness-raising opportunities should be provided for parents.
- The information gained from the focus groups should be used to develop clear and culturally appropriate messages around positive parenting, and user-friendly materials should be developed to promote positive parenting.
- Materials which facilitate communication, participation, the involvement of fathers, and mutual activities and interests for parents and children in their homes and family environments should be developed.
- Messaging to parents and caregivers of children should be balanced with regard to the promotion of the rights and responsibilities of children, as well as the rights and responsibilities of parents.
- The messaging should be empowering and focus on what is positive, not on the negative.
- Information on child development (physical, emotional, social and cognitive) should be readily available in an accessible format and in all the different local languages.

In order to take the Parenting Project forward, Childline South Africa plans to:

- Establish a reference group comprising a range of experts from the southern African region, which will interact regularly through telephonic and e-mail communication.
- Produce materials to support parenting (as outlined earlier) which will commence with inputs from the reference group.
- Expand and develop the existing focus group outlines as a base for parenting workshops and training opportunities.
- Develop training materials to support parenting.
- Provide training on the use of these materials, initially to the organisations involved in the data collection phase and Childline counsellors who deal with parenting issues on the crisis line.
- Link with current initiatives in Africa looking at and working with parenting issues in order to facilitate the sharing of research and the development and distribution of positive parenting materials.
- Continue to participate in forums, conferences and meetings in order to highlight the negative consequences for children experiencing violence of any kind in their lives, and encourage a positive and supportive environment in homes and communities that will result in reducing and ultimately eliminating violence in the broader community.

Childline South Africa is grateful to Save the Children Sweden for funding this project, as well as to Carol Bower, Child Rights Consultant, for implementing it with Childline South Africa. ●

THE INTER-AMERICAN COURT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

confirms the obligation of the Organisation of American States to prohibit corporal punishment of children

by Lorenzo Wakefield

On 29 December 2008 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (hereafter referred to as the Commission) requested the Inter-American Court on Human Rights to deliver an advisory opinion on whether the use of corporal punishment as a method of disciplining children was incompatible with the provisions of the American Convention [namely articles 1.1 (non-discrimination), 2 (obligation to adapt domestic law in line with the American Convention), 5 (right to humane treatment) and 19 (rights of the child)] and the American Declaration of Human Rights and Duties (particularly article VII – rights to protection for mothers and children).

QUESTIONS POSED BY THE COMMISSION

The Commission posed the following questions to the court:

1. Whether these provisions mentioned, together with the “best interest of the child” principle, oblige the member states of the Organisation of American States (OAS) to regulate paternal authority and protection of children in such a way as to protect them against all forms of corporal punishment; and
2. Whether member states are obliged to adopt legislative and other measures for the purpose of ensuring that children are not subjected to corporal punishment as a method of discipline within the family, school or other institutions.

The Commission’s arguments and reasons were based on the recognition of the child as a legal person, as well as on the special obligations to protect children established in international law and jurisprudence (such as by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the European Commission on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights). The Commission nevertheless highlighted that there is no standard in the Inter-American context which clearly states that it is necessary to forbid corporal punishment of children because it is incompatible with their human rights. The Commission also argued that while most countries in the northern hemisphere have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), few of them have fully adapted their internal laws to the standards established by the Convention.



The Commission expressed that an opinion by the court on the issue would have a positive effect on eradicating corporal punishment and will allow for legislative reform and other actions to be promoted in the member states.

THE COURT'S JUDGMENT

The court acknowledged that various international instruments have taken steps to ensure the protection of children from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment. It also acknowledged that 34 of the OAS member states have ratified the UNCRC.

The court reiterated that the UNCRC obliges State Parties to ensure that no child shall be "subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or to any form of physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation while in the care of his or her parents, legal guardian or any other person who has the care of the child". The court thus recognised the provisions of the UNCRC as binding on member states. In giving more meaning to the rights contained within the UNCRC, the court highlighted the work done by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The court stated that in General Comment No. 8 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child concluded that "eliminating the violent and humiliating punishment of children is an immediate and unqualified obligation of the State Parties".

With regard to the first question posed by the Commission, the court referred to an earlier judgment it made on the "Juridical Status and Human Rights of the Child". In this judgment the court stated that article 19 of the American Convention requires State Parties to "adopt all positive measures required to ensure protection of children against mistreatment, whether in their relations with public authorities or in relations among individuals or with non-government entities". It is in interpreting this article that the court held that "children have rights and are not just an object of protection". This would in turn mean that children have the same rights as all human beings, which therefore leads to the conclusion that, just like adults, children have the right to be protected against all forms of corporal punishment.

In answering the second question posed by the Commission, the court once again referred to the same judgment mentioned above. In this judgment it also argued that in relation to the application of article 2 of the American Convention, it considered that "according to the provisions

set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children's rights require that the State not only abstain from unduly interfering in the child's private or family relations, but also that, according to the circumstances, it take positive steps to ensure exercise and full enjoyment of those rights". It went further and argued that the obligation to protect children from mistreatment is one of those rights enjoyed by children. Thus, State Parties are to take positive measures to ensure that these rights apply to children.

The court went further and held that the obligations of article 2 of the American Convention implies that State Parties should:

1. Eliminate any norms and practices that violate the guarantees provided under the Convention; and
2. Enact positive measures to ensure the observance of those guarantees.

In the end the court indicated that there was no need for it to issue an advisory opinion as sought by the Commission, since the questions posed by the Commission had been answered by analysing the existing jurisprudence of the court and from the obligations issued by other international instruments ratified by member states.

CONCLUSION

Even though the court denied the Commission their request for an advisory opinion, it did aid in addressing the Commission's questions regarding the banning of corporal punishment and the protection of children, and confirmed that this is an obligation of all the member states. It did this by recognising that children are bearers of rights and by accentuating that OAS member states that are signatories to the American Convention and Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should enact legislation banning the use of all forms of corporal punishment.

In the end, this judgment took the step in confirming that children in the OAS member states should be protected from all forms of corporal punishment. ●

A BRIEF REPORT

on the 4th annual meeting of the Southern African Network to End Corporal and Humiliating Punishment of Children

by Carol Bower

Representatives from organisations working on the issue of ending corporal and humiliating punishment of children in Botswana, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia attended the fourth annual meeting of the Southern African Network, held in Pretoria, South Africa, on 11 and 12 May 2009.

With eight sessions spread over two days and a wide range of activities to report on, as well as planning for the next period, the meeting was intensive and productive.

CONTENT AND DISCUSSION

The first session on day 1 was devoted to updates from the six countries represented in the Network. Numerous challenges that were being experienced in all the countries represented were raised. These included:

- Questions and discussion on how to encourage the peer support of African governments and bring about pressure between governments.
- Exploring the options for litigation. It was agreed that a "strategic subgroup" be set up to write a paper on the advantages and disadvantages of litigating on the issue of corporal punishment.
- The fact that even when corporal punishment is prohibited in schools, it is still practised there and the law is frequently not enforced. Members present indicated that they were having difficulty facilitating the inclusion of relevant modules in teacher training curricula. In this regard, a subgroup was mandated to consider material and activities which would facilitate the implementation of the ban in schools.

- Issues around child participation were also raised, and it was agreed that existing resources on how to consult with children should be consolidated for the Network, and a subgroup to manage this process was established.
- The need for accessible and user-friendly materials to be made available, and for these to be uploaded on the Network's website.

During the second session a document setting out the advocacy process towards the prohibition of corporal punishment in South Africa was launched.¹ The meeting was informed that this document inter alia highlights the gains and challenges of an in-country advocacy process to prohibit parental corporal punishment, focuses on efforts to create cohesion and consensus, highlights a significant shift in the social environment, and emphasises the importance of having a group focused solely on the issue of discipline.

Session 2 on the first day also provided an opportunity for participants to review activities undertaken by the Network in 2008, which included:

- The preparation of a document on treaty body reporting processes for the relevant countries;
- The development of a simplified version of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment 8;
- The Network's submission to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in November 2008;
- The Network's presentation to the All Africa Conference of Churches;
- The development of the Network's website; and
- Circulation of resources related to faith-based support.

The third session on day 1 focused on two African initiatives relating to positive parenting. The one managed by Childline SA looks at parenting in southern Africa, while the other initiative that is managed by International

¹ This is available at info@rapcan.org.za.



PARTICIPANTS HARD AT WORK ON DAY 1

Clockwise from far left:

Carol Bower - independent consultant; *Joan van Niekerk* - Childline South Africa; *Keith Vermeulen* - SACC, South Africa; *Aliness Mumba* - ZINGO, Zambia; *Tebatsho Hule* - CRAFT, Botswana; *Judith Mulenga* - ZCEA, Zambia; *Emily Ruhukwa* - Ditshwanelo, Botswana; *Tasneem Sterris* - SAHRC, South Africa; *Ismail Bawamia* - Office of the Ombud for Children, Mauritius; *Paula Simbine* - Save the Children Mozambique; *Berta Fumo* - Rede Came, Mozambique; *Daksha Kassan* - Community Law Centre, South Africa.

Not shown:

Peter Kanunka - NRC Zambia; *Sam Waterhouse* - RAPCAN, South Africa; *Deidre Kleynhans* - Save the Children Sweden; *Ulrika Soneson* - Save the Children Sweden; *Nomzamo Dlamini* - Save the Children Swaziland.

No country in Africa has prohibited corporal punishment in the home.

Child Support and the African Child Policy Forum looks at parenting from a continental perspective.²

The Network's website was launched during the fourth session.³ The presentation and discussion focused on what the website's logo and colour should be, links to other useful sites, how the "contact us" function should operate and using the site to build the support base for the Network, as well as updating and maintaining the site. Additional resources to be added to the website were also identified.

Day 2 comprised presentations and discussions on global and regional developments in Africa, strengthening engagement with the faith-based sector and planning activities for the next period.

Session 5 was on global developments and commenced with a report-back on the first global workshop held by the Save the Children Alliance in Bangkok during May 2008. It was reported that the workshop proved to be successful in achieving its purpose of building knowledge and skills to achieve legal reform, and to build capacity to undertake legal advocacy.

This was followed by a presentation on the current global status of countries that have to date prohibited all forms of corporal punishment. The presentation highlighted that currently 24 countries have by way of

legislation prohibited all forms of corporal punishment in all settings. Two countries have court rulings which have either prohibited corporal punishment in the home or removed the legal defence of reasonable chastisement. At least 23 countries have committed to full prohibition, or are in the process of debating new laws which will achieve the ban in the private sphere, or are contemplating court actions to challenge the practice. The presentation highlighted further that no country in Africa has prohibited corporal punishment in the home.

The sixth session was a report-back on regional developments, focusing on the submissions made to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches.⁴ It was reported that following the submission made by the Network, the ACERWC agreed to develop guidelines on positive discipline to be issued to all State Parties, and indicated that further communication would be made to all State Parties urging them to prohibit corporal punishment of children. The presentation was followed

⁴ These submissions are available at <http://www.rapcan.org.za/sanchpc/default.asp>.

² Further information on these initiatives can be obtained from bower.carol@gmail.com or www.parentinginafrica.com.

³ The website can be accessed at <http://www.rapcan.org.za/sanchpc/default.asp>.

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Resources on how to consult with children should be consolidated.

by a discussion on how to maintain further contact with the ACERWC and strategies for lobbying the committee members. Recommendations were made that the Network engages the Chair of the ACERWC and lobbies individual members. In addition, organisations belonging to the Network should apply for observer status so that they may frequently attend the Committee's sessions.

The second-last session on day 2 focused on strengthening engagement with the faith-based sector and hence included a report-back on the meeting of the All Africa Conference of Churches held in Maputo during December 2008. The presentation was themed "Resolving tensions between children's rights and theology in Africa" and drew links between human rights and faith, while highlighting the mechanisms available for the enforcement of rights.

This was followed by a presentation on the process that the Zambia Interfaith Networking Group on HIV/Aids (ZINGO) embarked upon in its engagement with the faith-based sector since 2006. The presentation highlighted that initially the engagement with the faith-based sector was challenging in that the rights-based approach to development, especially with regard to child rights programming, meant a paradigm shift for religious leaders. Also, issues relating to the disciplining of children were difficult for the religious leaders to deal with. However, it was stressed that faith-based institutions are always willing to work with civil society on children's rights and preserving children's dignity; moreover, regional religious bodies that are open to working on issues of children's rights are a great entry point for the Network members.

In the final session of the meeting a new member to serve on the editorial board of *Article 19* was elected

by the Network. Following a voting process, Emily Ruhukwa from the Ditshwanelo Centre for Human Rights in Botswana was confirmed as the new member.

PLANNING FOR 2009

Following the conclusion of all the formal presentations and intensive discussions, the last part of the meeting was devoted to planning activities for the rest of this year.

Tasks allocated to various members inter alia included the circulation of relevant documents and making contact with high-profile supporters. Support from international organisations for positive parenting and non-violent discipline is to be sought, and linkages between the Network and child-focused civil society networks in Africa facilitated.

The meeting also decided that efforts to bring new members into the Network are to be initiated, with efforts directed at Lesotho, Namibia, Angola, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Communication with the NGO Advisory Council and the Special Representative to the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children will also be pursued.

Various resources will be developed, including the translation of certain documents into Portuguese, a toolkit on child participation, and a parenting skills document. The Network's *Position Statement* will also be updated.

A decision was taken to host a strategic meeting for key role-players in the region to discuss the advantages and disadvantages with regard to litigation on the issue. In addition, a media strategy is to be developed by the Network.

To ensure that members of the Network are kept abreast of developments and can be informed early in the year which activities they should be undertaking, it was decided that the next meeting will take place in Pretoria during mid-February 2010. ●

RESOLUTIONS

from the 9th All Africa Conference of Churches' General Assembly

by Keith Vermeulen

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) held its ninth General Assembly during 6-12 December 2008 in Maputo, Mozambique. Two representatives from the Southern African Network to End Corporal and Humiliating Punishment of Children (SANECHP) had the opportunity to attend and do presentations at this meeting. This article presents a summary of what was discussed and the resolutions taken.

The AACC is an ecumenical fellowship representing more than 120 million Christians through 173 member organisations spanning 39 African countries. This forum works towards making a difference in the lives of the people of Africa through ministries of advocacy and maintaining a presence at continental, regional and local levels.

In 2007, the AACC chose as its advocacy theme: "The Church Awakens: New Hope for the African Child" in order to focus its ongoing advocacy efforts on the plight of the African child, since it regards this as one of the most serious and pressing social issues facing this continent.

At the ninth Assembly, an entire afternoon was assigned to the "Children's Track" continuing the AACC's intention to highlight its ongoing advocacy for the African child. The afternoon allowed space for the following:

- A presentation by a panel of young people on different issues of concern (including sexual abuse and trafficking);
- Input on the biblical and theological mandate of ministering to children;
- The launch of the recent AACC publication on children's rights and ministries entitled "*Do Not Stop Them*"; and
- A panel discussion on different child rights issues.

In their presentation the young people made an urgent and strong appeal for adults to listen to them and also hear them in their homes and within families. They also called on the Church to "give space to children" and for church leaders to participate in the resolution of social conflict where children were being abused in homes and at schools. They questioned the

possibility of "a better world" where the abuse of children threatens to spiral into ongoing abuse of children by adults who were abused as children. As one of the children put it, "if we listen and talk and deal with abuse, the word will spread that ... children need love, affection and protection ..."

During the panel discussion on child rights issues, Keith Vermeulen (a member of SANECHP) presented broadly on the notion that children's rights are human rights, as children are human too. He also drew the meeting's attention to the fact that although child rights activists and church workers spoke different "languages", the vision of rights activists for a world based on human dignity and equity is shared by the Church. Churches, however, need to dialogue more on where and why they believe their religious rights, traditions and practices conflict with human rights - and in this case children's rights.

Carol Bower then presented the Southern African Network's submission, calling for support from the AACC for the prohibition of all forms of corporal and humiliating punishment in all spheres of a child's life, including within the home. The submission presented the context of corporal and humiliating punishment within the reality of global and continental violence against children. Secondly, it noted that corporal punishment by parents - as recorded in the *All Africa Special Report on Ending Legalised Violence against Children* - is still legalised in all African States. Finally, the submission highlighted the serious effects of degradation and resentment that corporal and humiliating punishment have on children.

While there was no time for greater interaction, the Steering Committee of the General Assembly took on board several recommendations that will affect the AACC's further advocacy on ministries, practices and the rights of children.

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THE WAY FORWARD AND RESOLUTIONS ON ADVOCACY FOR THE AFRICAN CHILD: A SUMMARY

The meeting decided that, in order for children's issues to be addressed, the Church needs to incorporate children's issues in their core business and ensure participation from children and youth. A "way forward" document (which may be accessed at www.aacc-ceta.org) was prepared and is intended to assist and stir the AACC and its member churches into action on behalf of children. Drawing on the various inputs and calls for action, the document also calls for a subsequent report-back to the Assembly every five years. What follows below is the substance of the conference resolutions taken (however, the final version may contain certain textual variations).

1. Biblical mandate

The Church in Africa, like all churches, is given a biblical mandate to minister to children. The ministry of the Church is to empower children to attain their fullest, God-given potential physically, psychologically, spiritually, socio-culturally and economically. This will prepare them to become agents for transformation in their communities, to the glory of God. The document challenges the Church to realise that the failure to minister to children is an omission of its Great Commission.

2. The voice of children

Through their participation in a plenary session of the ninth General Assembly, the children demonstrated that they have the capacity to engage adults in meaningful dialogue. Therefore, the Assembly resolved that children should be regular participants within the AACC and its member churches.

3. Ambassadors to the future

The Assembly recommended that the AACC member churches select two children - a boy and a girl, aged between 8 and 12 - to serve as child ambassadors for a period of five years. It further recommended that the National Councils select at least two child/youth delegates to the AACC General Assembly in 2013.

4. Parental education

The Church acknowledges that the family is central to the stability of any society. Therefore, the Assembly resolved that its member churches be encouraged to creatively integrate "Christian Parenting" (or modules thereof) into lay and clerical training.

5. Child rights

The Assembly resolved that all AACC member churches follow up and act through their National Councils to ensure that:

- a. Their country has an action plan to implement the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- b. Their country is implementing child welfare and protection strategies as contained in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;
- c. Their country has child protection legislation to protect the rights and welfare of all children;
- d. Their country has passed legislation that outlaws all forms of "corporal and humiliating punishment" of children.

6. Day of the African child

The Assembly emphasised that 16 June, the Day of the African Child, be highlighted in church calendars. Churches were challenged to promote this date, to share messages to and from children, and to provide an opportunity for children and youth to lead worship.

7. Children as change agents

The Assembly acknowledged that children can be positive agents of change. Therefore it appealed to the AACC member churches to view children with respect and to design church programmes with children in order to set a positive example for all programmes with children in the community.

8. Harmful practices

The Assembly noted that harmful practices include, amongst others, female genital mutilation, early marriages, child labour, infanticide, incest, maltreatment of children with disabilities, and pornography, including negative media influence, and resolved that these be strongly condemned. The Assembly proposed that the AACC and its member churches utilise every opportunity to advocate for an end to all practices that negatively affect children.

9. Vulnerable children

The AACC noted that all children are vulnerable and that many children live in environments of extreme vulnerability. Vulnerable children include orphans, sexually abused children, trafficked children, street children, children influenced by witchcraft, children living in child-headed households, children involved in conflict and children affected and infected with HIV/Aids. Member churches of the AACC are challenged to discern how and where they should respond to the causes of child vulnerability in their areas. Plans for mitigating the causes of child vulnerability should be implemented and reported on at the next General Assembly.

10. Audit of child vulnerability

The Assembly proposed that the AACC commission an audit of child vulnerability in five countries, examining its causes and developing strategies for reducing risk and building resilience. The audit report should be presented at the next AACC General Assembly in 2013.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This opportunity opened the door for further interaction between the Southern African Network to End Corporal and Humiliating Punishment of Children and the AACC member churches, as well as the National Councils of Churches. Specific issues and opportunities for cooperation may be found in the sharing of resource materials on parental education, children's rights, the Day of the African Child and the proposed audit of the causes of children's vulnerability. Perhaps the greatest and most exciting possibilities lie in plotting a "way forward" over the next five years, especially in advocacy activities aimed specifically at outlawing corporal and humiliating punishment of children in Africa. This should

be done together with the churches as a major stakeholder able to influence thought and practice in faith and cultural communities on the continent. ●

- The participation of Keith Vermeulen and Carol Bower as resource persons from SANECHP at the AACC's ninth General Assembly was made possible through funding received from Save the Children Sweden that included sponsorship of the "Children's Track" tea table. Keith represents the South African Council of Churches - a member of SANECHP - which in turn is a member of the AACC.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AT A CROSS-ROADS: A Global Conference on Child Rights and Research

Children's Rights at a Cross-Roads is a global event organised by the Childwatch International Research Network, the African Child Policy Forum and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, in collaboration with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty, and others. The main objective of the conference will be the promotion of a framework for the global collaborative development of a knowledge base for the realisation of children's rights. The conference will provide an arena for reflection and dialogue across various professions and disciplines where

experiences and ideas will be shared, and the role of research in the development of policies and practices that safeguard children's rights will be discussed.

Dates: 30 November - 2 December 2009

Venue: United Nations Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

See: <http://www.childwatch.uio.no/projects/global-conferences/un-child-rights-convention-anniversary-conference-2009/> for more information.

Research strengthens children's rights and helps to build better futures for children.

How can researchers, policy makers, practitioners and policy makers work better together?

How can children influence the agenda of child research?

Children's Rights at a Cross-Roads

A Global Conference on research and child rights

30 November - 2 December 2009, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Save the Dates!

THE 20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Children's Rights at a Cross-Roads is a global event organized by the Childwatch International Research Network, The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, in collaboration with the UN Committee on the Rights of the

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Childwatch
INTERNATIONAL
RESEARCH NETWORK

The African Child Policy Forum

UNICEF
Innocenti Research Centre

Source: <http://www.childwatch.uio.no/projects/global-conferences/un-child-rights-convention-anniversary-conference-2009/childwatch-flyer-nett%5B1%5D.pdf>

The objectives of the conference are to:

- Identify strategic dimensions of a research agenda for the global realization of the rights and aspirations embedded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Establish a framework for collaboration between policy makers, practitioners and academics for the improved use of research in the implementation and monitoring of child rights.
- Develop models and mechanisms for collaboration with young people in the design and development of participatory research and child-led research initiatives.

The conference will be an **arena for reflection and dialogue** across professions and disciplines. Policy makers, researchers, young people and practitioners are invited to present their experiences and ideas and to analyze and discuss the role of research in the development of policies and practices that safeguard children's rights.

Through **presentations and group discussions**, representatives from different professions and backgrounds will examine the status of child research and present recommendations to how the three objectives can be reached.

To stay informed about the event, please register at:
info@crcanniversary.org

Photo by Jigge Lie

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