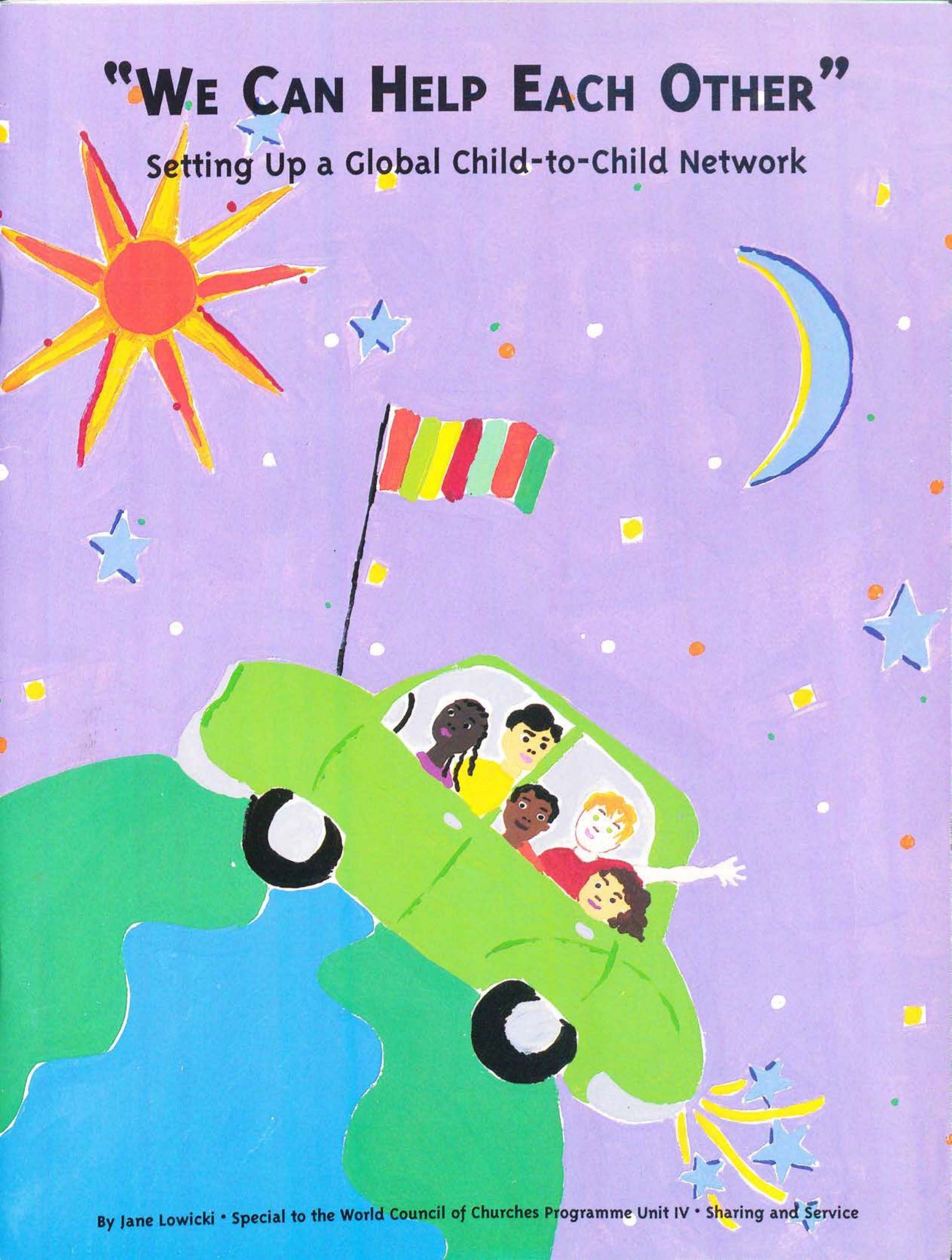
"We Can Help Each Other"

Setting Up a Global Child-to-Child Network



By Jane Lowicki • Special to the World Council of Churches Programme Unit IV • Sharing and Service

WCC DB1996/27

"We Can Help Each Other"

Setting Up a Global Child-to-Child Network

World Council of Churches
Programme Unit IV - SHARING AND SERVICE
150, route de Ferney P.O. Box 2100 1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland
Telephone (++41-22) 791.6111
Fax (++41-22) 791.0067
TELEX 415 730 OIK CH

By Jane Lowicki
Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program, NCCCUSA
Special to the WCC Programme Unit IV - Sharing and Service

Based on discussions at the World Council of Churches Consultation on Children, 19-21 May 1996

Art direction and design by Carol Gorgun

Illustrations unless otherwise noted by Eliza Gran

Photographs by Jane Lowicki

Special thanks to the all of the children and translators participating in the consultation. J.L.

Printed by Kutztown Publishing Co., USA. August 1996

Contents

Hope is Alive When We Help Each Other 5

Message From Myra 8

Just the Facts 10

Child Labor 13

Child Prostitution 19

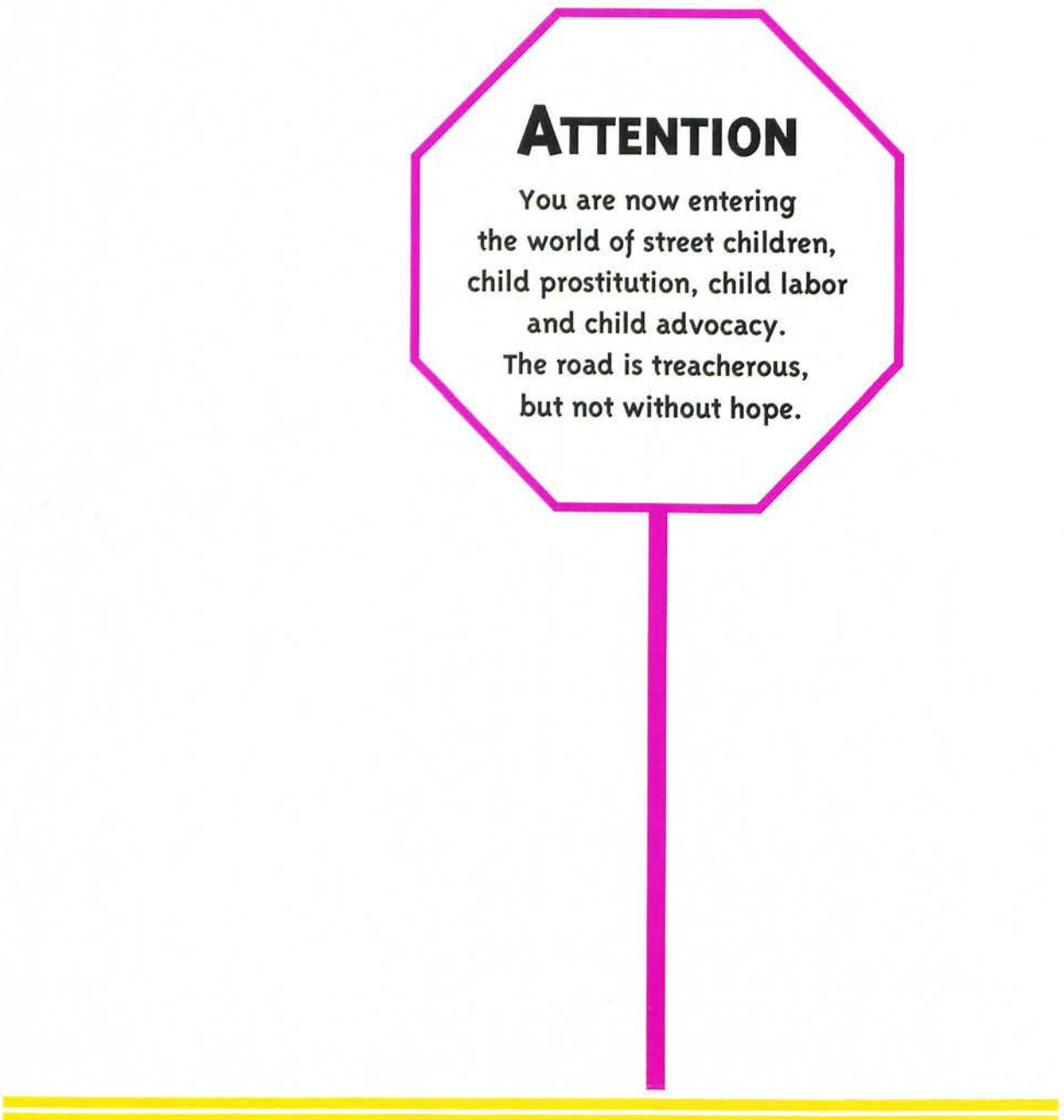
Street Children 25

Child Advocacy 37

Action Plans 45

Consultation Participants 51

Contact Information 56

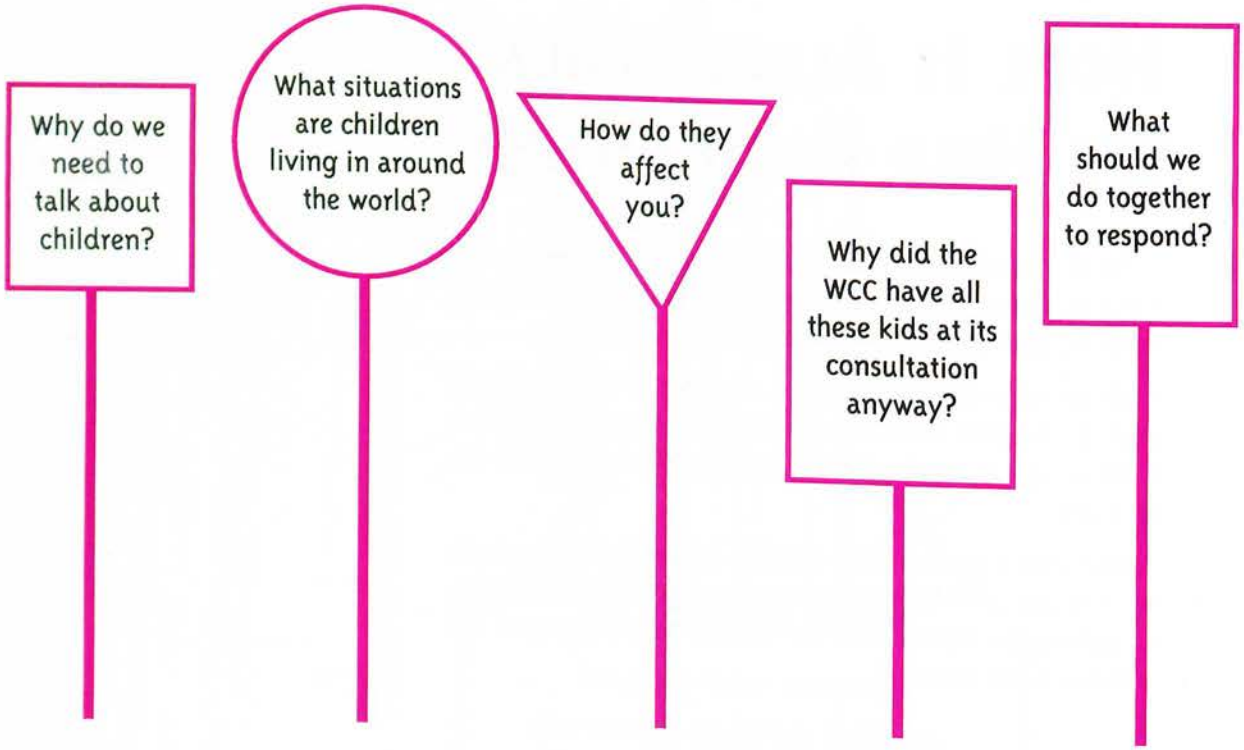

ATTENTION
You are now entering
the world of street children,
child prostitution, child labor
and child advocacy.
The road is treacherous,
but not without hope.

Hope Is Alive When We Help Each Other

Thank you for joining us, and have a seat right here. You had better fasten your seat belts as we begin a sometimes hair-raising ride into the lives of the world's children.

We are nine children from five continents who the World Council of Churches invited to participate in its Consultation on Children 19 - 21 May in Geneva, and we'll take turns in the driver's seat.

Wait, don't get up! We're better drivers than you might think. You see, we'll be taking you on a trip through our own lives, looking at experiences we've had ourselves, and we know those paths by heart.



We and more than 20 adults, some of whom work with children and some of whom work with churches concerned about children, spent a good deal of time finding answers to these questions, and we'd like to share those answers with you.

You may be surprised. Although the scenery, languages and faces may change, many of the problems will be the same.

poverty	**abuse**	**neglect**
drugs	**crime**	**prostitution**
disease	**war**	**hopelessness**

The signs are urgent and plain as day. The world has failed to protect and value children in vital ways.

But by the end of the journey, you will hopefully see, that life for children does not have to be all pain and misery. There is hope. That's you and us, too. We can help each other to bring about change.

We are organizing children's networks, mobilizing other children to help one another solve our own problems when no one else seems to understand or care. But we can't change the situation for children alone. We need the help of adults and other children who care like you.

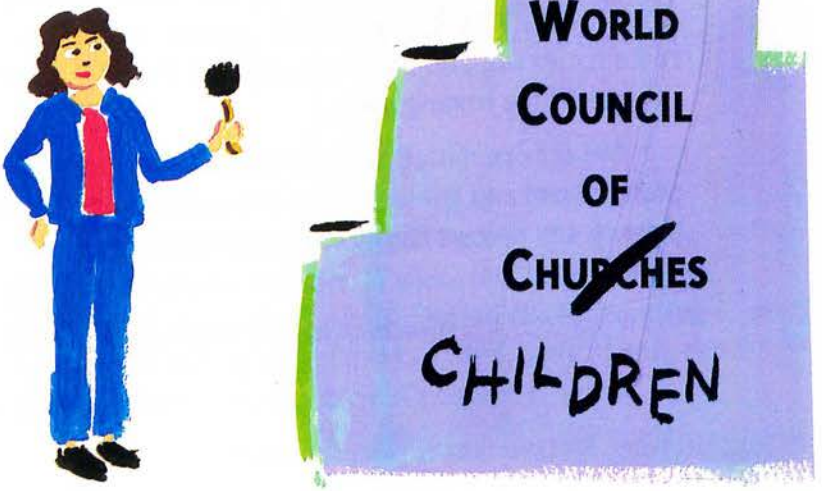
We came to the WCC with stories to tell and specific suggestions and requests for action on behalf of children – development of a children's network related to the WCC; awareness-building among children and churches; mobilization of the WCC's member churches along with other religious groups and partner agencies to become more involved with children's issues in concrete ways; international advocacy and more!

The fate of the world's children is everyone's concern. Children are the present and the future, representing all of life's possibilities.

Coming together we widen the circle – children with children, churches, teachers, as wide as it can be – all joining together to change the course of history.

At the end of the road, with kids at the wheel, safety, dignity, education and good health for all children can become real. With support from the WCC, its member churches and you, children should prevail.

Forget flat tires, overheating or an empty tank. We'll get out and push for a better future for all of us. Hang on, and together we'll begin to give tired wheels a crank!



"We're happy to make pit stops to help with the changing face of the WCC and its constituency."

Message from Myra

The consultation on children was a very different kind of meeting for the WCC. The children who came to the meeting were the chief actors, child advocates speaking for themselves on behalf of their peers. Back home they are working with networks of other children, raising awareness about the issues of street children, the exploitation of child workers, child prostitution and other forms of abuse.

They have challenged us to think differently about the experiences of children and to augment church support for children, particularly in areas in which they are already working. They are an example to the adult world.

We hope this document will accomplish several things:

- Become an active expression of the WCC's solidarity with children, following up on the Unit IV Commission's mandate to make "excluded and marginalized children" a priority for WCC networking and advocacy.
- Invite readers to engage in a plan of action which works with children and stresses support, advocacy and education.
- Act as a tool for children working to build their networks and for churches to raise awareness about children's issues and the children's movement.

This document focuses on three issues of urgent concern to children, but there are many more – child soldiers; orphans of war; refugee children; girls in war zones; children with AIDS; female infanticide; female genital mutilation (FGM). Those issues will also be at the center of the WCC's work with children in the coming years.

We are committed as a World Council to promoting child protagonism and children's organizations and to supporting them in any way we can to carry out their cause.

Myra Blyth
Director, Unit IV, Sharing and Service, WCC

The Force of Tenderness
Solidarity Through Love

We must build a solidarity based on love.

A real basis for justice and human rights.

A basis for struggle on behalf of children and
all human beings.

The discourse of love has been made into a discourse
of weakness.

We must recuperate the social strength and force
of tenderness.

Our capacity for love and tenderness is a human quality
for the new century.

We would speak in the most beautiful tones,

Burning in defense of the rights of children,

Willing to make mountains move.

Love powerful enough to cancel the sexual abuse of children.

Strength to end the exploitation of working children and
to change completely

The domineering thinking which looks down on children
of the streets.

That the forces of the spirit in our midst and in us would
transform our weaknesses into strength.

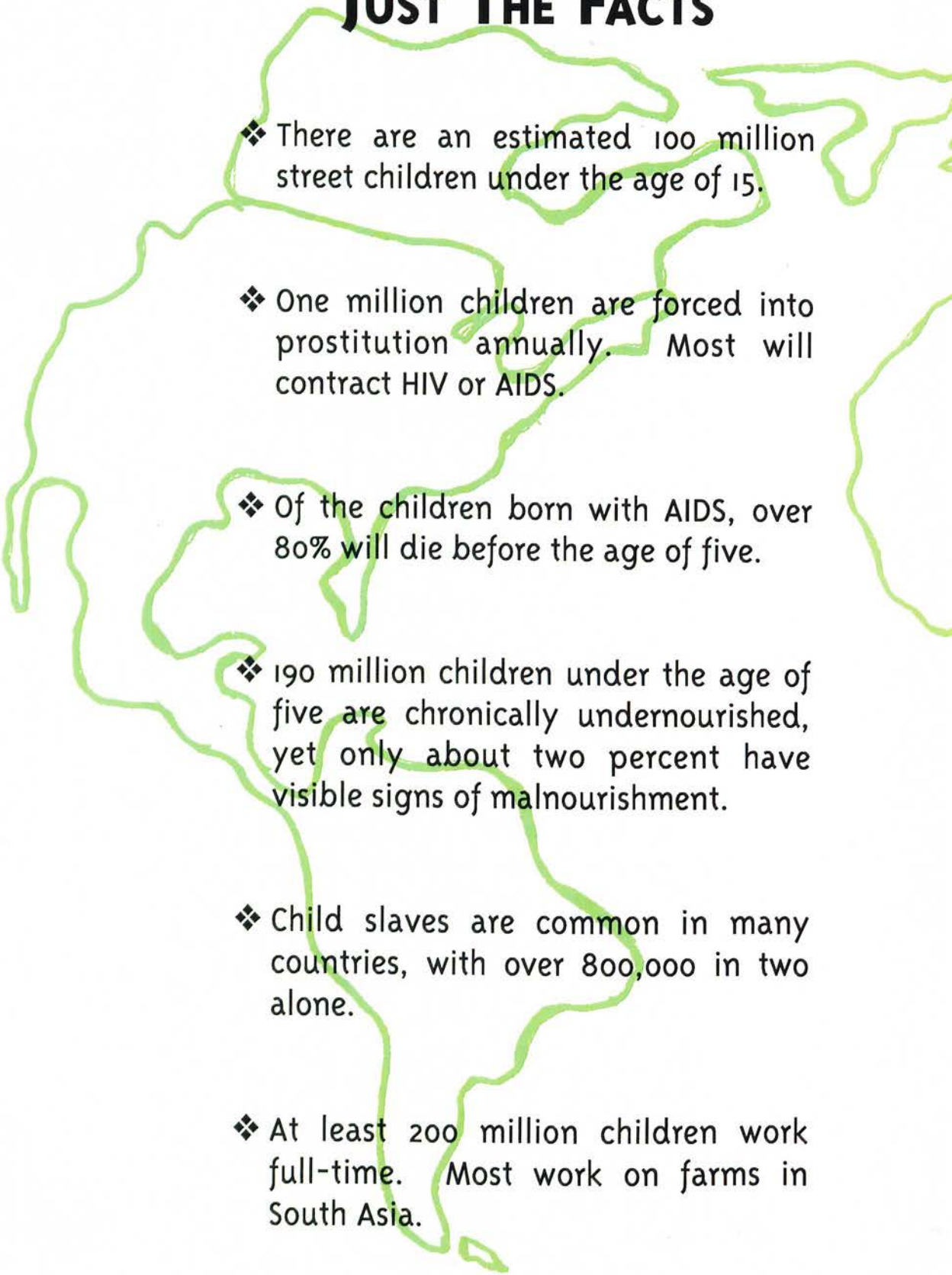
That our intelligence would be God's wisdom.

— Adapted from May 20, 1996 worship led by
The Rev. Alejandro Cussianovich

"The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice."

— Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 13.1

Just The Facts



- There are an estimated 100 million street children under the age of 15.
- One million children are forced into prostitution annually. Most will contract HIV or AIDS.
- Of the children born with AIDS, over 80% will die before the age of five.
- 190 million children under the age of five are chronically undernourished, yet only about two percent have visible signs of malnourishment.
- Child slaves are common in many countries, with over 800,000 in two alone.
- At least 200 million children work full-time. Most work on farms in South Asia.

"The effects of global, social and economic changes today have dramatic consequences on the daily life of children and adolescents, as well as on their future. Marginalization, abandonment, abuse and exploitation of children and other forms of violence are increasing worldwide. Children and youth are victimized by poverty and illiteracy. They are vulnerable in war and conflict situations. In all these situations, the girl child can also be victimized because of her sex...

When children's dignity and rights are violated, God is violated. The right of children to healthy physical, mental, social, cultural and spiritual development is also enshrined in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child."

— From "The Needs and Rights of Children,"
WCC Working Group on Children

Child Labor

I am Vidal. I'm 16, and I come from Peru.

I've worked in mines, in agriculture, at home helping my family, and I've also been working helping others.

For me, working is not only a necessity, it's a right – part of how children learn about society, build self-esteem and find a place for themselves in the world. The desire to work is natural; you are born with it. When we children work, it teaches us to confront life. It's a self-education. It's also a way to contribute to our families and communities for their survival. There is dignity and value in our work, but too often, there is also exploitation and abuse.

Millions of children work full- or part-time jobs, and we are some of the most vulnerable in the workplace. We have not traditionally been viewed as individuals with rights, and have been easily exploited. We are considered expendable by profit-seeking employers and given tasks unsuitable for our age and physical ability. Many of us work long hours in unsafe and unhealthy conditions in sweatshops, on farms, in the streets, in brothels and factories – many workplaces. Our level of stress is tremendous, and we are often deprived of some of the most important aspects of childhood – recreation and formal education.

Our work is also devalued. Sometimes we are underpaid or not paid at all. Sometimes we are beaten, harassed or killed if we object to our treatment or try to organize. Some of us are given dangerous tasks to perform, putting us further at risk. Some of us are sexually abused.

Laws governing child labor do exist, but in many areas they go unenforced. Those making money off the exploitation of child workers often have strong political influence that is hard to break. So, the exploitation of children in the workplace is widely accepted. Even as we move into the 21st century, child slavery still exists in many parts of the world.

Children may not realize they are being exploited and abused or that they have rights. They feel mostly powerless trying to respond. That's how it was for me working in the mines in Peru.

...the exploitation of children in the workplace is widely accepted. Even as we move into the 21st century, child slavery still exists in many parts of the world.

Gold Is Tarnished by Exploitation in Peru

My family is very poor, but our community is rich in spirit. I have two brothers and one sister.

One time, my family faced a very difficult economic situation, and my father left home to find work. For a long time we didn't know where he went. My sister left home for the city to look for work and to finish her studies, and my brothers and I were left to take care of our mother.

The situation was so bad that when I was 12, my older brother and I went to the Mucumayo mine to look for jobs and also to try to find our father. The distance from my village to the mine is two days on foot. It's quite a long journey with no communication possible between home and our destination. In the rainy season, it is very difficult to go back and forth. There are hardly any roads, and it is very very muddy. You have to cross a dangerous bridge called Taxili, which could fall down at any time.

I think they confused our skill at doing things as children with our real strength to carry out our job.

When we arrived we both found jobs, and we found our father. We learned that he was earning quite a lot of money, but he never sent us a penny. He was spending his money with other people, but not even a penny went to us. That was very hard for us.

Our job was carrying and pushing minerals and loading them into cars to be carried out of the mine. We worked from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., about 10 hours in the mine with time for a break. We only ate rice and farina — every day. Once a month we would get a meal with a small piece of meat or fish. Most adults and some adolescents suffer a lot of sickness. When they cough, they spit out blood from black lung disease.

We received a small salary, and we were allowed to take residual minerals to a special place where it's crushed in the hope of finding gold. You may get some gold, but it's not a sure thing. You have to be lucky. It was the same for adults and children.

I think they confused our skill at doing things as children with our real strength to carry out our job. We're young and agile, very quick, but we are not very strong. They say, "Quickly, do such and such!" without considering that we are not so strong. Agility is one thing and physical capacity is another.

Many children work in the mines, but it's hard to tell exactly how many. There are many openings to the mine, many veins with different names and owned by different people. Working all day and far apart from other miners in other mines, it is hard to tell how many children are working, maybe 50 total.

Also, since we're spread across a large area, we're not so aware of how much we're being exploited. For me, it took a long time. It was when I became a member of the organization called MANTHOC (Movimiento de Adolescentes y Niños Trabajadores Hijos de Obreros Christianos/Movement of Adolescent and Child Workers, Children of Christian Workers), that I began to really think about my job and the way we were working. I realized then that I was being abused.

Now, with other children in MANTHOC and with other organizations, we fight for a better world with equality. The rich despise us as unintelligent. It's not true. They are the ones provoking our poverty.

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY CHILDREN IN THE WORKFORCE?

Some of the major factors contributing to rising numbers of children in the workforce include:

- Poverty and consumerism - Both create the need to work.
- Underdevelopment - Unrealistic structural adjustment programs imposed on countries by international lending institutions which leave countries in debt and less able to improve the living conditions of their inhabitants.
- Attraction to urbanization - Movement of people from rural to urban areas becoming part of the urban poor and dispossessed.
- Broken families - Death of a parent, divorce, remarriage and lack of support for single parent households.
- Family planning - Need for increased planning options and education.
- Unemployed parents.
- No implementation of laws on child labor respecting the human rights of children.

"Child Labor is Not Just a Third World Thing."

Child labor issues are often associated with the so-called "Third World" countries, but children also work in industrialized countries. The need to protect the rights of children in the workforce is a global issue.
In Germany, 58 to 60 percent of children in school work part-time jobs.

- Negative images of children as dangerous and expendable leading to abuse.
- Few organizations working on behalf of, or by, children.

DO CHILDREN AND WORK MIX AT ALL?

" . . . the exploitation of childhood . . . constitutes the evil the most hideous, the most unbearable to the human heart . . . "

—Albert Thomas, first director of the International Labor Office (1919–1932)

Some proponents of child rights believe children should not work at all. Others believe that children should be able to work as long as they are not exploited and the work does not interfere with their development in other areas, such as formal education. Distinctions are also made between children (under 12 years), adolescents (13–15 years) and young people (16–18 years).

The children of Peru and the children at the consultation do not believe in the abolitionist concept. In Peru, we have some very controversial legislation called El Codigo de los Niños y Adolescentes (Child and Adolescent Code) in which the government supports a child's right to work under certain conditions.

Here's what the Convention on the Rights of the Child says:

Article 32:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
2. States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:
   a. Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
   b. Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
   c. Provide for appropriate penalties of other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

One of our friends from Egypt at the consultation told the following story about what happened to a child named Gamal from Cairo.

Gamal's Story: Confronting Brutality in Egypt

Gamal's parents separated when he was two, and from then on, he lived with his father, stepmother and four stepbrothers.

Gamal's father suffers from an emotional disorder and is not able to work. As a result Gamal was apprenticed into a carpenter's workshop when he was 8 years old. He worked for five Egyptian pounds per week.

One day earlier this year, Gamal went to work but returned home at mid-day with the workshop owner. The man had accused him of stealing his calculator. Gamal's father told the man that Gamal was "like your son," and asked him not to be harsh with him.

Gamal and the owner left, and Gamal did not return home that night. The next day, another worker told Gamal's father that Gamal was very ill. The father found his son lying on a piece of wood covered with a white cloth. As it turns out, the owner of the workshop had hung Gamal from the ceiling of the workshop and had hit him severely with a stick on the head. Gamal pleaded with the man and told him that he had not taken the calculator, but the owner persisted in beating him. The owner also beat Gamal's 11-year-old stepbrother Sameh, whom Gamal said might know where the calculator was.

Gamal's father took his son to Al Mataria Hospital while Sameh was cared for by his mother. Gamal's stepmother filed a complaint with the police, and the hospital informed the police too. The owner of the workshop was then arrested. The case has received a great deal of media attention.

Unfortunately, Gamal remained in intensive care with a severe brain hemorrhage for months.

Child Labor in Egypt

Statistics vary greatly on the number of working children in Egypt. According to one estimate, 7.6 percent of Egypt's total workforce consists of children under the age of 15, or 1.3 million out of 17.3 million workers. Children have traditionally worked in agriculture. This work is largely perceived as non-exploitative. Accidents on the job are common but not adequately documented.*

** CAMPAS, Labor Force Sample Survey 1988 cited in Child Labor in Egypt, Ahmed Abdalla, 1996.*

Child Prostitution

I'm Marie-Louise. I'm 18, and I'm from Cameroon.

More than 1 million children around the world are forced into prostitution every year.* The sheer horrors experienced by the individual girls and boys who make up this astronomical number can barely be expressed. The physical and mental scars suffered by children exploited in the sex trade as prostitutes, in pornographic literature, movies and shows are debilitating and irreparable.

Some children turn to prostitution as a means of survival. Others are kidnapped by people trafficking children or are sent to brothels by relatives to make money for their families. Some are tricked into prostitution, having received a promise of another type of job.

Girls are primarily affected, but boys are also at risk. Men make up the vast majority of the customers. Some of the children are enslaved and some are treated as indentured servants who can almost never repay their "debt" by working in exchange for room, board and a small, if any, payment. Worse, in an age of AIDS, generations of children are losing their lives to the deadly disease through unprotected sexual contact. The low status of women and girls in most societies makes them even more susceptible to sexual exploitation and abuse.

A World Apart in Cameroon

When I was younger, I myself was a victim of prostitution. I am the oldest of six children. My father is a violent person. He used to beat everyone in the family, my mother, the children. He's really, really violent.

My parents divorced, and I was the only one to take care of my young siblings. My father remarried four times after the divorce, so four different women passed through the house. These women definitely didn't like us. For them, nothing we did was right. As punishment we were not allowed to have food or to go to school. We were hit with sticks, were allowed no leisure time, or we were left to ourselves with no support or affection. We were lonely and bitter.

* *World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children brochure, UNICEF.*

The life of a prostitute is very inhuman. It's sexual abuse with little to gain. It's violence in all its forms: intimidation, sexual abuse, corporal and spiritual abuse. It's the humiliation of humanity.

In this situation, I was forced into the street looking for security, and as a means to survive, I turned to prostitution. I worked to provide my young brothers and sisters with what they needed to live and to make sure I could pay for school fees and supplies for myself and my brothers and sisters. I suffered a lot in this situation because I had to get that money through prostitution, under very difficult conditions.

The life of a prostitute is very inhuman. It's sexual abuse with little to gain. It's violence in all its forms: intimidation, sexual abuse, corporal and spiritual abuse. It's the humiliation of humanity. You are no longer human. You are a subject, an object of this treatment.

In the end, I became pregnant. I was 15. At my age, everything became more difficult. I was abandoned by everybody, my parents, my friends, my peers. I was really marginalized. My friends no longer saw me as a peer, but as something else, not a human being, something else.

I didn't know what to do. There was no way out. All doors were closed, and there was no exit to reach anywhere. Still, I decided I was determined to keep my child, to find survival for myself and look after my child. My own mother wanted me to abandon the baby and give it up for adoption because I was not in a position to maintain myself. So, I was separated from my mother in another way because I refused to abandon my child. She was angry and refused to see me.

I reached a state where I wanted to kill myself, but because of my baby, I didn't have the courage. By chance, I happened to come to know the organization La Main Dans La Main, (Hand in Hand), that helps children, and I went to their office. Thanks to their support, I received help and regained hope. It's important to give children the means to face the future.

A LAW FOR PROTECTION AGAINST SEXUAL ABUSE

Article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child says:

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

a. The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;

b. The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;

c. The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

WHAT LEADS TO CHILD PROSTITUTION?

Child prostitution is the most blatant and pernicious kind of child exploitation. But it stems from the same causes that lead to children on the street and child labor. Economic pressures, disintegrating families and insufficient advocacy on behalf of children are all causes for this gross exploitation of children. More specifically:

- Poverty - With few options and skills to earn money, some children turn to selling their bodies. Sometimes they are sold into prostitution. In some societies, girls are sold by their families in order to make money. Others are tricked into prostitution.
- Gender - In many societies, girls have fewer options than boys. They are denied education and have poor-paying jobs. In addition, the abuse of girls is abetted by society's tacit approval of objectifying females.
- Lack of sex education - Sexual abuse can be fostered in places where sex isn't discussed and children aren't told how to protect themselves from exploitation.
- Corruption - In many areas, law enforcement officials not only ignore the problem, they profit from the exploitation. Some are bribed, others actually traffic children for use in prostitution or pornography rings.

Reprinted from "The Child," Kenya

**We are all equal,
men and women,
girls and boys.
A woman is a very
special creation of
God;
men should not ruin
her life by raping her.
I am appealing to all
peace-loving citizens
of Kenya
to make a bold step
and stop this
horrible practice.**

By Grace Ngugi
Hospital Hill Primary School
12 years old
Nairobi

Reprinted from "The Child," (the official newsletter of the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children), # 3, April 1996.

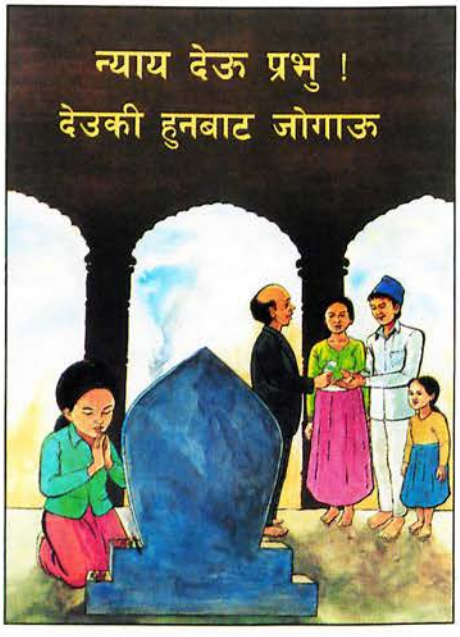
"Give me justice, oh Lord, save me from being a Deuki!"

What are the Risks for Girls in Nepal?

I'm Astha. I'm 15.

In my country Nepal, we face several serious problems:

- Girls are sold by poor families into prostitution, primarily to India.
- An open border between Nepal and India makes trafficking of girls to the booming sex trade in India relatively easy. Up to 7,000 Nepalese girls are trafficked each year, and about 20 percent of all girl prostitutes in India come from Nepal and Bangladesh.*
- Girls forced into prostitution who contract AIDS are deemed useless to the sex trade, and they are expelled. With little infrastructure to deal with the crisis and shunned by society, they lose hope, and many become suicidal.
- Sexism and strong gender roles leave girls fewer opportunities to attend school. When there is a choice, boys are sent to school instead of girls. Girls remain home.
- Cultural practice in some places dictates that young girls are sold to rich families to be offered to temples as prostitutes. The girls are called Deukis. Once a girl becomes a Deuki, she cannot marry. There is nothing else for her to do but become a prostitute. Her children will become prostitutes, too.



UNICEF

* *"Growing up in Bombay's Brothels," ECPAT Newsletter, #15, January, 1996, pg. 9.*

Sex, Tourism and Impunity

I'm Monica. In my country Brazil and many others, the sexual exploitation of children is a crime which goes largely unpunished. Tourists engaged in sexual activity with children are some of the major culprits. Male pedophiles, seeking youngsters to fulfill their sexual appetites pour millions of dollars into the illegal sex trade, and many in law enforcement are corrupted by the profits.

Thousands of young girls and boys forced to work in conditions of virtual slavery contract AIDS and other diseases spread internationally through the sex industry.

While Asia continues to experience the brunt of this problem, other parts of the world, including Brazil, are devastated by the sexual exploitation of children. Nearly a half million children work as prostitutes in Brazil. Sex tourism exists in many Brazilian cities including Natal, Fortaleza, Recife, and Salvador. Girls as young as seven are involved. In some places, child prostitution is linked to drug addiction and drug trafficking. Virgin girls are even sold at auction like animals.*

I work with young women involved in prostitution, and I have a message for men from the "First World." Don't think you can come to Brazil to have fun with our women! All over the world, public campaigns are needed to let the perpetrators know their actions with children are criminal and that they're being watched. Punishment must also be pursued, but that is not so easy. As it is now, in Brazil, many young girls have nowhere to turn for help. If foreigners are caught, they can afford to pay off the police. The girls are unprotected, abused, swindled and sometimes killed and forgotten by society.

Governments, the tourism industry, the media and the general public must work together to monitor the situation and to strengthen law enforcement. One woman at the consultation who works with children in Kenya said that the risks of retribution for speaking out are great. She said that a force against impunity must be developed.

...a force against impunity must be developed.

* *ECPAT Newsletter, #16, April 1996, pg. 4.*

Street Children

We know personally that there is a reason behind every child who ends up living on the streets. Once there, the only positive aspect of life is a sense that "at least I'm the boss of my life out here." But that feeling is hollow because you quickly discover that, on those mean streets, everybody's trying to be the boss. The older kids, the police, the drug dealers, the pimps — everywhere more and more people are trying to take advantage of you, outsmart you and demean you to take the little you've got.

You can find friends along the way, but help from others is hard to come by. The risks are numerous. You work hard on the streets to stay alive or just to escape the troubles you're fleeing. You dream about going home for good, but you know you cannot. You steal and fight and maybe get high. Sometimes the police want to kill you as if you are a rat instead of a human being. You have no rights, and you feel like the only place for you is out of place.

Running Just to Stand Still

I'm Paulo, from Portugal. I'm 16 years old.

People think all street kids are in the big cities, but I started out in a more rural area of Portugal where my family lived. I lived all day and all night on the street. I did not go home anymore because I was afraid I would be beaten by my stepfather. I was forced to steal bikes and other things and to beg. It was a sad life because I really wanted to go home, but I gained a lot of experience on the street.

I was ten years old when I started living on the street full-time, but I started running away when I was five. When I was three years old, I couldn't talk because I had been beaten so much. Then I lived with my godfather, but he threatened to kill me, and so I lived with another relative. People thought I was crazy, but I knew I was not crazy.

My stepfather was a beast who drank a lot. Sometimes I would be sleeping in bed, and he would come and beat me. Once he hit me over the head with a large knife and fractured my skull. I needed 30 stitches. My mother loved me, and sometimes she tried to stop him. He beat her too, and she would run away.

The Portuguese police say, if the Brazilian police have a right to kill children on the street, so do they...

I have six brothers and one sister. When I left the house, some of them wanted to leave too, but I knew that wouldn't be good. We were hungry and would have to steal. Sometimes my parents also forced me to steal for them.

Since I already knew I would never receive anything good at home, I started to leave home for one or two days at a time. By the time I finally left altogether, it was not new. When I left, I found new friends and learned new things. When I returned home, my stepfather would ask how much money I had from the street. My mother would count it and sometimes it would be correct and sometimes not. When it wasn't, he would beat me. If I tried to eat at home, he would spit in my dish. He would say, "You want groceries? You want food? If you have to eat, you have to buy it."

Sometimes men would approach me and my younger brothers and ask us to go places with them. We were 8, 10 and 12 years old. When I told my mother, she just said, "Make a lot of money."

The police in Portugal are sick. They caught me stealing one day and picked me up. They always insulted me, called me bad names, and they threatened to kill me. It's so easy to die on the streets, POW!, that fast. The Portuguese police say, if the Brazilian police have a right to kill children on the street, so do they; if the Brazilian government doesn't act against the violence, then they have a right to commit the same violence in Portugal. Really sick.

When I ended up in court, they said I needed education. Pastor Andreas invited me to his home. Now I live with him, and things are much better. I'm going to school again, but people look down on me. That's not fair. Sometimes I have good grades, sometimes not. People used to think I was having a good time on the street, carrying on, but I was not having a good time at all.

I don't really have any fears anymore, but I'm very sad because I miss two friends of mine. One died when he was hit by a car while he was riding his bicycle. The other is in an institution. He was abused too, like me. It was very sad because we were always together. I feel very lonely sometimes, but thanks to God, so much is better now. I don't have to steal, and I have everything I need. I feel safe.

Carried to Safety

I am Andrew, from Papua New Guinea. I'm 16 years old.

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), children all around the country have a problem. When they leave school after Standard Six, (their school years before high school), there's no support to help them continue their studies into high school, so they go to the streets. Gangs are in the streets. When the kids go there and don't find anything to do, they get involved in those gangs and start abusing drugs and alcohol. Some go into prostitution.

Some have homes to go back to and some don't. They live in places that are dark, like under the streets. They sit there and smoke and drink and have fun. They do anything they want to do. Girls and boys are there, and they form small groups of their own. Some around 10 years old will go around together. Those who are 13 to 16 will be together and those 17 and older have their own groups too. They are in the same gang, but they have their own groups.

I started going around with them when I was 11 or 12, getting drugs and alcohol, and messing up my life. In PNG, there are highlands and coastal lands. The highlands are lush and cold. Marijuana is planted there, and it supplies the cities, everywhere.

Only one fifth to one fourth of students reaching Standard Six in PNG go on to high school. When I finished Standard Six, I didn't know what to do. At home, my father worked, but it wasn't enough to sustain us. So, I went around with other boys breaking into houses and stealing to earn my living. Some parents know about this, and some don't. But normally, they will not stop you. They know you're going to do whatever you like, drink, steal. They think, "It's your problem."

I have two brothers who are still on the street, doing drugs and drinking. My sister's okay. She's married. She's a Christian. She's cool. But my brothers are still out there. Once, two of the leaders of my gang were shot by police. There's a lot of violence out there.

Somehow God called me out of the darkness I was in. I was filled with hatred. I just wanted to get rid of something inside and beat people and steal from them. Now, my life is filled with the love of God, and I just want to love people.

"It has been helpful for me to know that it's not only in Brazil that the problems of street children and child prostitution exist. We need to work together on a poster campaign to combat child prostitution. We also need more meetings like this."

— Monica, 17, Brazil

"In Latin America, an ecumenical network for children already exists. I can see this spreading to Africa, Asia and around the world from this meeting. It has been very helpful to share experiences from all over the world, to enrich ourselves and gain commitments from the WCC."

— Vidal, 16, Peru

"Much more can be done to stop the selling of guns and drugs and to address the issues of street children, child labor and child prostitution. Increased training is needed for pastors, encouraging them to work on these issues with children and communities."

— Lamont, 15, USA

"I would like to see the WCC work to help bring NGO's, governments and the media together to help children. I am particularly concerned about child prostitution."

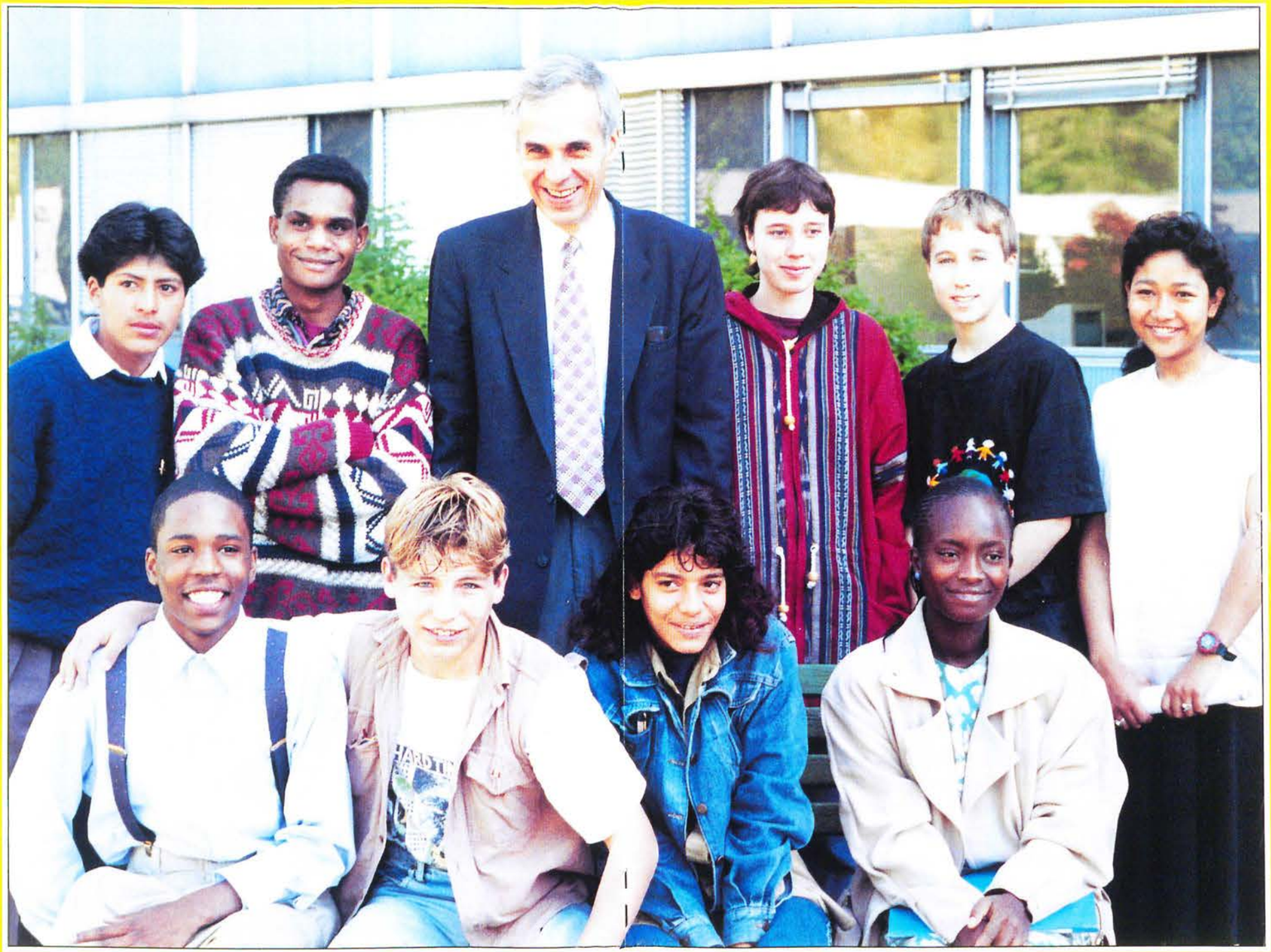
— Marie-Louise, 18, Cameroon

"The children's organization I work for in Nepal mobilizes children to spread awareness on children's issues and to push our governments into compliance with the Convention on The Rights of The Child. This network is further extended by coming together with new friends here in Geneva. WCC has begun to play a key coordinating role."

— Astha, 15, Nepal

"If the WCC begins to work more closely with children at the local level, better responses to the needs of children will occur."

— Caragh, 17, Canada



Here we are in Geneva with the Rev. Konrad Raiser. We are, from left to right, standing, Vidal, Andrew, Caragh, Craig, Astha, sitting, Lamont, Paulo, Monica and Marie-Louise.

"The WCC and churches around the world have an unbelievable amount of power. The WCC has to be willing to use its power on behalf of exploited and abused children."

— Craig, 13, Canada

"It's important to talk about the real conditions in which children are living. If we can all come together to work to improve children's conditions, then maybe we can also do something to influence governments."

— Paulo, 16, Portugal

"The problem for children is not just economic or physical, it's spiritual. Churches are not putting their arms around the kids. They need to comfort and welcome them. Kids need love and to know that God remembers them."

— Andrew, 16, Papua New Guinea

"This has been a very important beginning. You have expressed issues not often heard in the churches. You have underlined the urgency of the problem and have manifested convincingly through your experience and competence that children need to take the lead. This is different from what most adults think - that you're not in a position to know how to respond. Ultimately, it's you who know best.

Churches must become more aware about how little they know about the world in which children live today. Most responses are not appropriate to what you're experiencing. It needs a radical overhaul. You will be important teachers to help the WCC learn how to move in this new territory. With your help and that of your networks, we will learn how to do better. Take with you the WCC's basic commitment of solidarity."

— The Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary, WCC

The change in my life began one day when I stole a bike. I was riding it down the road at about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. All of a sudden a car full of drunken people speeding down the road came at me. The car hit me, and somehow, as I was up in the air, it felt like I was just carried to safety, and I ended up falling beside the road on the grass. I got up and took off because I thought the people were going to come after me. I was 14 then. I couldn't understand how I survived.

A Christian brother I had met told me that God's grace had delivered me from danger. This really troubled my heart. I had so many thoughts about the grace of God that I started going to church, and somehow I ended up with a new and better life. It is possible to change your life with help. My poor brothers...

I believe now that sharing the Word of God with kids can help transform their lives.

In Jesus I found there is always hope. There is always a future in Jesus. There is prosperity not disaster. On the street, kids just ask themselves, "Why was I born into this world?" They don't know why, and they just try to get along. I believe now that sharing the Word of God with kids can help transform their lives. The Gospel is strong in PNG. It's changing people's lives.

Kids need hope and something to do that will help them grow. They need to earn a living. They need education, skills training, food and affection. We need to set up networks to help them. More churches must wake up and start putting their arms around the children.

Facing Difficult Choices

I'm Monica, from Brazil. I'm 17 years old.

I was a street girl in Recife. The young people and the kids in the streets in Recife are there because at home, they don't have anything to eat. They have three choices. They can go and work for a rich family and risk suffering abuse. They can go out and try to find some kind of work in the street, or they can turn to prostitution.

These are the choices facing thousands of Brazil's children and teens who come from poor families whose parents are without work and without food. In my own case, my mom did not have a profession or a regular job, and she couldn't give me all that I needed. So, I went out to look for ways to survive. This is the way it happens too, if there is no school in the neighborhood where you live.

If I had chosen to work for a rich family, my salary would have been low, and I would have been violated. I didn't want to be victimized by violence there, so I preferred to live in the street and work with marginalized people. I call this "work" because we were earning our living with our stealing and other activities.

Many kids get involved in prostitution. They make money, but sometimes they are not paid. They can't denounce non-payers because many are foreigners who bribe police with their money. Besides that, prostitution is a crime.

My job was to help drug traffickers. I also sold drugs sometimes, but mainly my job was to tell drug dealers when police were arriving. Over time, the police found out what I was doing, and one day they came after me. I was at my mother's, where I returned once in a while, and while I was sleeping I heard a sudden knock at the door. It was the police.

My mother's place is in a slum, where most of the street kids are from, and the police just barged in. They immediately came to me and my friend and started hitting us saying, "Now you're going to die." When they asked about the drugs, I said I didn't know anything about it, but they just continued hitting me and then began to hit my brothers and sisters.

When the police break into people's homes, they just start hitting the people as if they have no right to defend themselves. They don't want to hear that our families don't have any money or that we are abused. It's as if we don't have a right to talk, as if we're not human, but just garbage from society.

[The police] don't want to hear that our families don't have any money or that we are abused. It's as if we don't have a right to talk, as if we're not human, but just garbage from society.

The police finally left my mother's after telling all the neighbors they were taking me to jail. I couldn't move. I thought they were coming back, but they didn't. My mother said I couldn't return home anymore. So, I took my things and left. The drug dealers I worked with were outside. They had power over the police because they had what the police wanted — money. They were angry with the police for breaking their promise not to go after any of their workers. They paid them, and the police left, but I had already been beaten up.

I had heard about the Passing Center, a home for street girls, so I went there. At first, I didn't want to stay there long. I had to get used to it, but I knew the police were right behind me all the time. When I told the dealers I didn't want to con-

tinue trafficking drugs, they said I was playing with them and that they would kill me if I ever returned home again. So, both the police and the dealers were after me. They even came to the Passing Center once.

Now I live in a special home that the Passing Center has for street girls when they cannot return to their families. I work with other girls, counseling them, and I have been trained as a paramedic. I hope one day there will be no more drug dealing and that jobs will be created for parents of children who live under these conditions.

Killing Children on the Streets of Brazil

In Brazil, police kill children on the street. There has been some attention paid to the problem of sex tourism in Brazil, but the systematic killing of children by police has not slowed down. Thousands have been killed and only once was an officer sentenced for killing a group of children. People with good social status never get punished. They justify their actions by saying, "Better to kill them today, and avoid delinquency later as adults."

An armed forces study on street children in Brazil said that by the year 2000, there will be 15 to 20 million street children. The armed forces believe this will be a problem for society because the children might begin to organize. This attitude leads to more killing of children. They're right, we do need to organize, but for a better future.

I hope one day there will be no more drug dealing and that jobs will be created for parents of children who live under these conditions.

WHAT SENDS CHILDREN TO THE STREETS?

- Poverty, unemployment and family disintegration - Parents or family members do not have the means to earn an adequate living to meet the needs of children.
- Abuse and neglect - Homelife is so physically or psychologically harmful to children they are forced to leave home to find safety. Drug or alcohol abuse in the home is often a contributing factor.
- Lack of education - Little or no access to education cuts children off from opportunities.
- Urbanization - Societal support is insufficient to meet the needs of growing numbers of urban poor.
- Prejudice and lack of hope - Systematic marginalization of poor, minority, indigenous, or transient inhabitants leaves children with limited opportunities.

PUSHED BEYOND MANY BOUNDARIES:

Street Children Need Protection on Many Fronts

The global problem of street children represents a breakdown on many fronts. Here's what the Convention on the Rights of the Child has to say about many of the rights that are violated in the lives of street children.

Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity...

Article 33

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and pyschotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.

Article 40

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.

North America Has Kids in Crisis too

I'm Lamont. I'm 15 years old, from the United States of America.

Unemployment is a big problem in the United States, especially in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where I live, and especially for young African-Americans. Some kids are forced into the streets, like in other countries. In America, we call them homeless.

Kids have formed gangs like alternative families, and gang violence is a major problem. They fight, shoot and kill people, and some sell drugs. Gun dealing and selling is a major component of the drug trade. Easy access to guns makes streets, homes and schools much more dangerous places to be.

I'm not involved in these activities myself, but they do affect me. For instance, the church I attend is in another town. When I go there I have to think about what I'm wearing. If I wear the "wrong" color, I might get approached by someone asking, "What's up with all that red or black? Why are you wearing all that? Are you down with a gang?" My brother's been jumped a couple of times.

Kids need to feel like they have a future, like they belong.

There's also a lot of drug trafficking, and it has affected my life personally. My dad sold drugs. He got caught, and he went to jail. After that it was tough for us to survive. My mother had to provide for five of us on one small income, and my brother and sisters and I were harder to control when we were younger. We didn't like to listen. We had to move, and we had a lot of trouble paying the bills and keeping food on the table. My mother's strategy for keeping us out of trouble was to keep us at home. We couldn't go anywhere without her knowledge and approval. We couldn't hang around with anyone doing wrong — stealing, spray painting, acting like they're in a gang or even not doing well in school.

The lack of male role models is a serious problem for kids my age, and kids have little to hope for in the future. Jobs are especially hard to find for young people. There are more opportunities to go on the streets and sell drugs to make money than there are chances to get a summer job. Kids need to feel like they have a future, like they belong. They need safe places to go. The most violent crimes are committed in the evening when kids have no place else to be but on the street. They need recreational activities to keep them occupied and off the streets.

The social and economic structures fail so many children in the United States. The poor, who have little economic power and low social standing, are primarily affected. Racism also demoralizes the population and ruins hope and opportunity. My message to kids is that they need to set their goals high and to concentrate on their studies. Adults also need to show more constructive authority in responding to kids who they know are doing wrong.

We're Craig and Caragh, aged 13 and 17. We're from Canada.

Both of us do advocacy in Canada on behalf of children around the world. In Canada, the number of kids living on the streets compared with other countries is relatively low, but they do exist, and the problem is a pressing one. The majority of kids on the street in Canada are older, about 16 years old and up. Children can find some care, but social programs responding to the needs of kids in crisis are being eroded. Serious challenges to the social safety net in Canada have been underway which are worsening life for these and other children.

Native communities throughout Canada are also facing strong political, social and economic obstacles. The white culture dominates these areas, and survival of native communities is becoming more and more difficult. Alcoholism and gasoline sniffing are pressing problems. They are the result of a gradual and severe attack on native culture, which has demoralized native societies. Many young people feel particularly hopeless. Reaching out to them is especially hard because of trust issues. Since the system has failed them so many times before, it's difficult for them to believe it will help them now.

Serious challenges to the social safety net in Canada have been underway which are worsening life for... children.

Child Advocacy

So far we've told you about the situations we've lived through and what millions of other children are still experiencing. We also want to tell you about our work with children now and how it is possible to make a difference through various forms of action.

Marie-Louise

With help from the organization La Main Dans La Main (Hand In Hand) in Cameroon, I have been able to turn my life around. Where once I experienced hunger, prostitution, and abandonment, I now have hope and an ability to help others as I help myself. I work with La Main Dans La Main, which came into existence responding to the needs of children who were abandoned, drug addicted, sexually abused, or otherwise in need. The children receive educational opportunities, health care, emotional and other support. Staff may, for instance, work with an employer when a girl is hired to ensure that she will learn a skill and not just receive a wage.

Children need to be given the means to face the future, but it is not so easy for organizations like La Main Dans La Main to sustain that support. In Cameroon, the government provides little aid to children and is reluctant to acknowledge the problems that exist. There are many risks involved in speaking out on behalf of children, and it is nearly impossible to get media coverage. In situations like this, international support for children generated through networks of children, the World Council of Churches and international humanitarian organizations is essential. They can expose the issues of concern to children in these areas and also assist organizations providing help to children.

I have been so fortunate myself, and I want others to be as fortunate. Finding new friends at the consultation from around the world who understand the problems we continue to face in my country is a lifeline. I hope we can build on this exchange. We can help each other.

Children need to be given the means to face the future...

Churches are very strong in Papua New Guinea, but they are not getting their arms around the lost kids.

Andrew

In Papua New Guinea, I work with a church organization called City Mission that helps young boys in trouble. Some have been released to our care from prison, and others come in from the streets. We take care of their needs and teach them the Word of God. They get food, clothing and a place to sleep. Most of all, they are comforted.

When the kids come in, they feel there is a place for them, a home. We try very hard to make them feel cared for and loved. We hug them, have fun with them, and they don't want to leave us. It really helps to have other young people there to work with them. Young people understand young people. Adults don't understand the lifestyle these kids are coming from. I understand because I've lived it. They listen to me, but they don't always listen to the adults.

Education is the key for kids to live a life that is good. There are good things inside the kids that are out on the streets in trouble — music, drawing — but they cannot establish them. There is no release, no support or assistance to bring out the good talents they have.

Churches are very strong in Papua New Guinea, but they are not getting their arms around the lost kids. They need to go to the streets and invite children into the church and make them feel at home. They need to hug them, say something to them, give them something to eat and drink. If churches can do this it will really change the country.

I believe churches can also work to melt any stony hearts in government. They need to speak out. People make bombs, or people make nations. If you continue to kill your young people by not supporting them, there's no future for your nation. You're just destroying the nation that way.

Coming to know God's love has really changed my life. God created human life with an incredible beauty, but the beauty has been stolen. It is spoiled. Children and churches need to mobilize together to help restore the beauty that God created.

Astha

I am a member of a child rights organization called Bal Chetana Samuha (Child Awareness Group). There are 56 children in Bal Chetana Samuha, and our main work is spreading information on child rights and monitoring the Nepalese government's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We publish a magazine called Bal Awaj (Voice of Children), which describes problems that children face in Nepal. We distribute it to schools, libraries and many other places. We visit schools all over Nepal talking to children about child rights issues.

Bal Chetana Samuha is the first children's organization in Nepal. We originally came together as a group in 1994 after the government of Nepal ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and developed a report on children in Nepal. Non-governmental organizations reviewing the report invited children from all walks of life to take part in the review. Children from the street, refugees, domestic servants, carpet weavers, school children — all kinds of children — we're asked to participate. Before one of my teachers asked me to join I knew nothing about child rights. We learned a lot and decided to continue our work as an official children's organization.

There were many obstacles to getting organized, however. The organization had to be registered with the government even to get a letterhead. When we tried to register, among other things we were told that all of the children had to prove their nationality. The CRC says that children can organize programs and do certain things affecting society. Ultimately, we brought the statement to the registration office, and then they agreed to register us.

It has been very inspiring to be involved with this group and now with other children from around the world. In Nepal, we have really been working to build a network and reach out to more and more children. We would like the stories of the children of Nepal to reach people in other countries. We also want to spread the message that if you try hard and follow your heart, nothing is impossible. Children also need to be encouraged, and many times the best people to do that are other children.

I am happy that the WCC is committed to supporting children's networks, but it is important for churches to cooperate with other religions. It is especially important in Nepal, which is a Hindu state. There are very few churches here, but the religious community has so much to offer children.

...it is important for churches to cooperate with other religions.

Lamont

I work as a peer helper at my high school. Peer helpers go through two years of training to help other kids with a variety of problems. We are available throughout the day to discuss issues such as teen pregnancy, family planning, gangs, suicide, child or spousal abuse and more. We help them find solutions.

The children who use the peer helper program learn how to talk about their problems. It gives them a place to feel safe and get help. When a person comes in, we listen, assess the problem and try to help them figure out what to do. Adults are also brought into the process. If we are confronted with a suicide call, an adult is called in right away. Special classes are also available to the students, such as "How to be a parent." The program has helped children resolve many issues including fights between gang members.

One of the important things the church does is try to provide daily activities for kids that serve as an alternative to street life.

I'm also very active in my church, the Mount Ararat Baptist Church, where Rev. Darnell Leonard is the pastor. Rev. "O," as we call him, has put together a wide array of programs and activities which address the problems of young people in the community, and children are an integral part of making these programs successful.

I'm in the church choir and also work as part of a leadership team which works with children at an Americorps-sponsored camp run by the church. The team is made up of a handful of young people from the church. I work in the gym at the camp. One of the important things the church does is try to provide daily activities for kids that serve as an alternative to street life.

When I came to Geneva and met all the other children there from around the world, I was really moved. I know things are bad for many children in the United States, but so many children have it much worse around the world. I heard their stories. They made me hurt. I felt their pain. Children have rights, but they're not enforced. The more we all learn about one another, the more we can accomplish together to change these situations.

Craig

Iqbal Masih was sold into slavery at the age of four in Pakistan. He later escaped and tried to organize other freed child slaves in a campaign against child slavery and forced labor. He was murdered for his activities at age twelve. After his death, I founded Free The Children in Toronto, Canada. It's a youth-run organization working on the issue of the exploitation of child workers and pushing for youth empowerment on many fronts.

We take various actions such as education campaigns to raise awareness on the issue of child labor, especially with young people. We put pressure on governments to bring about changes in their policies, and we encourage world leaders to take international stands against the exploitation of children. We sponsor letter writing campaigns. We work with the media. We do many things to spread our message and bring about change. I believe that education is the key to bringing about the elimination of child exploitation.

Free The Children is expanding rapidly. There are chapters springing up in many countries. I think it's a symbol of how young people want to take action and participate in enforcing child rights. They simply need the support. Children's organizations around the world can also greatly support one another by beginning to work more together.

We all need to look at the world on a global scale. When it comes to human rights, there are no borders. Every person has the same rights. The abuse of a person in Nepal or the abuse of someone in Canada is of equal concern. We're experiencing a global economy with global human rights. We cannot move into the 21st century with children still suffering widespread abuse.

The children of the world are our peers. We need to work together, and we also need the help of adults and organizations that care. Whatever each one of us does is a drop in the ocean compared to what's happening to children every day. But those drops add up, and I hope there will soon be a flood of change for children. Don't forget the stories you've read. Pass them along, and remember, children are the leaders of today and tomorrow.

...young people want to take action and participate in enforcing child rights. They simply need the support.

Monica

I live in Recife, Brazil, and I work with a non-governmental organization called the Passing Center that works with street girls, children from grassroots communities and child prostitutes. The center has what we call Home 1 and Home 2. Home 1 is for girls coming directly from the street for the first time. Home 2 is a provisional center for these girls at a further stage. When children go there, they can learn various skills such as, cooking, sewing, handicrafts and also theater.

Aside from giving courses to girls, we pay them. We don't have much to pay them, only about 20 Brazilian pesos each, but it's enough to get them through the weekend. It's like a scholarship. We encourage girls to go to school because it is their right. We also try to reach out to children in the community before they turn to the streets to help them find other alternatives.

I work as a counselor and as a paramedic. I counsel child prostitutes on HIV and AIDS. We can't tell the girls not to go into prostitution because we know they are doing this for their survival, but we can tell them how to protect themselves against the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The hardest part of this job for me is when, after giving all this information to a girl, she continues with the prostitution.

I think one way that children's groups can effectively work together with non-governmental organizations and governments is with a public poster campaign aimed at child prostitution. Posters could be developed and placed in hotels and airports reminding men and young girls that prostitution is a crime.

If I had one wish, it would be that innocent people shouldn't have to continue to pay for what governments are not doing. Many young people are paying for the lack of organization and responsibility of government. Governments should put into practice what the people who elected them asked them to do. The struggle for power in the world today needs to end. Some people just want to be more powerful than others instead of wanting to help others. NGOs working with children and trying to help really need support.

If I had one wish, it would be that innocent people shouldn't have to continue to pay for what governments are not doing. Many young people are paying for the lack of organization and responsibility of government.

Caragh

A team of high school students, including myself, volunteers thousands of hours of time to Street Kids International in Toronto, Canada. I go into the office two days a week and help with the work of the organization, which advocates children's rights around the globe. It has relationships with grassroots organizations. They work together to make decisions about the goals of Street Kids International and their implementation.

Direct services are provided to children around the world through these partner organizations. There is a commitment to working with organizations to increase their capacity to serve children not only for the short-term, but in more long-term sustainable ways.

Children's strengths and potential must be recognized, and programs must be made available that respond to the needs of children as identified by the children themselves at the local level. For young students like me, volunteering has been a great experience. I have learned a lot, and am committed to spreading the word about the needs of children.

Paulo

In my city in Portugal I work with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Portugal on efforts to organize a group of working children. In other cities the church is already working with children living in slums.

Institutions are urgently needed where children in trouble can go to receive help. It is ironic and sad that governments spend so much money producing arms while tremendous numbers of children are in crisis.

It has been very helpful to be with other children from around the world and to begin working together with the WCC. The WCC can play a key role in creating spaces for children to have deeper discussion of issues we face around the world.

Children's strengths and potential must be recognized...

It is ironic and sad that governments spend so much money producing arms while tremendous numbers of children are in crisis.

Vidal

I am a member of several different organizations which work on behalf of children in Peru and in many other Latin American countries. One is called MANTHOC (Movimiento de Adolescentes y Niños Trabajadores Hijos de Obreros Cristianos/Movement of Adolescent and Child Workers, Children of Christian Workers), which was started in 1976. Another is a different organization for working children. A third is a regional organization for children with partners in Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. And finally, I participate in the Ecumenical Network of Children in Latin America.

MANTHOC is divided into two parts. One is called the life of the movement, the other focuses on services. In the life of the movement, approximately 1,500 children are organized in 18 cities. Here, children deal with the issues of working children and develop strategies for responding. The service side assists the members and also tries to reach out to other children in need. This service work helps about 5,000 children. As much as possible, MANTHOC tries to make special schools available to working children. The regional organization I participate in has a membership of about 10,000, and about 30 organizations of working children are represented. The ecumenical network has a smaller representation but is very important.

All of these associations between children have helped raise awareness among children about their rights and have led to many actions being taken on behalf of children in the region. We have meetings, write publications and reach out to many communities. We work with law enforcement authorities and public officials to try to build bridges between us for change.

Compared to other areas of the world, our work in Latin America is fairly advanced, but there is still so much to be accomplished. I believe we also have a lot to share with other children's groups just getting started. Lessons need to be learned about what happens to kids after they outgrow work with the children's organizations and how adults can best support children's advocacy groups.

The children of the world are getting organized so that our rights can be respected, so that we can have dignity and have appropriate working conditions. Networks are very important for becoming involved and spreading the word. Together we can bring our message to the international community.

Lessons need to be learned about what happens to kids after they outgrow work with the children's organizations and how adults can best support children's advocacy groups.

Action Plans

Acting together to alleviate the suffering of children is to say "yes" to tomorrow and all the promise it can hold. We've told you about the problems and some of the things we are doing to respond. Here are some ways we can work together to coordinate and strengthen our efforts. We hope you will choose some way to become involved yourself.

Our Goals:

To enforce child rights that guarantee the healthy physical, mental, social, cultural and spiritual development of all children.

To make support for children's advocacy networks a priority, recognizing that children must be involved in constructing their own future.

To concentrate efforts on meeting both the short-term needs of children and changing the factors contributing to the destruction of child rights. This includes efforts to achieve sustainable development and end the cycles of poverty that perpetuate the exploitation of children. In addition, the problems of unemployment, access to formal education, gender bias, environmental degradation, family dysfunction, and debt repayment/structural adjustment must be addressed.

Our Strategies:

Cooperate • Share information and ideas and work with other groups or individuals concerned about children's issues.

Educate • Teach those who are not familiar with child rights.

Advocate • Demand decision-makers place children at the top of their agendas.

Assist • Find meaningful ways to alleviate the current suffering of children.

Our Tactics:

A Role for the World Council of Churches

The WCC can:

- Support development of a global child-to-child network.
- Create spaces for children to articulate their problems and concerns through meetings or other events, seeking ways to continue their work and to exchange experiences with other children.
- Provide training opportunities for children at future WCC-sponsored meetings.
- Circulate "We Can Help Each Other" and promote its use and discussion; work with children to develop follow-up goals and initiatives. Any follow-up meeting should include further discussion on how to continue development of an international child-to-child network. Attention should be given to developing a media strategy for the network.
- Assist children with their advocacy efforts.
- Include children in advocacy efforts already underway with partner agencies and in ecumenical meetings where children's issues are discussed.
- Develop a resource map of organizations working on children's issues.
- Assist with the representation of children at international meetings, and continue to advocate for children at the international level.
- Engage in deeper discussion over appropriate roles for adults working with child advocates.
- Develop a poster campaign responding to the specific concerns of child prostitution and promoting child-to-child networks and activism.
- Sensitize National Councils of Churches to the need for coordinated work with children, recognizing that much of the change for children must take place at local and regional levels; engage them in a campaign for children leading up to the WCC General Assembly in Harare.
- Support local and grassroots churches and partner agencies by providing training, distributing documentation and information and promoting exchanges.
- Encourage biblical and theological reflection of churches on children's issues.
- Reach out to other religious faiths, finding new ways to work together on behalf of, and with, children.
- Support projects that help parents and respond directly to these goals.

A Role for Children

- Contact any of the children and adults listed at the end of this document for more information on child rights and how to get involved.

- Obtain and read a copy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child from the UNICEF office nearest you.

- Ask the WCC for a copy of the Summary of the Discussions of the Consultation on Children, 19 to 21 May 1996.

- If you are already working on behalf of yourself and other children, use "We Can Help Each Other" to reach out to children just getting started with new organizations and new ideas. Assess common goals and develop plans of action. Communicate with organizations such as the WCC and ask for the necessary support. Follow up on their commitments. Let the WCC know about the results of your discussions.

- If you are considering child rights for the first time, use "We Can Help Each Other" to discuss children's issues with friends and adults. You may want to engage youth groups at churches or schools, or other local religious groups or community organizations. Pick an issue you are particularly concerned about, and develop an idea for responding. Test the idea and let other kids know about what happens.

- Volunteer your time to work with, or on behalf of, children. Refer to the activities of other children described in this document.

- Initiate education and advocacy efforts for children such as letter-writing campaigns or presentations on children's issues.

- Consider participating in campaigns initiated by a children's organization, the WCC or other groups.

- Once activities are underway, continue to speak out and widen the circle of involvement. Make new plans. Always remember that "We Can Help Each Other."

A Role for Churches

- Place children at the top of your priority list. Open your arms to children in new ways and support child-to-child interaction on issues of child rights.

- Participate in a campaign for children as it develops through work between WCC and children.

- Act as a surrogate family for children. Welcome children and connect them with other families and children for support.

- Set up alternative education programs, inviting educators or role models to talk with children.

- Offer after-school programs for children.

- Encourage Bible study and youth group activities to include discussions about the rights of children. Discuss issues in your community and in a broader context. Use "We Can Help Each Other" as a basis for discussion.

- Work with local schools and law enforcement authorities to bridge gaps of understanding between children and the adult world.

- Create safe centers for children where they can talk with counselors or just find a place to relax and feel welcome.

- Work with other churches working with children.

- Find common ground with councils of churches and interfaith groups on children's issues.

- Engage in theological reflection on children, and pray for the children of the world.

- Advocate against the failing social structures that create "haves" and "have-nots" in society. Work with children as part of the religious community to pressure governments to respond to the needs of children.

- Continue to help with the spiritual growth of children, and reach out to families in need of reconciliation.

A Role for International Humanitarian Organizations

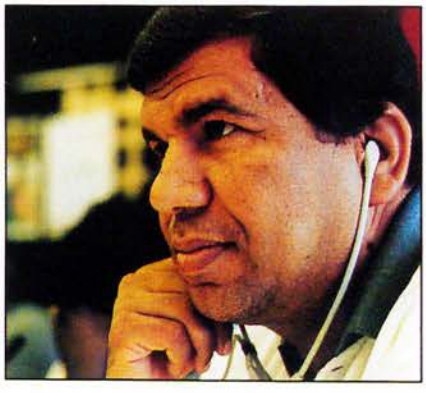
- Continue to work on behalf of children by providing direct support and by continuing advocacy efforts.
- Include children in international meetings discussing children's concerns.
- Assist children in their efforts to organize.
- Push governments to enforce the Convention on the Rights of the Child, punishing those who violate the rights of children.

"We Can Help Each Other"
WCC Children's Campaign

Consultation Participants

Mr. Ahmed Abdalla Ahmed
Al Jeel Centre for Youth and Social Studies
Ain Elsera 136-2-10, Cairo 11441, Egypt
Tel: 00202 3645043; Fax: 00202 984189

Mr. Gamal Zekrie Bisada
ECRED
The Experimental Centre For Recycling & Environmental Development
Ezbet el Nakhl
15 Hasan Subry Street, 11761 Ezbet El Nakhl, Cairo, Egypt
Tel: 00202 4408671; Fax:00202 2825405



Ms. Joyce Umbima
K.A.A.C.R.
Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children
Purvi House, Wing A, 2nd Floor, Off Mpaka Road, P.O. Box 73637,
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: 00254 2 443868; Fax: 00254 2 449819

Ms. Marie Sixte Nnomo
La Main Dans La Main
BP 4826, Douala, Cameroun
Tel: 00237 424981; Fax: 00237 430872 (c/o Mr Nnomo Messina)

Ms. Marie-Louise Mboyom Noubaya
La Main Dans La Main
BP 4826, Douala Cameroun
Tel: 00237 424981

Mr. Joseph Francis
CLAAS
Centre for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement
31 Katcha Ferozpur Road, Mozang Chungi, Lahore, Pakistan
Tel & Fax: 0092 42 7591571

Ms. Bishnu Kumari Thapa-Shrestha
INHURED International
International Institute for Human Rights, Environment and Development
P.O. Box 2125, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 00977 1 520054; Fax: 00977 1 520042 or 226820

Ms. Ashtha Tuladhar
Bal Chetana Samuha/Child Awareness Group
P.O. Box 2358 Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 00977 1 520054; Fax: 00977 1 226820

Ms. Daniela Rei
Saint Stelian Association
St. Lunca Bradului No. 2, Bl H5 sc 2 et 1 Ap. 6, Bucharest, Romania
Tel: 00401 312 1880; Fax: 00401 312 1914; Fax: 00401 222 9875

Mr. Andreas Ding
Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Portugal
Apartado 68, Buarcos, P-3080 Figueira da Foz, Portugal
Tel: 00351 33 32617; Fax: 00351 3333230

Mr. Paulo Alexandre Silvestre Narciso
Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Portugal
Apartado 68, Buarcos, P-3080 Figueira da Foz, Portugal
Tel: 00351 33 32617; Fax: 00351 3333230

Ms. Maria Iris da Silveira
CESE
Coordenadoria Ecuménica de Servico
Rua de Graça, 164, Salvador, Bahia, Brasil, CEP 40080-410
Caixa Postal 041
Tel: 00557 336 5457; Fax: 00557 336 0733

Ms. Mônica Valéria Ferreira da Silva
"Casa de Passagem"
Centro Basileiro da Criançae do Adolescente
Rua dos Marajás, 177 Caixa d'Agua Olinda Pernambuco, Brasil
Tel: 00558 1 423 3839; Fax: 00558 1 231 1449

Mr. Alejandro Cussianovich
MANTHOC
Los Tulipanes 180, Villa Jardín 1ra. Zona, Lima 35, Peru
Tel & Fax: 0051 14 772769

Mr. Vidal Ccoa Mamani
MANTHOC
Los Tulipanes 180, Villa Jardín 1ra. Zona, Lima 35, Peru
Tel & Fax: 0051 14 772769

Mr. Shawn Robertson
Street Kids International
1-325 Markmam St., Toronto, Ontario M6G 2K8, Canada
Tel: 001 416 504 8994; Fax: 001 416 504 8977

Ms. Caragh Kep Titherington
Street Kids International
398 Adelaide St. W., Suite 1000, 10th floor, Toronto, Ontario M5V 1S7, Canada
Tel: 001 416 504 8994; Fax: 001 416 504 8977

Mr. Craig Kielburger*
Free The Children
16 Thornbank Rd., Thornhill, Ontario L4J, Canada
Tel: 001 905 881 0863; Fax: 001 905 881 1849

Rev. Darnell Leonard
NCC-U.S.A.
EPRUS AMERICORPS
c/o East End Coop. Ministry, 250 N. Highland Avenue, Pittsburgh, P.A. 15206 USA
Tel: 001 412 361 5012; Fax: 001 412 361 0151

Mr. Lamont Scales
NCC-U.S.A.
423 Rossave, Pittsburgh, P.A. 15221
Tel: 001 412 371 1091

Mr. Major Tau Pala
Salvation Army
P.O. Box 1323, Boroko NCD, Papua New Guinea
Tel: 00675 325 5507; Fax: 00675 325 3534

Mr. Andrew Kairi
Port Moresby
City Mission
Box 5872 Boroko P.N. 6, Papua New Guinea
Tel & Fax: 00675 200 0606

Ms. Karen Oon-Buffin
Christian Aid
P.O. Box 100, London SE1 7RT, UK
Tel: 0044 1 71 6204444; Fax: 0044 1 71 6200719

Ms. Mait Tidner
Church of Sweden Aid
S-751 70 Uppsala, Sweden
Tel: 0046 18 169 500; Fax: 0046 18 169 707

Mr. Martin Stäbler
Tourism Watch, End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT)
ECPAT Executive Committee
c/o Service Overseas, Nikolaus Otto Str. 13, D 70771-Leinfelden-Echterdingen
Tel: 0049711 7989281; Fax: 0049711 7989123

Ms. Jane D. Lowicki
Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program
NCCC USA
475 Riverside Drive, Room 658, New York, N.Y. 10115-0050, USA
Tel: 001 212 870 3153; Fax: 001 212 870 2132

Ms. Eunice Santana*
WCC President
Apdo. 2244, 00613 Arecibo, Puerto Rico
Tel: 001 787 878 5427; Fax: 001 787 880 9287

Rev. Myra Blyth
Executive Director Unit IV
World Council of Churches
150 rte. de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland
Tel: 0041 22 791 6111; Fax: 0041 22 788 0067

Ms. Marta Palma
Working Group on Children Coordinator and Latin America & Caribbean Desk Secretary
Tel. ext. 6035

Mr. Kyung-Seo Park
Asia Desk Secretary
Tel. ext. 6315

Mr. John Doom
Pacific Desk Secretary
Tel. ext. 6307

Mr. Richard Murigande
Africa Desk Secretary
Tel. ext. 6038

Ms. Maria Rosa Giovanini
Administrative Assistant
Latin America & Caribbean Desk
Tel. ext. 6036

Ms. Emilia Reichmuth
Programme Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director
Tel. ext. 6027

Ms. Salwa Morcos
Middle East Desk
Tel. ext. 6317

* Served as co-moderators of the Consultation on Children.

Contact Information

To learn more about how "We Can Help Each Other" by becoming involved in the global child-to-child network contact:

Mariette Grange
Research Officer
Networks and Advocacy Team
Unit IV - Sharing and Service
World Council of Churches
150, route de Ferney, PO Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland

Telephone (++41-22) 791 63 24
Fax (++41-22) 791 88 00 67
E-Mail mgm@wcc-coe.org

The World Council of Churches Working Group on Children

Coordinator: . . . . . .Marta Palma
Directorat: . . . . . .Myra Blyth
Emilia Reichmuth
Asia Desk: . . . . . .Kyung Seo Park
Africa Desk: . . . . . .Janet Thomas
Latin America &
Caribbean Desk: . . . . . .Marta Palma
Pacific Desk: . . . . . .John Doom
Middle East Desk: . . . . .Salwa Morcos
Refugee & Migration: . .Helen Moussa
Scholarships: . . . . . .Barbara Maubach

Working Group Members may be contacted at the above address and at the following telephone and fax numbers:

Telephone (++41-22) 791 61 11
Fax (++41-22) 788 00 67

To obtain a copy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child or to learn more about UNICEF and the state of the world's children contact the UNICEF office nearest you.

"We Can Help Each Other"
WCC Children's Campaign

WCC GENEVA
1071733851