

The following is a personal report on the proceedings of a conference attended by myself on behalf of the SACP on 23/02/10. It is merely a brief overview of the salient points made by the speakers and where possible a website address has been given where further information can be obtained.

George Reoch, SACP

**Children's Rights – Looking Ahead with 2020 Vision**  
**Roxburghe Hotel, Edinburgh**

The conference was chaired by Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. He welcomed the delegates, outlining the programme for the day as well as introducing each speaker.

The opening presentation was by Kay Tisdall, Professor of Childhood Policy, University of Edinburgh, Programme Director MSc in Childhood Studies and Co-director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships. Her presentation was entitled "**Looking Forward.**"

Professor Tisdall provided an overview of the areas still to be addressed or strengthened in the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the UK and this was taken from the Concluding Observations of the UN 2008 report. These included amongst other things

- the need for improved co-ordination, resource allocation and awareness of the UNCRC
- ensuring independence of Children's Commissioners
- ensuring protection against discrimination
- ending the use of all harmful devices on children, abolishing physical constraint for disciplinary purposes and using restraint/confinement only as a last resort.
- promoting Article 12 (right of children to participate in decisions made about them)
- reconsidering ASBO's and other violations of freedom of movement
- protecting privacy of children
- improving outcomes for children in care
- meeting international standards of juvenile justice
- improving information on, and support for, asylum seeking and migrant children.

One evaluation of the report gave the UK government 3/10. It appeared there was a lot of work to be done by 2020. However, as she concluded her presentation, at least one member of the "audience" made the very valid point that while all the emphasis was on the *rights* of the child precious little was being said on the child having any *responsibilities!*

The second presentation was entitled "**Children: respect their rights and promote their well-being**" and the speaker was Agato D'Addato, policy officer for Eurochild.

Ms D'addato started by explaining that Eurochild consisted of a network of 83 organisations and individuals promoting the rights and welfare of children and young people throughout Europe. Funded in part by the European Commission PROGRESS programme 2007-13 Eurochild's strategic priorities are to both influence policy in the areas of Early Years education and Family and Parenting Support and to provide information and expertise on child poverty and social exclusion.

She went on to explain that Eurochild's focus is to encourage a real commitment to children through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (as opposed to just paying lip service to it) and to invest in accessible, affordable and high quality services for families and young people. Looking forward to

2020 Eurochild's vision, she said, was to have a society more equal and cohesive due to investing in the children of today.

More information can be found on the Eurochild website [www.eurochild.org](http://www.eurochild.org).

After coffee, the next speaker was Colin Morrison, co-director of the Children's Parliament. His presentation was entitled "**Children's parliament: making children's human rights real**".

The origins and idea for the charity sprang from children attending a European environmental education project in Scotland. Given a remit to create a scale model of what they thought an environmentally friendly city should look like they built a parliament in the centre where they could exchange ideas. The charity operates workshops and projects both within the community and in schools.

Colin Morrison then went on to explain exactly how the charity "does" children's rights. Essentially the idea is that when children come into the Children's Parliament they bring with them their own ideas, opinions and viewpoint. Adults bring their facilitator skills to listen (and to welcome) these views. Together relationships of mutual respect can be formed between children and adults. The Children's Parliament also helps foster an understanding of diversity and difference between children as they work together.

The Parliament works with 6 themes

- who we are
- where we live
- freedom
- health and happiness
- feeling safe and being cared for
- having our say.

In conclusion, the point was made that the parliament was *not* there to advocate on behalf of the child. It was believed that the children, if allowed to, are more than capable of advocating for themselves.

More information can be obtained from [www.info@childrensparliament.org.uk](mailto:www.info@childrensparliament.org.uk)

Following lunch, there were two presentations giving an international perspective on children's rights. The first was by Helen Penn, Professor of Early Childhood, University of East London and focused on her work in South Africa.

Beginning with a brief recap of the tenets of the UNCRC, Professor Penn went on to describe the difficulties faced in a country still recovering from apartheid and where there are no less than 11 national languages. In addition tribal law exists alongside the national law. More than half of all children are malnourished and child poverty is widespread.

In response the South African government has formulated an Early Child Development (ECD) policy. This is for children 0-8 and among other things it provides government support for the poorest families and gives grants to not-for-profit nurseries. However, it is beset by difficulties in administrative coherence between, for example, education and health departments which are often staffed by young inexperienced workers meaning a lot of money intended for young children gets diverted or remains unspent.

The second presentation was by Dr Afua Twum-Danso, University of Sheffield and focused on Ghana. Despite ratifying the UNCRC 20 years ago and passing its own Children's Act in 1998 (which brought all laws relating to children under one document) huge problems remain. There is a lack of resources to implement decisions with high staff turnovers and demoralisation in agencies charged with enforcing the act and a widespread ignorance that the Convention even exists. Other problems are cultural ones where some believe that the act gives the children too much power and leads to lack of respect for authority.

The final part of the day was given over to a panel and delegate discussion on the issues raised and possible ways forward. The conference was then closed by Tam Baillie the Children's Commissioner who thanked the speakers and recapped on the main points raised.

On the whole the conference was worth attending and there are certainly major problems in protecting children's rights in many countries but a bit more emphasis in trying to instil some sense of responsibility in children as well would perhaps have been welcome.