

NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child
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**Contribution of the Union of Societies "Nasa Djeca" (our children) of
Croatia to the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the
Child**

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The Union of Societies Nasa djaca of Croatia is an non-governmental, humanitarian and educational organisation working for the welfare of children. It supports developments and education of children, and organises activities of children in their free time.

The organisation bases its work on the Convention of the Rights of the Child and support actively the implementation of that document in Croatia. The main organiser of these activities within the Union is its Committee for the Rights of the Child, which was established soon after the adoption of the Convention by the UN General Assembly.

This information contains only a short review of the concrete activities carried out by the aforementioned Committee and the Union as a whole:

1. On the same day of the adoption of the Convention - 20th November 1989, the Union published a book Realisation of the Rights and Needs of the Child (Author: Dr. Emil Paravina), containing 104

pages.

2. The Union was the first in Croatia who started organising promotional activities of the Convention. It was done on 11th December 1990 (Deliberately on Unicef Day), at the Tribune in Zagreb, which was attended by large number of Croatian citizens.

3. On the 6th March 1991, the Committee on the Rights of the Child was established as an operational body of the Union. It was composed of eleven well known public figures covering by their profession the following fields of activities: law, science health, social welfare, education, pedagogy, literature, art, history, film, music, economics, demography, information, out-of-institutional work with children.

4. The Committee started its work at the same time when the armed conflicts took place on the territory of Croatia. The Committee immediately directed its activities towards protecting of children and their rights. It started with public appeals, followed by protests, and then publicly documenting sufferings of the children, tried hard to secure at existential needs for the children, especially the displaced and the refugee children. For illustration it is pertinent to point out the following few concrete actions:

- on 5th April 1991: Appeal for peace, undisturbed growth of children, tenderness of the family home and greater care for children by community in general;

- on 11th May 1991: Appeal to the public (published in all the media of information) which expressed great worry for the fate of children and pleaded for protection of childrens rights by the adults;

- on 15th July 1991: Appeal pointing to the first incidents of childrens sufferings, first innocent victims of war, pleading for voice of common-sense, protesting against aggressive and uncivilised methods of solving the conflict;

- on 13th September 1991: public priotest against the war and aggression, in which, at the same time, the hope was expressed in common-sense, pointing the motto: Children do want peace!.

- on 24th October 1991: the Committee wrote official letter to the Committee for the Rights of the Child in New York, giving the facts about the suffering of the children in Croatia, and asking for the implementation of the international competence regarding the protection of childrens rights.

5. On the initiative of the committee the first documentary film about the suffering of Croatian children was made, and 30 video-cassettes were dispatched to the addresses of distinguished persons and institutions throughtout the world.

6. On 29th November 1991, the first evacuation of children from the war zone was carried out by the members of the Committee and other activists of the Union: 250 children and their mothers from Osijek and its surroundings were saved and transported to the summer camps of the Unions societies along the Adriatic coast. It was a brave and dangerous enterprise carried out under the fire of guns.

7. When UNICEF decided to open its office in Zagreb, Croatia, and faced difficulties in getting the necessary space, the Union put at its disposal larger part of its premises in the centre of the city. So, on the 3rd December 1991, the first Unicef office in Zagreb was opened and accomodated in the Unions premises. Later, when the number of its staff enlarged extensively, Unicef had to find and move in larger premises (in August 1992) thanking at the same time to the Union for the valuable assistance in the initial phase.

8. On the 28th of October 1991, the Union sent to Croatian Government three proposal for the alleviation of negative consequences of the war on the life of the children: to establish and maintain the recording of facts relating to the sufferings of children in the war; to establish a Fund for help to children of Croatia and to coordinate programmes of activities of all those who offered assistance; to initiate the establishment of the Croatian National Committee for Unicef.

9. On the 28th of February 1992, the Union sent to the Government three proposals: to establish an inter-ministerial body for the needs and rights of children; to fix obligations and competencies of the newly-formed humanitarian organisation for assistance to children; to adopt for this purpose a corresponding regulation or law; to extend assistance to the organisations which have programmes for children.

10. In order to help the displaced and the refugee children, the members of the Committee and other activists of the Union worked out a concept of the planned activities with these children through various programmes of entertainment and recreation in their free time. Namely, after solving the problem of accommodation, food and lodging, for these children, we managed through organising the aforementioned activities to alleviate their psychological and traumatising problems. The Union charged groups of its members to carry out such programmes of activities in several Croatian cities.

11. After one year of such activities, the Union initiated and its activists organised a performance named "For the Smile on the Child's Face" which was some kind of review of the successful results of those activities.

12. The Union has also introduced a new form of activities of school children in their free time called "Children's Forum". The aim of this organised activity is to inform the children about their rights, and to educate them about world peace, mutual understanding and co-operation. The first Seminar for the guides of "Children's Fund" was held in Summer, 1992. After that, they established seventeen such forums in various parts of Croatia.

13. Members of the Committee have initiated preparation of the illustrated book dealing with the child's rights, adapted for the work with children. A necessary text has been written and the well known artist (Oscar prize winner) has been engaged to make corresponding drawings for the book., but it was not possible to publish it due to the lack of financial means.

14. In co-operation with Zagreb University, the Union also organised the first Colloquy in Croatia on the subject: "Children, School and the Human Rights". It was held in Zagreb, on the 3rd June 1992.

15. At the beginning of 1993, within the First Social Welfare Workshop, the important interdisciplinary discussion was held on the subject: "The Children's Rights between the Proclamation and the Reality".

16. Between 1990 and 1993 the Union published the Convention on the Rights of the Child three times in total circulation of 12'000 copies. All the copies have been distributed to members of the Union and other organisations, free of charge.

17. After the termination of the armed conflict, in the situation of the relative peace and the reconstruction efforts in the country, the Union's Committee on the Rights of the Child had to adapt itself to the new situation. Its main task became to monitor, encourage and help the activity of the Union's societies (basic units) in the cities and communal centres in the realisation of children's rights.

18. Now, the Committee has 13 members, representatives from the cities of the country. Their tasks are:

- a. promoting the Convention of the Rights of the Child;
- b. monitoring of phenomena in the process of realisation of the rights of the child in Croatia;
- c. drawing the attention of relevant State's factors to the incidents of violation of the children's rights;
- d. reacting in the public by its statements, appeals, protests, requests, recommendations in connection with the rights of the child;
- e. submitting proposals to the competent organs, institutions and services for undertaking measures in the interest of children, in general.

19. The Committee with new members, in its first public statement (2nd February 1994) reminded all the relevant factors of the topicality of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the need to keep implementing consequently all its provisions.

20. In connection with the introduction of some restrictions in the field of health protection, of health

protection, the Committee wrote a letter to the authorities concerned, on the 8th February 1994, requesting them not to weaken the existing children's health rights. Unfortunately, the reply was that the children could not be exempted.

21. On the 8th May 1994, the Committee supported the petition by the Society Croatian Woman which contain the following requests:

- a. paid leave for the mothers of newly born babies in duration of the three years;
- b. child allowance to the amount adequate for the proper upbringing of the child;
- c. rights for the employed mothers with handicapped child to be absent from the work during all the working hours with full pay.

22. On the 9th June 1994, the Union addressed a letter to 67 local radio stations and newspapers with the request to contribute on the part to the promotion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Integral text of the Convention has been attached to the letter with the suggestions how this promotion could be done by the radio and the press.

23. On the 20th July 1994, the Union sent a letter to the Ministry of Education and Sport which contained a proposal to secure financial means in the government budget for pre-school education of those children who could not be admitted at kindergarderns or be included in some other educational programmes before starting elementary school. Till now there was no reply from the Ministry.

24. The Union's experts elaborated the concept for the establishing and of the ? Tribina DND za pava djeteta (forum of societies "Nasa djeca" (Our Children) for the Rights of the Child) and this project has been sent to 52 societies "Nasa djeca" throughout the country, with instructions to establish such "Tribune" (forum) within each society. This "Tribune" is an organisational form for convening once a month or every other month, a meeting of adults at which they listen to the lecture during which those present ask questions for additional explanations of points raised by the speaker and express their views on the matter under the discussion, etc.... The main aim of activity through these forums is to prevent potential violations of children's rights to do that, and to initiate actions for the improvement and promotion of children rights in the local community.

25. In Summer 1995, the Union organised the Summer Camp of Children's Friendship, on Rab island, Adriatic coast. The participants were 45 displaced and refugee children from Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina. It was some kind of pilot-project for evaluation of mutual life of children of various nations (Croats, Muslims), as well as national minorities living in Croatia. The documentation of the results of the realisation of this project is very valuable.

26. In January 1995, the Union organised a Seminar for guides of "Children's Forums", which was attended by 79 participants from 28 towns and communal centres in Croatia. The participants took obligation to create new Children's Forums in the places of their living. These new Forums will include between 800 and 1'000 school children, who will be systematically taught about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, peace, mutual understanding and co-operation.

27. The Union's activists translated and adapted to our specific conditions several parts of the Unicef book It's Only Right! A practical Guide to Learning About the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the basis of this material eight separate texts are being prepared which will be used for teaching the children-members of the Children's Forums about the Convention.

28. In the course of the last year the Union expanded its activity beyond borders of Croatia. It became a member of the NGO/UNICEF Co-ordinating Committee on the Activities for Children in UE/NIS, and the associate member of DCI. It expected that its membership of these two NGOs will help the Union to further strengthen and develop its activities in the field of children's rights.

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