



## Part 2: Background information

### 1. Frequently asked questions about the children's rights convention

#### What is it about?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty on human rights that regulates the rights of young people. It was adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Convention consists of 41 articles on the rights of young people, one article on public awareness and education, and twelve articles on how the Convention is monitored, ratified and put into force. The Convention on the rights of the Child was adopted by more countries than any other international human rights treaty. By December 2008, 193 countries had signed and ratified the Convention.

#### What is a child according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

By "child", the UN means all young people under the age of 18 years, unless the age of majority (i.e. the age at which a person is legally recognized as an adult) is attained prior to this. This is noted in the first article of the Convention.

#### How does the Convention work?

The Convention is not a national law. However, the principles of the Convention must be reflected in the national legislation, in the political activity and programs of the various states. Governments must also submit regular reports to the United Nations about their progress in implementing the Convention. This system of reporting puts governments under pressure to really respect the rights of young people.

#### Does the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child really make a difference to our lives?

With the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments obligate themselves to respect the rights of people under 18 years of age, to allow them to participate in decisions that affect them, to secure their survival and to protect them from harm. Article 4 states that governments must advocate our economic, social and cultural rights "to the maximum extent of their available resources". Only if and when we know and understand what is written in the Convention can we work towards upholding it to guarantee that these rights determine how young people are treated.

### 2. Children's rights - part of the human rights process

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is historically the instrument of human rights which has found the greatest acceptance worldwide. It has been ratified by all countries (apart from two), thereby bringing children and their rights closer to the centre of the endeavour to establish a universal implementation of human rights. With the ratification of this instrument, national governments have committed themselves to protecting and ensuring children's rights. At the same time, they have declared themselves willing to hold themselves accountable for this responsibility *vis-à-vis* the international community.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is based on various different cultural traditions and legal systems. It is a universally recognised collection of non-negotiable obligations and standards. It de-

termines - without any form of discrimination - the fundamental human rights for all children the world over.

- the right to survival
- the right to the development of one's full potential
- the right to protection from abuse, exploitation and harmful substances
- the right to participate fully in family, cultural or social life

Every right spelled out in the Convention is inherent to the human dignity and harmonious development of every child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education and legal, civil and social services. These standards are benchmarks against which