

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS NETWORK

AMNESTY
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Editorial

The disappointing, though unsurprising, result of the Child Discipline Referendum highlights this area as one we must maintain our activism on to ensure that children's rights continue to be protected here in New Zealand.

The poorly drafted question was already weighted towards a particular answer. That's why 87% of those New Zealanders who bothered to vote, voted 'No' to the question "Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in New Zealand?" The result will build pressure on politicians to change the law.

As a member organisation of The Yes Vote group of organisations we are asking you to email your MP or all MPs and ask them to continue to support the Child Discipline Law. The easiest way to take action is to visit <http://yesvote.org.nz>

Additionally can you also write letters to the editor etc in response to media on this issue to ensure that the real human rights issues are debated, rather than the smokescreen "smacking" and criminalization of good parents arguments

We have contacted **SAVE**, the most recent organisation committed to a "YES" vote. It is a group of students from Nelson College opposed to all forms of violence against children. They have been joined by students from Nelson College for Girls, Motueka High School and Auckland to form "Students Against Violence Everywhere". It is worth visiting their website at www.savemovement.org. We hope that we can take joint actions with them in the future.

Although there have been virtually no actions on children's rights from the International Secretariat, this has been a very interesting period for the network.

Following the unanimous decision of the Auckland Annual Meeting to support our resolution calling for greater priority for children's rights, New Zealand representatives, Chair Stephanie Rixecker, CEO Patrick Holmes and Nicola Mutch, attended the International Council Meeting (ICM) in Turkey. The Spanish Section had a resolution before the ICM seeking such priority and, in addition to NZ, Annual Meetings in the UK, Denmark and Italy had passed similar resolutions of support. We await the decision of the ICM with great interest!

Good news from the ICM. An email from our contact in the German Section just received reported that



Auckland's Green Bay High School Amnesty Group created camouflage gingerbread soldiers as a fundraiser during the week of Freedom Challenge activities

the Spanish resolution had been successful and that children's rights issues had been added to Integrated Strategic Plan for 2010 to 2016. The German Section had also been supported in its effort to add "Stop State violence against children" to the list of objectives in the ISP. We hope to include a fuller report from the NZ delegation and further details of the changes to the ISP in our next newsletter.

This year's **Freedom Challenge** was "Kid's against Camouflage - keeping children out of conflict" and it was enthusiastically taken up by College and University groups throughout the country. The theme – keeping children out of conflict – was interpreted in various ways by the different groups. The common denominator was their energy and creativity. Several groups were featured in front page pictures and stories in their local newspapers. You can read about their successes at http://www.amnesty.org.nz/media_release/freedom-challenge-has-kicked-off. Our warm congratulations to all involved in a very successful action.

GOOD NEWS

President of Lithuania vetoes homophobic law.

In late June, there was an urgent appeal for Sections to protest against a bill before the Lithuanian parliament, the Seimas, which would prohibit the discussion of homosexuality in schools and ban any references to it in public information. As there was a time limit of a few days, we drafted a letter to the Speaker of the Seimas which was signed by Patrick Holmes as CEO and Peter on behalf of the network and sent to Lithuania. The law was still passed by the assembly.

However, Amnesty International welcomed the decision by the President of Lithuania, Valdas Adamkus, on 26 June 2009 to veto the "Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information" which was adopted by the Seimas a week earlier.

Amnesty International said it was strongly opposed this homophobic amendment. Should the law be returned to Parliament, Amnesty International said that it would call on the Lithuanian authorities not to pass the law and to ensure that all persons in Lithuania, including children, fully enjoy the right to freedom of expression – including the right to seek, receive and impart information.

Guantanamo Detentions: Mohammed Jawad

The USA team has issued a short document on the latest developments on Mohammed Jawad's case. In a legal brief filed in federal court on 24 July 2009, the US administration said that it will no longer treat Mohammed Jawad – an Afghan national who has been in US custody since December 2002 when he was 17 years old or younger – as "detainable under the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) as informed by the laws of war". However, the US administration is seeking to have the judge not order Mohammed Jawad's immediate release, but to allow further delays.

No further action is required. Many thanks for all your hard work.

TAKE ACTION: SRI LANKA - UNLOCK THE PRISON CAMPS



Child at a Sri Lankan detention camp.

Sri Lanka's bloody civil war ended three months ago yet about 280,000 civilians are still held captive inside military-run internment camps that operate like prisons. Trapped between the Sri Lankan army and rebel Tamil Tigers during the final months of combat, they have been interned behind barbed wire with no government plan for setting them free or sending them home. UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, described the camps as being by far the most appalling scenes he had seen..

More than 50,000 of the detainees are children. Every day, lives are lost because of poor sanitation and lack of food, water and access to medical care. Only a few independent aid workers or journalists are allowed in. Without independent monitors in the camps, further abuses are continuing.

Although innocent of breaking any laws, these civilians are being treated like criminals. They are essentially prisoners locked up in violation of the Sri Lankan constitution and international law.

Please write to the Sri Lankan authorities making these points in your letter:

- Express concern that over 280,000 civilians have been detained in overcrowded military-run camps since the end of hostilities early this year;
- State that they should be allowed freedom of movement and that aid agencies, journalists and human rights observers should not be prevented from entering the camps. Without independent monitors those detained are at risk of human rights abuses by the security forces;
- Express grave concern that about 60,000 children are among the detainees and that their treatment is clearly contrary to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Sri Lanka is a state-party;
- Urge the government to allow all held in the camps freedom of movement including the right to leave the camps if they wish;
- Urge that the camps be placed under civilian not military management and that free access be given to humanitarian agencies, journalists and human rights observers to carry out their functions.

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