

IPA Project: General Comment on Article 31: two-page summary1. Background

In 2008, with the support of seven key international organizations, IPA wrote to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child requesting a General Comment on article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Supporting organizations were:

International Pediatrics Association

World Organization for Early Childhood

World Leisure Association

Education (OMEP)

Right to Play International

International Toy Library Association

International Council on Children's Play

European Child Friendly Cities Network

A General Comment is an official statement adopted by the UN Committee that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the Convention that seems to require further interpretation or emphasis. The aim of the General Comment is to increase state accountability.

In order to highlight the urgency of a General Comment on article 31, in 2010 IPA successfully conducted (with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation) eight regional consultations on children's right to play. At this point an eighth organization (Childwatch International) committed to the General Comment goal. The Consultations were held in South Africa, Kenya, Bulgaria, Lebanon, India, Thailand, Japan, and Mexico. The results of these consultations, which explored the global status of article 31, led to the UN Committee's decision that a General Comment would be developed.

In February 2011 IPA was invited by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to organize the drafting of a General Comment on article 31.

2. UN Focal Group

The UN Committee established a Focal Group to work with IPA comprising:

Awich Pollar, Chair (Uganda)

Aseil al-Shehail (Saudi Arabia)

Yanghee Lee (Korea)

Sanpharit Koompraphant (Thailand)

Hadeel Al-Asmar (Syrian Arab Republic)

3. Brief Description of Project

The project's main goal is ***'to develop and manage an international structure to facilitate the drafting of a General Comment on article 31 for the consideration of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.'***

The project will have two interrelated components. The process of developing the draft will draw upon the perspectives and interests of a broad spectrum of individuals and organizations and receive regular guidance from the UN CRC. In addition, building on our successful Global Consultations experience, three regional groups will be included in the drafting phase in order to provide insight into opportunities and challenges of diverse nations using the General Comment

to effect change. Regions being considered include Brazil, Turkey, and Mexico but final decisions will depend on the interest and engagement of local groups.

The serious involvement of children (i.e. avoiding tokenism) through posing two or three 'key questions' to a limited number of existing children's groups is being explored.

4. *Time-frame* The UN Focal Group has recommended that efforts be made to produce a final draft of the General Comment for presentation to the UN Committee meeting in January 2013. The whole of the year 2012 will therefore be devoted to the drafting process.

5. *International Structure*

a) **Working Group** of 12 – 14

The Working Group will organize and manage the drafting program. This group will review all drafts and participate in a two to three day meeting in the preparation of the final draft. It will work closely with the UN Focal Group.

b) **Core Group** six members of the Working Group (including consultant/writer) will function in an executive capacity.

c) **Pool of Experts** of approximately 20 individuals and organizations will ensure broad geographic and cultural input and representation of all elements of article 31 and be 'on call' during the 12 month process.

Information exchange will also take place on a regular basis with:

- * **UN Agency Liaison Group:** A selection of representatives from UNICEF, World Health Organization, UNESCO and Habitat.
- * **UN NGO Network** (based in Geneva)
- * **Children's Rights Information Network (CRIN)** (London/UK)
- * **IPA Council and national links.**

6. *Support of Bernard van Leer Foundation:*

The basic *Article 31 Project* will be funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and, as with the 2010 Consultations Project, will also benefit from consultation time of Selim Iltus, an Officer of the BvLF. This is a very positive start for this important but challenging project.

7. *Engagement of Consultant/Writer:*

Gerison Lansdown will participate as consultant/prime writer. Her engagement to draft the General Comment was approved by the IPA Board in July and by the UN Committee in September. Gerison has much experience writing for the UN and other international organizations. She is perhaps most recognized for her work in relation to children's *evolving capacities, children's participation, and children with disabilities*.

Conclusion

It is almost four years since IPA began its journey to achieve a General Comment on article 31.

We now have an opportunity to bring an understanding of article 31 that will position it more centrally within the fuller context of the UN Convention. We believe that children worldwide will benefit from article 31 being viewed and promoted as **part of their complete care and protection**. IPA is looking forward to this challenging but exciting project.

