



Position Statement

Rights of Children

ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) endorses the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹ and supports efforts made by its member national nurses associations (NNAs) to promote the principles set forth in the Convention. More specifically, ICN supports:

- Protecting children from any form of abuse, sexual exploitation or child labour, involvement in armed conflict, child prostitution, child pornography and forced marriages, which damage their health and intellectual, physical, social and psychological development.
- Enhancing protection and care for children with special needs such as orphans, abused or neglected and refugee children as well as assisting children who experience post traumatic stress disorder related to war and conflict, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.
- Promoting family health and welfare so that the family unit is the place where children are wanted, protected, cared for and grow up in health and dignity.
- Lobbying for equitable distribution of goods and services so that all children have adequate nutrition, housing, education and health care.
- Promoting equal opportunities for education of female children, orphans and those of minority groups.
- Fostering the delivery of primary health care services for children with emphasis on the promotion of health and the prevention of disease and disability.
- Promoting the rights of the hospitalised child, including parental involvement in caring for the sick or institutionalised child or the child being cared for in the community.

ICN supports the right of children to be registered at birth as a prerequisite for identity and dignity and for access to their fundamental rights of protection, education, health care and other services.

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¹ United Nations, **Convention on the Rights of the Child**. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, 20 November 1989.

ICN believes national nurses associations should:

- Be familiar with the complementary relationship between health and human rights and advocate for human rights training for nurses and others.
- Collaborate with human rights groups and government bodies in monitoring implementation of children's rights.
- Report any risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation of children to appropriate authorities.

Background:

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that:

Every child shall enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right not to be disadvantaged on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, whether of him/herself or of his/her family.

The child shall enjoy special protection and opportunity to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in conditions of freedom and dignity. The child shall be entitled from birth to a name and a nationality.

Special care and protection shall be provided for child and mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and health services. The physically, mentally or socially handicapped child shall have special treatment, education and care.

The child shall grow up in an atmosphere of affection and of moral and material security. Wherever possible the child shall grow up in the care of and under the responsibility of parents and only in exceptional circumstances shall the infant be separated from the mother. Society and public authorities shall have the duty to extend particular care to children without family and those without adequate means of support.

There shall be equal opportunity to free and compulsory education, at least in elementary stages, which will promote the child's individual abilities, judgement and sense of moral and social responsibility. There shall be opportunity for play and recreation. In all circumstances the child shall be among the first to receive protection and relief.

The child shall be protected from practices, which cause racial, ethnic, cultural, language, religious or any other form of prejudice and discrimination, and be brought up in a spirit of respect, friendship among peoples, peace and consciousness of a responsibility for his/her fellow human beings.

/over...

War and conflict increase children's vulnerability to post traumatic stress disorders, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy from which they must be protected.

Children who are not registered often lose the protection that the law affords, since without a birth certificate their age cannot be established. Furthermore, lack of or an inadequate birth registration system means that a government does not know the true number of its citizens, and is hampered in planning for their needs.

Cultural and traditional practices that harm children and violate their rights should be eliminated.

Partnership with human rights groups and government bodies is vital for safeguarding children's rights.

The health and human rights of children are intricately linked and it is important to educate nurses and others about human rights.

Adopted in 1979

Reviewed and revised in 1995, 2000 and 2008

Related ICN Positions:

- [Nurses and human rights](#)
- [Prevention of disability and the care of people with disabilities](#)

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.