

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Background

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is presently the most widely ratified international human rights instrument. All United Nations member states, except for the United States and Somalia, have ratified the Convention. It is the only international human rights treaty to include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and sets out in details what every child needs to have a safe, happy and fulfilled childhood.

The Convention is a comprehensive instrument which sets out rights that define universal principles and norms for the status of children. It not only sets out these fundamental rights and freedoms, but also takes into account the need for children to have special assistance. And protection due to their vulnerability. It is the most complete statement of children's rights ever produced and has 41 substantive articles. It is also the first legal instrument to focus solely on the child, regardless of where the child was born and to whom, and regardless of sex, religion and social origin.

Upon ratification, states commit themselves to respecting these rights.

When the Convention was written, and why

In the 1940s, the United Nations produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted in 1948. This Declaration applies to children as well as adults. However, growing awareness of the rights of children led to calls for a dedicated children's human rights treaty.

In 1959, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the second Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This consisted of ten principles for working in the best interests of the child. This was not legally binding, however, and was only a statement of intent.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was drafted over the course of 10 years between 1979 and 1989. Representatives from all societies, religions and cultures contributed, as a working group was given the task of drafting the Convention. Like all human rights treaties, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was first to be approved, or adopted, by the United Nations General Assembly.

On 20 November 1989, the governments represented at the General Assembly (which included the UK) agreed to adopt the Convention into international law. It came into force in September 1990.

Committee on the Rights of the Child

States which are party to the Convention, including the UK, have to report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. This United Nations treaty monitoring body assesses how well states are implementing the Convention, reports on progress and makes recommendations. The committee comprises 18 independent children's rights experts who are elected in their personal capacity to four-year terms. The committee meets three times a year in Geneva, Switzerland.

The committee is responsible for examining the progress made by state parties in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. Unlike some treaty monitoring bodies, the committee does not have the power to examine individual complaints concerning violations of the rights of a child.