

PEACE EDUCATION FOR ALL

Statement of Support for Save the Children – Rewrite the Future

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The written history of childhood is a very short part of the history of humankind. We know for sure that children have been part of the labour force everywhere. They have worked in fields and in factories. They have worked hard in taking care of their siblings or taking care of the cattle from the earliest years on, as many of them still do nowadays in the developing world.

Children have always been, as a part of any human society, influenced by famines, illnesses, conflicts and occupations, witnessing firsthand human violence and participating in many ways in crises and warfare. The fact is, that under warlike conditions children are exposed to crude, violent, fearful and shocking experiences. They have been forced to become soldiers or have been used as first trespassers in mine fields. In modern warfare, the civilian and the combatants are often mixed. Children may grow up in regions, where hostilities are deeply rooted in the minds of the civilian population, and aggressive behaviour is supported. Children are often living in circumstances of low intensity warfare, where the adversaries tend to destroy the structures of the targeted country despite the absence of open aggression. The children of affluent industrialised and information societies face warfare as a sophisticated play where their skills are developed to destroy the enemy image. In countries not exposed to conflict or warfare, this militarisation of children's minds does not aim at the potential military use of children, but rather at the construction of legitimacy for warfare and arms race. The education for war has long traditions, compared to the traditions of peace education.

Peace education has been on the agenda of IPPNW from the very beginning of our activities. We have organised peace courses and schools, trained medical students and teachers. There is an evident need in the whole world to increase both the effort given, as well as the level of ambition regarding, the results of the peace education. These facilities are, however, not enough; there is still a challenging field ahead of us, calling for the input of the best research resources and the real interest of the societies as a whole.

We have to develop new methods for working for peace education, and new sense of responsibility for all adults. Children's minds are easily occupied by strong, charismatic adults. Children's minds are a mirror of our own society. Focussing only on children in peace education is merely a gesture of our own powerlessness and unwillingness to change our global beliefs. This means developing new ways to cooperate with societies, teachers, adults and parents. The parents will be our partners in developing peace education.

And last but not least: we have to develop methods and ways of working more with children, to speak directly to children and to listen to children. Children cannot bear responsibility for their development or for the development of the world, but they will need to have a say in our future.

Dr. Vappu Taipale is the author of several books and textbooks on social and health policy and child and adolescent mental health. She has held numerous senior appointments in her native Finland, the European Union and the United Nations system related to health and social development. From 1982-1983 she served as Minister of Health of Finland and Minister of Social Affairs from 1983-1984.



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