





STANDING FOR CHILDREN


A Statement of the Provincial Leaders

1. The Regional Conference of Christian Brothers,¹ representative of the Lasallian education ministries of the United States-Toronto Region, assume as our moral duty the promotion and the protection of the rights of children and commit ourselves to helping them achieve their full human dignity. This foundational duty is consistent with our Christian vocation to educate and evangelize the young, especially those who are impoverished and marginalized. Today in the United States and Toronto, 700 Brothers and 5,500 teachers educate 68,000 young people in 100 schools and institutions in 23 states, the District of Columbia and the city of Toronto.
2. In fidelity to the prophetic vision of John Baptist de La Salle, our Founder and the Patron Saint of Teachers, we view standing for children, especially the most vulnerable, as an integral dimension of our total consecration to God. Our Institute's 43rd General Chapter in 2000,² directed that the defense and promotion of the rights of children be "a major focus of concern" for the Lasallian education mission.
3. We, the Provincial Leaders, are gravely concerned about ensuring protection of the unborn child; children and youth who are impoverished, marginalized, abandoned, and exploited; children and youth who are inadequately fed, housed, and cared for; children and youth who lack basic necessities of life, including the opportunity for a quality education and children and youth who are trafficked.
4. In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.³ This international treaty is the most universally ratified human rights pact in history, with every U.N. member state, including the Holy See, having ratified the *Convention*, except two. Only Somalia and the United States, despite its active participation in the decade-long drafting process, have yet to ratify the *Convention*. Though real progress has been made around the world on behalf of children's rights and their well-being during the first two decades of the *Convention*, too many children continue to be deprived of their fundamental rights. Because they are fragile and growing, they need protection.
5. In response to this troubled reality, in April 2010, students and educators from the Region's Lasallian secondary and higher education ministries participated in the Lasallian Convocation at the United Nations on the Rights of the Child. Inspired by their witness and solidarity, we urge the United States Senate to give its advice and consent to the ratification of the *Convention*—which belongs to a broader architecture of human rights—that enunciates children's rights, proffering a global vision of the child with a moral and spiritual dimension.
6. Why should the United States ratify the treaty? We put forward two basic reasons: First, U.S. ratification would establish a useful framework to create and reform domestic laws, policies and practices that protect children's rights and serve their basic human needs; Second, U.S. ratification would bolster international efforts to make the world more fit for children. The world can greatly benefit from more direct U.S. leadership in the campaign to protect children.
7. Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the *Convention* in June 2009, a *World Appeal to a New Mobilization for Childhood* was launched, an initiative of the International Catholic Child Bureau and signed by nearly 10,000 Non-Governmental Organizations and individuals from around the world. The *Appeal* reads: "The *Convention*... has generated a new vision of the child. Since its promulgation and its almost universal ratification, children must be considered fully as human beings, true-rights holders entitled to enjoy human rights in an inalienable way and without discrimination. Unfortunately, subscribed engagements are still very far from being respected worldwide. Too often, children continue to be viewed as objects of assistance, or as beneficiaries of certain rights they receive as charity."⁴
8. When we, the religious leadership of Lasallians in the United States, survey the status of children in our Region and around the world, we are distressed. While the *Convention* has created a new ethos for childhood and led to a clearer comprehension of childhood risks, the global landscape remains scarred with millions of children deprived of their dignity and their basic human rights. Too many children in the U.S. are in essence "held captive" by the scars of poverty, with the current economic climate pulling more families and their children into destitution.⁵ Today, one in five children in the U.S., or 14.1 million, are economically poor, the majority living in working families.⁶ There is still much work to be done.
9. The Gospel of Jesus and Catholic Social Teaching instructs us that the preservation of human dignity can only be attained if human rights are affirmed and protected. Thus, we call upon political and religious leaders, as well as civil society organizations in the United States and throughout the world, to exercise their influence to promote and protect children's rights, moving our society towards achieving real progress so that all children may thrive.


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Visitor, District of Eastern North America


Bro. Larry Schatz, FSC
Visitor, Midwest District


Bro. Timothy Coldwell, FSC
Visitor, New Orleans-Santa Fe District


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Notes

1. The Regional Conference of Christian Brothers, or RCCB, is the governing board of Christian Brothers Conference. The RCCB holds the primary responsibility for the unity of the Region and its programs and initiatives and consists of the Provincials and Assistant Provincials of each of the four Districts (provinces) in the Region and the General Councilor for the Region.
2. The Institute's highest legislative body. It is comprised of elected Brother delegates from around the world that convenes every seven years to set the broad directions for the Brothers' life and the Lasallian mission.
3. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by U.N. General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49 of the *Convention*.
4. The International Catholic Child Bureau (Bice), affiliated with the Vatican's Secretary of State, took the initiative of this document. Founded in 1948, Bice has actively participated in drafting the Convention in the eighties and since then has constantly followed its implementation in the field and in Geneva to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a founding member of Bice, and the Institute is a signatory of the *World Appeal*.
5. Children's Defense Fund, www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/held-captive-child-poverty.html.
6. Ibid., www.childrensdefense.org/policy-priorities/ending-child-poverty/.