

Human Rights Council
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Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Oral Statement

Voices of Children in Ending Immigration Detention

*Joint oral statement on behalf of the International Detention Coalition (IDC), the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), and the Terre des Hommes International Federation (TDH)**

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report and recommendations. We also wish to thank the Special Rapporteur for the close collaboration we have with him.

The voices of children are a powerful and necessary reminder that our work here in Geneva has real impacts on the lives of children worldwide. The testimonies of children in this statement have symbolically been brought by two long distance runners from Lampedusa to Geneva to highlight the concerns and needs of children in the context of migration.

Over 400 km of the journey from Lampedusa to Geneva were run in the last 4 days by the Secretary General of Terre des Hommes, who will be arriving to the Palais des Nations this very afternoon. This was a long and arduous journey, but so little as compared to the difficult and dangerous journey by foot of millions of children on the move. We should listen to these children. Their views and opinions must influence our policy making.

Migrant children are often victims of abuse and exploitation at the hands of adults. And because of their migration status, migrant children often face barriers to access justice for these harms. Talking about his experience in prison, a 16-year-old child on the move said:

“They do to us whatever they like. They treat us like animals, with no reason, just to play. I would like that there are cameras. I know you could then see with your own eyes because it is impossible to explain”.

The immigration detention of children and families, represents a grave violation of children’s rights and a serious breach of justice. Every day, all around the world, millions of children are affected by immigration detention. A 15-year-old boy reports:

“All migrants were taken and detained. The girls were taken away during the night to be raped, we could not do anything. I can’t think of what I will become now. You are made to hate yourself and your life. The pain is so much that you would rather die, because your condition does not allow you to rebel”.

The physical and mental health harms to children in closed immigration centers have been well-documented. And even very short periods of detention can have lifelong developmental impacts on children. For this reason, the CRC Committee has made clear that it is never in the best interests of a child to criminalize or detain them because of their or their parent’s migration status. Another 15-year-old boy recently arrived in a reception centre shared:

“I am too young to suffer like this. I started too early to cry, to be afraid and to feel unprotected. I hope I will soon leave this place because here time is 'circular', it does not make sense, nothing changes and I am losing valuable energy. I cannot waste any more time, I have to build a future”.



Instead of detaining children for immigration purposes, the CRC Committee has stated that “to the greatest extent possible, and always using the least restrictive means necessary, States should adopt alternatives to detention that fulfill the best interests of the child.

The Global Campaign to End the Immigration Detention of Children, of which we are all supporters, is working with numerous state parties to make this a reality in the coming years. We will be exploring this work in more detail and invite you to attend a side meeting on “Ending Child Immigration Detention” this Thursday 19th June at 2:00pm where we will again share the voices of detained children and explore strategies for ending child immigration detention consistent with the recommendations of the Child Rights Committee.

On that basis we would like to ask the Special Rapporteur to restlessly lend his voice to help states end the immigration detention of children.

Thank you.

Geneva, 13th June 2014

**NGOs with ECOSOC Consultative status*