



Mission permanente d'Israël  
auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies  
et des Organisations Internationales à Genève

משלחת ישראל  
ליד משרד האומות המאוחדות  
והארגונים הבינלאומיים בג'נבה

Statement by  
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Before the  
Committee on the Rights of the Child  
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Geneva

Madam Chair, distinguished members of the Committee,

I'm honoured to have privilege of appearing before you in Israel's first appearance following the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. I am Daniel Taub, Senior Deputy Legal Advisor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I am joined here today by a delegation of experts from Israel, who are each experts on various aspects of the Optional Protocol. I am very pleased to introduce:

Mrs. Simona Halperin  
Director of International Organizations and Human Rights Department  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem  
and Head of Mission Designate to Israel's Economic and Cultural Mission, Taipei

Mrs. Hila Gilad Tene  
Director, Human Rights and Relations with International Organisations  
Ministry of Justice, Jerusalem

Mr. Harel Weinberg  
Legal Advisor  
Ministry of Defense, Jerusalem

Mr. Walid Abu-Haya  
First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Israel, Geneva

Ms. Amanda Grudinskas  
Adviser, Permanent Mission of Israel, Geneva

This delegation represents a small but expert selection from the many government ministries and bodies involved in the preparation of Israel's report and the dissemination and implementation of the Protocol.

Madam Chair,

Protecting our children and providing them with the best possible opportunities in life, is the guiding objective of every parent. It is one of our prime motivations in reaching

out to make peace, and when no other choice is available, in defending our families from violence and terrorism.

The Government of Israel is committed to advancing the protection of children in every sphere. We are proud of the progress made over the past two decades and were gratified that this was noted in the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child following the submission of Israel's Report in 2002.

This effort is clearly a work in progress, with much left to do. But in recent years we feel we have made some important further steps with regard to implementing the goals of the Protocol.

First and foremost, there has been an increased focus on children's rights, and on the need to raise public awareness and involvement in the enhancement of children's well-being, irrespective of their ethnic, economic, geographic or religious background. The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict adds another layer to this perpetuation of the well being of children – their protection in vulnerable situations, those stemming from an armed conflict.

For several decades now, Israel's executive, judicial and parliamentary branches of Government have been working closely with Non Governmental Organizations, and with children themselves, to take comprehensive steps towards the implementation of international instruments and agreements targeted at the protection of the rights of the child.

Since becoming a Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Israel has undertaken a number of far-reaching reforms in the field of children's rights. In

particular, the past few decades have been marked by the passage of extensive legislation relating to children, frequently modelled on that of other State Parties, as was also presented in our written replies to the List of Issues.

When it comes to children, certain basic principles are universal and beyond dispute. We must speak in one voice in condemnation of such immoral practices as child labour, child soldiers, child trafficking and other forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation of children.

One of the most critical and important elements in the long-term protection of the rights of the child is education for peace and for tolerance. This is true particularly in our region, first, within Israel itself, tolerance between different communities, religious and secular, veterans and newcomers, Arabs and Jews. It is even more important in the long-term relations between Israelis, Palestinians and Arabs in general. On a personal note I would add that for close to two years I served as the head of the Israeli side of the Culture of Peace track of negotiations in the peace process, working together with my Palestinian counterparts to try to create an environment in our media, our schoolbooks and our public space which would be conducive to peace taking root.

Realising a transformation in attitudes in both societies requires a paradigm shift in education – education for peace; education for understanding; education for respect and tolerance of the other. In this respect, ongoing efforts to bring Israeli and Arab children together, through youth projects, seminars, and summer camps are of prime importance. Several such projects were detailed in our written replies to the List of Issues.

I would like to highlight some of these programs, initiated by the Israeli Ministry of Education:

- The "Pupil's Rights - A Model for Active Learning" program, is designed to disseminate and inculcate the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as pupils' rights in schools and within the community, including the Arab population. The program is aimed at outlining the civic duties for recognizing and implementing the child's rights among pupils, teachers and parents.
- "Imagine" program - intended for youth at risk and providing them with education on the rights of the child and the pupil's rights by studying music and dancing. The program operates in 26 remedial classes and Jewish and Arab youth centers.
- The "Building Agreements" program - is fostering a positive environment of communication between the education system, parents and pupils, in order to realize the pupil's rights. Thus, by involving parents and pupils, the program is allowing them to set the accepted behavioural norms and ethics, and is providing them with useful tools for listening, expressing and communicating between themselves and with each other.
- A joint program with the Public Defenders Office designated to teach educators, parents and pupils, on the rights of minors in criminal proceedings. The program has been implemented in 51 schools, to date, both Jewish and Arab, reaching over 20,000 pupils.

One of the harsher aspects of the ongoing armed conflict can be found in the rising number of children that have fallen victims to the hostilities - losing life, limb and

becoming orphaned. The State of Israel spares no effort in providing these children and their families with monetary remuneration and various benefits, all deliberated to assist and support them in their recovery, as well as the psychological support needed to deal with trauma and loss. In 2008 alone, the Israeli National Insurance Institute granted benefits to the families of 246 deceased children, 479 orphaned children and 132 disabled children – all due to hostilities.

Looking further afield, Israel also took it upon itself to grant asylum to several former child soldiers, and between the years 2005 and 2006, five cases of child-soldiers who came into Israel, after being involved in the civil wars that occurred in West Africa, were granted asylum. These minors were granted the status of refugees and were provided with psychotherapy in Israel, and three of them were also placed in designated treatment.

Madame Chair, distinguished Committee Members,

We have come here today with a willingness to listen, to share our experience and dilemmas, and to engage in a substantive dialogue about implementing the values we share, even in sometimes unique circumstances. Thank you very much for your attention.

Thank you.