Guest Editorial

Still Passionate About Children's Rights After Thirty Years

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In this issue 1 of Volume 30, we are marking 30 years of *The International Journal of Children's Rights*. For me the story of the Journal started not with issue 1 (which finally appeared in the spring of 1993), but at the beginning of 1989, the year that there was still discussion on the draft Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in the UN Commission on Human Rights and the draft CRC still had to be discussed in the Third Committee of the General Assembly and in a Plenary Session of the General Assembly. In 1989 I lived in Jerusalem and had started the Israel Section of Defence for Children International. Together with the Faculty of Law of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Centre for Youth Policy of Haifa University, we organised the First International Study Group on Ideologies of Children's Rights. My plan was always to get the support there for the launch of an international academic journal on children's rights. The Study Group took place on 9–14 December 1990. Recently I looked again at a photograph of the Study Group and I realised what a remarkable group of people we had together there. Adam Lopatka (who had served as the Chairman/Rapporteur of the Working Group drafting the CRC) stands in the middle of the picture like “the godfather of the Convention” as he liked to be called. Michael Longford (the British civil servant who had served as District Commissioner in Tanganyika and who later represented Britain at the CRC

Study Group participants (left to right): Janet Fink, attorney (Legal Aid Society, Juvenile Rights Division, New York); Yvonne Mansbach, M. PH. (Treasurer, DCI-Israel); Prof. Ludwig Salgo (Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany); Michael Longford (European Center in Vienna); Dr. Susan Wolfson (Institute of Education, London); Françoise Krill (International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva); Trevor Davies (Secretary-General of DCI, Geneva); Dr. Hans-Joachim Heintze (University Bocum, Germany); Dr. Menachem Horovitz (Chairman, DCI-Israel); Malfred Grude Flekkoy (International Child Development Center of UNICEF, Florence, Italy); unidentified guest of The Hebrew University; George Samaan (DCI-Israel board member); Prof. Adam Lopatka (Polish Academy of Sciences); Prof. Gary B. Melton (University of Nebraska - Lincoln); Prof. George Kent (University of Hawaii at Honolulu); Dr. Elaine Sutherland (University of Glasgow); Dr. Philip Veerman (DCI-Israel); Gwen James (A Voice for the Child in Care, London); Prof. Miek de Langen (University of Amsterdam); Dr. Collin Wringe (University of Keele); Mrs. Freeman (London); Dr. Heathcote (Keele); Prof. Michael D. Freeman (University College, London); Mrs. Lieve Verhellen (Belgium); Prof. Eugene Verhellen (University of Ghent); Drs. Coby de Graaf (University of Amsterdam).

Not in the photograph: Sergei Abramov (Editor, *Familia* magazine, Moscow); Dr. Zvi Eisikovits (Youth Policy Center of Haifa University); Prof. Gideon Fishman (Haifa University); Prof. Stanley Herr (University of Maryland); Prof. Ulla Jacobsen (University of Lund, Sweden); David Johnson (DCI Secretariat - Geneva); Dr. Hatem Kannana (Galilee Society for Health among Minorities in Israel); Prof. Motta Kremnitzer (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem); Albert Likhanov (Lenin Children's Fund, Moscow); Prof. Anne McGillivray (University of Manitoba, Canada); Mephodii, the Metropolitan of Voronez and Lipetsk (USSR); Dr. Joav Merrick (pediatrician of Tel Hashomer Hospital, Tel Aviv); Prof. Francis Rada (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem); Dr. Mike Saltman (Haifa University); Prof. Leslie Sebba (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem); Rona Shuz (London School of Economics); Prof. E. Shochetman (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem); Robert Vincke (DCI-Canada, Montreal).

FIGURE 1 Photo from *Israel Children's Rights Monitor*, vol.3 July 1991, p. 43. Published by DCI-Israel

negotiations) was towering above all of us (he was very tall). I still smile when I think how witty he was. Next to Michael Longford stood Ludwig Salgo (a family- and youth law professor from Frankfurt, Germany). In her Norwegian traditional dress I see Malfred Grude Flekkoy (a Norwegian psychologist who had been appointed

by the Norwegian Parliament in 1981 as the world's first Children's Commissioner). I also see is Michael Freeman (who was teaching at University College London) and his wife Vivien, also psychologist Gary Melton from the United States. Coby de Graaf and Miek de Langen (who had opened in 1985 in a shop opposite her home in Amsterdam a walk-in-centre for legal aid for children) were talking with Eugene Verhellen and his wife Lieve from Ghent in Belgium. Cynthia Price Cohen was not in the picture, but later she was definitely in many meetings with her 'infectious laugh and her indomitable energy and enthusiasm were, for me, her indelible characteristics' (Cerna, 2008). There were many others; I can't mention them all.

During the drafting of the CRC, tensions from the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States were clearly visible. Three representatives from the Soviet Lenin Children's Fund came to the opening session of the Study Group. I had even helped to get funding for them to come, because I thought it would help to bridge the gap between "East" and "West". But we only saw them back at the closing session. The world was changing. The Berlin wall had collapsed 11 days before the UN General Assembly adopted the CRC. In Poland a peaceful transition from communism had taken place in June 1989.

The Study Group was held despite the tense political situation (we were on the eve of the Gulf war and we had gas masks). That participants still came, was a tribute to their high motivation and commitment.

The first days were held at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the final days at Haifa University. In between there was a rich programme. A meeting was hosted by Palestinian colleagues in East Jerusalem, where we met with representatives of human rights organisations working for Palestinian children. There was also a day of travel to Haifa together on a bus rented for the Study Group. The joint activities on the way created a real group atmosphere.

1 The Founding Meeting

For me the Study Group was the "alibi" to get a group of important children's rights people together and discuss if we could launch an international academic journal, an idea which I had already discussed with Lindy Melman, the publisher at Martinus Nijhoff. The evening the Study Group arrived in our Hotel in Haifa (12 December 1990), the founding of the journal was the only point on the agenda of the evening meeting. I explained that my fear was that children's rights could become just a fad: now in fashion, but it could be out of fashion if we did not succeed in anchoring the children's rights movement academically. And for this we needed an academic journal. Children's rights had developed into a new field of human rights with children being recognised as subjects rather than as objects of

rights and this field deserved its own academic journal, I argued. The rest is history. The Study Group members supported the idea of starting an academic journal and they formed an international editorial advisory board and the Children's Rights Publications Foundation supporting the Journal (with Michael Longford becoming the first chair of the Foundation). The Study Group members agreed that the purpose of the journal would be to provide worldwide academic support to the children's rights movement (Veerman, 1992). We were lucky that Michael Freeman was among the participants of the Study Group and he agreed to be one of the Editors-in-Chief (Susan Wolfson and Geraldine van Bueren were on board in the beginning). Without Michael as Editor-in-Chief the Journal would not have become such an authoritative voice in the international human rights field.

2 New Developments and Challenges

Modern technology has helped the Editorial Advisory Board to become more involved and support Professor Laura Lundy and Professor Helen Stalford, the present Editors-in-Chief. On 21 September 2020, a first Zoom meeting of the Editorial Advisory Board took place with colleagues, including those in Australia and South Africa participating. On 5 November 2021, a second meeting took place on Zoom. I came across a Memorandum mailed on 24 April 1993 by Cynthia Price Cohen, pleading for regular contact between the Editorial Advisory Board and the Editors-in-Chief. At the time we only had expensive conference calls or organising a real (expensive) meeting. In fact what Cynthia proposed is has now been realised thanks to modern technology and this will improve the quality of the Journal. I am happy that the Editorial Advisory Board is now less white. And I hope in the near future voices of children can be heard directly in the Journal. Young people are our hope. The climate crisis, the right to education of girls and gun control show how young voices are essential. Young people like Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai and the young people of the *March for Our lives* (a youth-led gun-control movement in the United States) have shown us that we as adults do not take our responsibility for something so essential for their future. The idea of a column of young people in the Journal was raised in the 2020 Zoom meeting.

I am more worried now about the future of children than I was in the period 1989–1993, when we were preparing the beginning of the Journal. At that time the CRC was a sign of optimism. For me this optimism crumbled in 2017 with the inauguration of President Trump in the United States: the world order is in a transition period. With the rise of China (Richardson, 2020) as a global power, children's human rights will have to be more defended than ever. Working on children's rights

in a new world order (Zajec, 2020) might be harder than 30 years ago (Alston, 2009) and I am sure we will find reflections of this development in the Journal.

3 In Memoriam Gary B. Melton (1952–2020)

We recently learned of Gary Melton's death, an important member of our international editorial advisory board. His passing is definitely a huge loss for the field of children's rights, child maltreatment, psychology and child research. Gary was very committed to making the world a better place for children and helped in connection with international work for children (he organised the Second International Study Group in South Carolina). I remember especially how he opened my eyes for the importance of working with local religious leaders and the wider community. He had vision and saw the bigger picture. We will miss him.

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