With its 181 States Parties as of November 1995, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is close to universal ratification. The Committee on the Rights of the Child does its utmost to keep up with the consideration of the initial reports submitted by States Parties pursuant to Article 44 of the CRC. Under this provision States Parties are required to submit an initial report two years after ratification. The initial report should provide the Committee on the Rights of the Child with a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the CRC, including measures adopted to bring national law and practice into line with the provisions under the CRC; progress made in the enjoyment of the rights set forth in the CRC; factors and difficulties that prevent full compliance with the CRC; and implementation priorities and specific goals for the future.

During its Tenth Session, 30 October to 17 November 1995, the Committee on the Rights of the Child examined initial reports submitted by six States Parties: Italy, Ukraine, Germany, Senegal, Portugal and the Holy See.

Examination of States Parties’ reports takes place in stages. First, the State Party’s report is given a general review by the Committee, during which it formulates a series of questions that the State Party is requested to answer in writing. This is followed by a public, oral examination of the State Party’s report, at which the State Party must be present to answer further questions based on its written answers to the questions and other information. A brief overview of the Committee’s examination of each of the Tenth Session reports appears below.

Italy

A large delegation from the Italian Government, including representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Department of Family Affairs, came to Geneva to discuss Italy’s initial report. They commenced by noting that the CRC is self-executing in Italy and as such has been applied directly by the Italian courts, and that Italy applies the principle of the primacy of international human rights standards over national legislation in case of conflict of law. They also noted the establishment within the Parliament of a Special Committee on Child Issues.

Recommendations made by the Committee included the need to improve the implementation of the principles and provisions of the CRC. An overall
integrated mechanism should be established to monitor the activities designed
to promote and protect the rights of the child. The coordination between the
various governmental entities involved should be improved as well as their
cooperation with NGOs. The creation of a comprehensive network to collect
data on the implementation of children’s rights was strongly recommended.

The Committee brought attention to the need to protect vulnerable groups
in Italy, in particular gypsies, refugee children, children from poor families and
children born out of wedlock. In addition, serious concern was expressed about
the existence of child abuse within the family, the insufficient protection by
the Penal Code in this regard, and the lack of adequate measures for the
psycho-social recovery of child victims of such abuses.

The Committee stated that serious consideration was necessary of Italy’s
obligations under Article 4 of the CRC. In particular, it was concerned about
the inadequacy of measures taken to ensure the implementation of the
economic, social and cultural rights recognized in the CRC. Italy should give
priority to the social sector in its budget allocation.

The Committee noted that the system of education in Italy is in need of a
critical review, which should also facilitate the reduction of the number of
children involved in child labour. It expressed concern about the increasing
drop-out rate and the problems that this is creating in Italian society. The
lack of systematic training programs for professional groups was also of
great concern to the Committee. Furthermore, it stated that human rights
education should be a permanent part of the curricula.

In the opinion of the Committee, the four general principles of the CRC,
namely non-discrimination, best interests of the child, the right to life, survival
and development, and respect for the views of the child, should be given
more attention, including in the areas of protection of vulnerable groups and
the administration of juvenile justice.

The representative of the Government stated that Italy is going through a
difficult period of transition. There is no political stability, but the will to reform
is there and further steps will be taken to implement the provisions of the CRC.

Ukraine

The spokesperson who attended as the representative of the Ukraine
Government was Ms Liliya Grygorovytch, a member of the Ukraine Parliament
and chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Health Care of Children and
Mothers. Assisting her were two representatives assigned to the Permanent
Mission in Geneva as well as an attaché from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ukraine was described as a country in transition, moving from a highly
centralized, communist state to a democratic society with a free market
economy. With this transition have come social and economic dislocations
for many Ukrainians. In addition, the country is still recovering from the nuclear
disaster in Tchernobyl, which has taken a disastrous toll on the lives of many,
especially children far beyond the borders of the immediate area. As a result