

Melbourne Declaration 2006

The theme of the 17th IACAPAP Congress in Melbourne 2006 was "Nurturing Diversity".

Children of today should be guaranteed an optimal situation from birth to adulthood. During their childhood and school years, they should be allowed to develop their individuality.

Diversity should be promoted. It enriches people and communities around the world. But, every day, child and adolescent psychiatrists and allied professionals encounter global pressures toward conformity.

Children of today are born into families and communities that differ in regard to ethnicity, culture, language, religion, environment and the opportunity to benefit from education and wealth.

Children of today are also born into a world where substantial changes are occurring at an accelerating speed. They are exposed to revolutionary new technology, communicating ideas and values with opportunities for education and personal development. However, the worldwide communication made possible by internet and satellite broadcasting, and heavily used by marketing interests, conveys the risk of fostering a uniformity in the lifestyle of teenagers. Uniformity could erode the influences of unique cultures on individual develop-

ment, and lead to other pressures on special populations. It is likely that globalization will heighten inter-generational conflict in this regard.

Children born with mental handicaps and developmental disorder may face exclusion from school and adequate support and be denied the opportunity to participate in community life. They should have the right to be included on equal terms as other children. The situation will be even worse for those already marginalized by virtue of being part of a minority group, such as indigenous populations, and those of diverse gender identity and serious mental illness. Besides exclusion, they risk being the victims of bullying or more serious violence.

If child and adolescent psychiatrists and allied professionals are to counter the exclusion of children, promote their individuality and mental health, and nurture diversity, they should adopt the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Children (November, 1959). Of its 10 principles five are particularly relevant, and are quoted here as they were affirmed in November 1959.

Principle 1

The child shall enjoy all the rights set forth in this Declaration. Every child, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social

origin, property, birth or other status, whether of himself or of his family.

Principle 2

The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.

Principle 7

The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgment, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents.

The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities, shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right.

Principle 9

The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic, in any form. The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age; he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral development.

Principle 10

The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any other form of discrimination. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

All ten UN principles should be incorporated in our advocacy, monitored for their implementation, and explained in terms understandable to a broad audience. Almost all countries have embraced the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Global recognition should be fostered in an ever more visible and forceful manner in collaboration with a broad range of consumers and stakeholders.