



*International Janusz Korczak
Association*

*Międzynarodowe Stowarzyszenie
im. Janusza Korczaka*



Minutes of the International Seminar

The Polish Jewish Pioneer on Children's Human Rights, Janusz Korczak (1878–1942) and the rights of the child to form and express his or her views and to be heard according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

18th June 2011

We would like to offer our thanks to Ambassador Z.Rapacki, and his representatives Mr.Cezary Lusiński, Mr Konrad Stepowski and all the staff of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland to Geneva together with Ms.Marta Mauras Perez, Vice-chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, to Prof. Waltraut Kerber-Ganse and Mrs. Batia Gilad, Chairperson of the International Janusz Korczak Association (IKA).

Thank you to friends from Korczak Associations from around the world and to the members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for joining us in the exploration of Korczak's legacy and vision and its significance today.

The conference included representatives from Janusz Korczak Associations representing Burundi, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom together with members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child including representatives from Chile, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Thailand, Tunisia and Uganda,

The conference programme incorporated three panels.

The Opening Session:

Mr Cezary Lusinski, Deputy Ambassador, gave an opening speech on behalf of the Ambassador Remigiusz Henczel, Permanent Representative of Poland. Mr Lusinski welcomed all the delegates to this important Seminar and reminded people of the legacy that the Doctor, Janusz Korczak, has left to us all. Mr Lusinski stressed that the Polish Mission of Poland to the United Nations in Geneva is delighted to be able to assist the IKA in their endeavours to raise awareness of the importance of the contribution the life and legacy of Janusz Korczak can make to developing a positive understanding and appreciation of the value and importance of children's rights and responsibilities. Mr Lusinski stressed that Korczak provides us with a significant example of a citizen committed to humanistic ideas regarding the conditions which encourage children to grow and develop holistically.



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Mr Lusinski stressed that children have their own views and opinions which should be listened to and for which they should be respected. Children should also be valued for their inspirational ideas and for their enthusiasm in expressing their views, hopes and aspirations.



Mr Lusinski thanked the Slovak mission for hosting us all in their residence whilst the headquarters of the Polish Mission is undergoing major and much needed refurbishment. Mr Lusinski invited all the Seminar participants to enjoy the day and for the members of the United Nations Committee on Rights of the Child, members of the IKA and all others participating in the Seminar to engage in dialogue and share perspectives regarding the theme of the child's right to be heard. At a later stage Mr Lusinski affirmed the importance of the Korczak International Camp, Korczakowo, held every year in the Polish People's Republic in keeping Korczak's vision and

legacy alive and facilitating a spirit of community, cooperation and dialogue.

Mrs Waltraut Kerber-Ganse followed Mr Lusinski's opening speech by thanking the Polish Mission for hosting the Seminar and for their invaluable assistance in the organisation of the event. She explored the idea of Korczak as an educator who is not always perceived as being in the main stream of educational thought and practice and she outlined her hope for a future in which Korczak's pedagogical philosophy permeates all main stream education including the training of teachers. She also mentioned that Korczak's inspiring vision has been taken into consideration in the process of redrafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and she affirmed that Mr Thomas Hammaberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, stood firmly with Korczak in sharing his vision for Children's' Rights. Waltraut also gave a short overview of previous Korczak and Human Rights Seminars held in the Polish Mission in Geneva in 2009 and 2010.



Mr Lothar Krappmann introduced us to the process of different drafts of the Committee papers and stressed the importance of Arab Countries, Africa, Asia and Europe in addressing the issues of Children's Rights.

Marta Mauras-Perez, Member of the United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child from Chile emphasised the importance of protecting children's rights everywhere and in all continents. She said that children must be heard and listened to and must be encouraged to express their views.

Batia Gilad, the Chairperson of the IKA, spoke about Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and referred to the concept of human dignity and the importance of dialogue based on mutual respect and the requirement for children to have both the space and capacity to express themselves. She also made reference to the approach of moral education which affirms the rights and responsibilities of children growing up as valued citizens, sensitive to the needs of others and respectful of their obligations.

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Batia considered the links between Articles 12 and 28 and made reference to children being heard, listened to and affirmed so that they are empowered and able to develop meaningful lives as citizens of their local communities and the wider society. She referred to the legacy of Korczak and of Stefa Wilczynska and their struggle in helping children to reach beyond themselves, to the wider world and their fellows. Batia outlined the role education can play in helping children cope with trauma and distress and in finding their happiness. She illustrated the dream of Stefa and Korczak in helping children create the rhythm of their days in schools which provides a foundation for the rhythm of their world. She said that school was not restricted to the classroom but included nature, an emphasis on work and responsibility and the necessity for support for both the weak and the strong. Batia made references to Korczak's books for the children and their importance in facilitating understanding of democracy, equality and justice. She also referred to Itzak Belfer's inspiring paintings. As a child in the orphanage Belfer was encouraged to draw by Stefa Wilczynska. Korczak and Stefa were people totally committed to the development of children as active citizens even during the most difficult and challenging times.



Lothar Krappmann bridged the opening session with Panel I: he emphasised the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the role the Members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child play in furthering children's rights internationally. He believes that Korczak started a new way of thinking about children, which he referred to as a creative model of children's rights oriented in practice. He warned that although children are not perfect human beings they should be respected at all times in their lives; listening is not enough, we must actively seek children's views and hear and respond to their hidden agendas. Their views must be given proper weight. They also have a right to a response and to have access to full participation in schools, communities and the home. Lothar said that a child is an evolving human being and that is why they ought to be respected, be encouraged to participate and to question.

Panel 1 – "Children's participation across the world"

Panel 1 was chaired by Marta Mauras-Perez, Vice Chairperson of the UN CRC. The panel included the following Members of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: Mr Hatem Kotrane from Tunisia, Mr Sanphasit Koompraphant from Thailand, Ms Maria Herczog from Hungary and Mr Awich Pollar from Uganda. Reference was made to the recent Arab Spring including the Tunisian revolution and the necessity for youth to be actively included in public debates about equal rights.



The Panel considered a range of issues including that of African societies undergoing major changes in which tradition still plays a very prominent role in relation to how children are perceived in which it is often the case that men have more rights, particularly in terms of



inheritance, compared to children and women. In some cases children are perceived as being involved in witchcraft, or as being possessed by evil spirits, as a result of which they can be subject to violence and being thrown out of their homes and left to die.

The Panel considered tribal conflicts in Uganda and questions were raised regarding the relationship between cultural norms, values and traditions and rights and responsibilities. Female genital mutilation was referred to as an example of a widespread practice which in some cultures is regarded as being socially desirable and normative in spite of its human rights implications.

Korczak was affirmed as an inspirational example of a person who embodies respect for human rights and for many people in Asia and Africa his values, vision and legacy is able to be meaningfully related to a range of different social and cultural contexts. Korczak stands for justice and dialogue and his vision is paving a way in many countries so that people are beginning to question what it means to be a citizen and the issue of the relationship between parental and professional responsibility was particularly highlighted and the need for both parents to have the same respect in the family and community. Responsibility should supplant authority and all children ought to be entitled to full judicial proceedings.

Discussions about Africa explored the use of drama as a pedagogical and therapeutic resource in Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana which creatively and powerfully facilitated the development of a vehicle for children and young people to express their views. In some cultures it is a well established tradition that children's voices are not heard at home so positive steps are being taken to encourage self-expression through acting, dialogue and participation.

In Thailand protection of children is gaining in importance but abuse and neglect of children is still very common. Projects are being established to encourage parents to listen to their children and to help traumatised children express their feelings.



In the second half of Panel 1, Ms Maria Herczog, Member of the UN CRC, expressed that



Europe ought to be proud of Korczak but this is not happening on a wide scale. She referred to the crisis of the economy and the state of welfare which is placing children at risk. Korczak understood very well what it meant to live with social and economic decline and risk and that is why we are able to learn lessons from his experience, values and vision. Maria also referred to various surveys where children were asked their views about poverty and social exclusion. She indicated that 80% of children do not know how to ask for help in situations in which they experience violence, drug problems, poverty and neglect.

Using examples from the Euro Child surveys, Maria referred to the increased levels of suicide and its relationship to pressures to grow up and achieve, not being able to trust adults, and the



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prevalence of physical, emotional and mental bullying. She concluded that there is evidence that children do not trust professionals such as teachers, social workers and the police and, in many cases, even family members are not trusted.

In the context of such European research and the findings of Euro-Child surveys, we have to address the reality that poverty, exclusion, discrimination, abuse, bullying and mistrust present all too real barriers in empowering the children.

The Panel brought to the attention of Seminar participants issues of patriarchal models of relating in which children are subjected to media manipulation from an early age together with an absence of confiding relationships with adults and lack of meaningful and effective learning for wellbeing, dialogue, respect and participation. The Panel identified the need for teaching and learning to be embedded in a holistic vision related to the whole child rather than being limited to, and diminished by, an education in which focus on academic results is all too often the norm.

The Panel concluded that progress is not just to be seen in terms of GDP but in the well-being of all children which includes measures of purpose and meaning in the society in which they live.

The presentations of Panel 1 were followed by Amichai Pardo's drama performance entitled **"To Perform with Children and not in Front of Children"**.



This blended well with the presentations of Panel I as the performance involved interaction with participants from the Seminar who themselves became agents in the unfolding storytelling as they had to put themselves in the role of the child or adult, parents or educators and feel the moral and ethical dilemmas with both their hearts and heads.

Amichai gently encouraged the participants and cogently illustrated their process of reasoning and arriving at perspectives of justice and injustice, guilt, discomfort, anxiety, empathy and compassion. This process represented a real dialogue illustrating active participation and the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions and for the requirement to aim to develop as an authentic self. The Seminar participants greatly enjoyed this performance and we can be confident that the many children who have participated in Amichai's presentations will have been inspired and encouraged through their involvement in such a transparent and open process of dialogue.

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Panel II - Members of the Korczak Associations

This panel was chaired by Joop Berding – from the Netherlands. Panel II consisted of presentations by three speakers: Anna Bystrzycka from Czech; Jonathan Levi from France; and Kelvin Ravenscroft from the United Kingdom. In her presentation Ms Bystrzycka stressed the importance of Janusz Korczak's approach during his life and work in the orphanages in Warsaw, Poland. For



Korczak and his co-worker Stefania Wilczynska it was important that every child must be heard. Therefore Korczak invented the children's parliament and the court. Ms Bystrzycka found that there is perhaps too much attention for the bodily development of children, and too little for their spiritual development. Jonathan Levi in his presentation provided information about a project he is currently working on, sponsored by Unesco. It aims at the development of the abilities of children to act as teachers. Peer-to-peer education is in itself not new, but is mostly conducted in an intuitive manner. The project, guided by research about children's learning strategies, aims at a more systematic approach. From

December 2011 a number of pilots will be executed in different countries. In the third and last presentation Kelvin Ravenscroft connected the pedagogical ideas of Korczak's *How to love a child* with the idea of 'space', in which teaching, or more generally: educating children is seen as an act of hospitality. This can be connected to the search for the meaning of life, which every person has to conduct for himself or herself. Such a search needs places of trust, respect, and an ethos, Kelvin claimed. And this in turn has great implications for the way schools and curricula are organized: nature, beauty, meditation and an attitude of joyful gratitude should have a place there. The discussion focused on issues of well-being of children, which seems to be over-individualized, so that the social aspect is beyond view. What we need is a clearer outlook of our common humanity, and realization of the fact that children when they go to school they bring along entire worlds of experiences and backgrounds. The discussants agreed that Article 12 really is the core of the Convention, because it stresses dialogue and the dynamic creation of social meaning.

Panel III - Members of the Korczak Associations

This panel was chaired by Jonathan Levy – from France.

This final and rich panel dealt with the opportunities and difficulties of applying the ideals, visions and practical applications of Janusz Korczak and The International convention of the rights of the child to youth and children in the 21st century. It also looked at the issues of cross-cultural approaches when dealing with different ethnic groups and the complexity of trans-cultural (universality approaches) faced with cultural diversity in terms of values and norms.



Nelianne de Boo from The Netherlands gave us practical

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examples of rights of expressions within the school context. Dealing with expressing feelings, through methods of dialogue, and building trust and respect between children, and between children and adults. This is developed within a framework of the importance of choice and freedom of decision making, inclusiveness and genuine caring. Emphasis is on both individuals and building a learning community

Sven Hartman from Sweden presented an important project dealing with education for Romany children. One of the key aspects being the impact of Janusz Korczak's philosophy of education and the impact on teacher training for non-qualified Romany teachers. The Romany teachers found that the fundamental principles of Korczak corresponded and were similar to their own values. Amongst the key areas were: Child-centred learning, creating common rules, communication & social justice, sharing and cooperative activities, age integration, and the power of storytelling.

Awich Pollar from Uganda and CRC shared with us the difficulties' of the application of the convention and the universal principles of respect for the child faced with traditions and cultural norms within an African context. This important contribution leads to an ongoing discussion on the positive trans-cultural values of Korczak and the rights of the child and the dangers of cultural relativism in child-care.

Thanks to Joop Berding - **The Netherlands**, Jonathan Levi - France, **Kelvin Ravenscroft** – UK and **Malgorzata Kmita** for helping in prepering this report.



I kindly ask the participants of the seminar to forward their presentation no later than October 15, 2011. We once again plan to print a brochure that shows your work as in the attached brochures from years 2009 & 2010.

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