



International Janusz Korczak
Association

Międzynarodowe Stowarzyszenie
im. Janusza Korczaka



Korczak and the Rights of Children
100 Years of Inspiration
1912 – 2012

Report of the 4th International Seminar The Polish Jewish pioneer on children's human rights, Janusz Korczak (1878-1942) and the right of the child to ensure his best interest according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 3).

June 1-2, 2012

In the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations
Geneva, Switzerland

The Seminar was attended by around fifty participants, among whom twelve children and young people, from many different countries: Switzerland, Poland, France, Israel, Germany, the Netherlands, and émigrés from a number of African countries, Togo, Burundi, Ghana, Congo and Tanzania.



June 1, 2012

The first day of the seminar, June 1, 2012, was opened by Ambassador Remigiusz Henczel, Permanent Representative of Poland to the Office of the UN and other international organizations. Mr Henczel welcomed all participants, especially the children and young people from different countries. He stressed the importance of the seminar, and said the Polish mission was glad to host it for the fourth time. He then presented the new book of poems, just fresh from the press, inspired by Korczak, by the Polish poetess Karolina Kusek, entitled *My gaze embraced the world of the child*. A very beautiful book with poems, in four languages and spirited drawings. Every participant was invited to take a copy of it home, which was welcomed with enthusiasm. Next, Ms Marcia Kran, director of the Research and Right to Development Division of the OHCHR took the floor. At first, Korczak was new to her, she confessed, but as she read texts by and about him, he became more and more important as a source of inspiration for her work at the OHCHR. The last welcoming words

were spoken by Ms Batia Gilad, Chair of IKA, who thanked the Polish mission, and the ambassador in

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particular, for hosting the event for the fourth time. She also was glad that this time children and young people participated, and was looking forward to all the activities.

After these introductions it was time for action. Jonathan Levy led the participants through a process of getting to know each other. On a table he had put a number of photographs, and some colorful objects. Everyone was asked to pick a photo or an object that describes oneself in the best way. The children first made their choice, then the adults. Then everybody gathered in groups, and presented to the others their picture/object, and thus ‘revealed’ something of himself or herself. In this way the path was paved for the coming workshops and panels. The next activity was getting cut-up pieces of a number of articles from the Convention back together again, like a puzzle. Every printed-out article was cut in three, so that one had to find the other two. When the three parts (and people) found each other they discussed about three questions: 1) what does this article – i.e. the right to education – mean to you? 2) what hinders it being effective? And 3) what can you do about that? In the plenary session the groups presented their findings. It appeared that still a lot of work is to be done, in order to make the articles effective in practice. After this, the children went to an excursion in the Palais des Nations, where they talked about youth-unemployment. The adults used this break for informal discussions and exchanges.

After the break Ms Kirsten Sandberg, member of the CRC, had skipped part of the meeting of the committee so that she might be with us, and talk about article 3 of the Convention. She showed the importance but also the complexity of it. Then the group was divided in seven subgroups: home – school – health – leisure – street culture – community – beliefs. Every subgroup was asked to make a poster about the bearings of article 3 on their chosen domain. They might use words, but also pictures and drawings to create the poster. The groups all went to work, and this was a very lively, colorful and creative event.



After the coffee break, Amichai Pardo from Israel performed the complete version of the play by Korczak: ‘The Ten Matchboxes’. ‘Dressed’ as Korczak Amichai re-told the story of the Ten Matchboxes: anything could happen to a matchbox, it could be lost – and found, it could be used as a purse for coins, you could show off with it. A stage-‘fight’ was created with two of



the boys fighting over a matchbox. Their ‘mothers’ joined in the argument. Then ‘Korczak’ picked five out of the audience to be members of the jury who had to decide on the fight. He used the book of law, and the verdict was made: the court forgave the trespassers After this wonderful happening the Polish mission hosted a reception. A great first day had come to an end.



June 2, 2012

The 2nd of June was also the second day of our seminar in Geneva. Again some fifty people were present, including twelve children and students. The introduction was made by Mr. Malek Michalak, the children's ombudsman of Poland. He is also the chair of the European group of ombudspersons. He felt that it was important that there young people in this seminar. Mr. Michalak then spoke about the way Korczak's ideas were received in Poland, and in other countries. There is still not enough knowledge about Korczak. The fact that the Polish parliament inaugurated the Korczak year is very important. It was done in close cooperation with the children's ombudsman.

Then Ms Batia Gilad, chair of IKA, told us about the man, the person that was Korczak. Waltraut Kerber-Ganse who stood at the beginning of our seminars, introduced the rest of the program for this day. Then the floor was taken by Mr Thomas Hammarberg, former High commissioner for Human rights of the council of Europe, and honorary patron of the Korczak year. Mr Hammerberg stressed that in our time we need guidance from ‘icons’ like Korczak. His ideas are important for teachers, every teacher should know Korczak, especially his thoughts on justice. As a physician, Korczak was very much aware of social health. Then Mr Hammarberg introduced the four fundamental articles of the convention that form its leading principles: the articles 2 - 3 - 6 – 12. At first governments did not all agree, but now it is established and more cohesive. These principles are: -non-discrimination, between adults and children, and between children; - the best interest of the child; this is complex, i.e. smacking. Here Korczak really had an impact on the UN: the view of the child himself or herself is crucial; - war-experiences and their consequences for children, or more everyday: city-planning: there should be an impact-analysis on what it means for children

and their play. – article 12 points at participation. Overall, Mr Hammarberg urges that these principles



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should not lead to a bureaucratic approach but to a lively mentality. He concludes by saying that in 1923 Korczak was disappointed about the Treaty on children's rights. What would he have thought about the Convention of 1989? He would have been happy, but worried about its implementation.

After the coffee break panel I was devoted to a further exploration of article 3 by Ms Sophie Graillat who works with Defence for Children International France, and the AFJK. She raised eleven questions that everyone who is concerned with the - rather abstract - best interest of the child, should ask himself. Questions like whose best interest? And best from what perspective: medical, psychological, or more holistic? Questions also about procedures, legitimization of decisions, and follow-up. Through these questions, article becomes more and more concrete. Of course, debate remains, i.e. on cultural relativism. Interestingly, one wonders what Korczak and his child-judges would have done with these questions.

Joop Berding from the Dutch Korczak Association used this panel to present the group "Janusz Korczak" which he has created on the [Linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com). A professional platform for the exchange of ideas, and activities. All one needs to do, is become an affiliate of LinkedIn, and then apply for membership of the Korczak group. Joop moderates this. All present are cordially invited to join!

Then it was time for the presentation of yesterday's posters. One of the youngsters of every group presented their posters: on school, family life, security, street culture and so on (see above). They were very impressive insights.

Daniel Halperin the chairperson of the Swiss Association granted to the representatives of the IKA Associations and guests 13 short stories, the adventure of detective Tom Lasker, written and illustrated by Hans Georg Friedmann, published by the Swiss Korczak Association.

Hans Georg Friedmann was only 10-year-old when he and his family were forced by the Nazis to move out of their home in Vienna. He died in the concentration camp of Dachau, in the spring of 1945.

Hans George's imaginative writings, where good always prevailed over evil and where justice was the highest human value, contrast to the reality in which Jewish children lived in that time.

After this, panel 2 was devoted to the importance of participation, in general and also in schools. Presentations were made by Jonathan Levy from France, Ms Maria Herczog, member of the CRC, and Joop Berding from the Netherlands. Jonathan presented a number of ideas on education, in part derived from the Delos-Report, The treasure within. Life-skills, social skills and peace education, learning to be, and the transformation of oneself and of the

world, are the strong 'pillars' of education. To these he added what he called 'positive deviance': it is the



idea that deviating from the ‘norm’ is not always a bad thing, it can work out quite well, and become a model of new behavior for both peers and educators. Ms Herczog in her presentation paid attention to diverse cultural influences that are of importance for the meaning and effectiveness of article 3. Joop Berding presented a number of data from recent reports of the Children’s Ombudsman of the Netherlands. There are some stunning figures, liked the fact that around 500,000 children live in poverty or are mistreated (15% of all Dutch children). In his comment on these reports Joop used Korczak’s concepts of respect, justice, and participation. These give more depth and pedagogical urgency to the matters discussed.

The final panel, III, moderated by Jonathan Levy, dealt with article 3 from the point of view of social welfare in relation to the best interest of the child. Avi Tsur the first speaker on the panel introduced the fundamental concepts of social welfare from Janusz Korczak’s works and looked at the connections for the best interest of the child. With an overview of life in the orphanages of Korczak and the different educational and social dispositive that were deployed in them. Avi led us through a series of questions such as “What is home?”. Also dealing with issues of safety and a non-threatening environment. Adu Adjei the next speaker followed by looking at the broad issues of today in social welfare. He questioned whether

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these policies really were concerned with the best interest of the child. He also gave a critical analysis of the relevance of social welfare policy, citing from Sir Ken Robinson's remarks of the outdated mode of reasoning in lots of policies and their consequences for the everyday life of the child. Cornelia Muller, the third and last speaker of the panel described the project she has been involved with on the German/Polish border which involves cross-cultural workshops dealing with expression, empowerment, and understanding of

the needs and vision of German and Polish children working on a common project.

Report of Seminar Geneva June 1-2, 2012 by Joop Berding, Avi Tsur, Batia Gilad and Jonathan Levy.