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### *Editorial*

### *Family life, deinstitutionalisation and adoption*

“Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment... - Recalling that each State should take, as a matter of priority, appropriate measures to enable the child to remain in the care of his or her family of origin - Recognizing that inter-country adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her State of origin.” Extracts from the preambles to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Hague Convention of 1993.

If, in certain special cases long term placement in an institution or in a foster family may seem to meet the best interests of the child (certain children, given the traumas they have lived through or certain of their personal characteristics, are unable to reinsert themselves in their family of origin or in an adoptive family), it is nonetheless accepted at the international level that, basically, it is in the best interests of the child to be raised in a family environment that ensures him/her permanence and individualized attention.

One of today's great challenges for many countries of origin (and for receiving countries too) resides in **preventing institutionalisation – non-institutionalisation – and in the development of an individualized and permanent family plan for children placed in institutions – deinstitutionalisation – or in a foster family** (these two types of placement offering, for the majority of children, only temporary solutions). A permanent family plan entails: as a matter of priority, reintegration in the family of origin (the immediate family or the extended family) and, as a second choice, adoption; in that case, as a matter of priority, domestic adoption and, as a second choice, inter-country adoption.

If we put the ethics of the rights of these children into practice, it entails:

- Knowing better the reality so as to identify the actions to be taken: within a country, what are the gates that lead children to institutionalisation? What is the personal and family situation of each of the children currently living in institutions?
- Putting in place legislation, structures, social policies, staff training and budgets that make action possible, on the one hand, **to avoid the child's descent** into the institutional system, and on the other hand, **to help his/her exit** from an institution or a family placement for a **permanent** family environment (it entails, as soon as they enter an institution, studying the family situation and taking action as quickly as possible to reinstate them in their family of origin; and in more difficult cases, strengthening the family of origin's capacities and its links with the child with the aim of family reintegration in the medium term; opting for domestic or inter-country adoption by taking, as the occasion arises, the necessary decisions so that the best interests of the child become the primary consideration).

These steps seem essential to us but, as to the best of our knowledge, few States or organisations devote their attention actively to them. Institutionalisation of their child generally continues to be the first response given to mothers and families in difficulty. Too many children spend several months or years in an institution before their family situation -social and legal - is clarified and steps are taken to promote their reinsertion into their family or their adoption. Since time plays a key role for children, this situation is

extremely harmful. Too many children have as their only future an unlimited stay in an institution with no consideration of an individualized life plan for them.

It is certain that adoption – domestic and inter-country – will only be a life plan for a limited number of children. But this option MUST be offered them by the laws of the land and by the professionals when it corresponds to their best interests. This measure must have its place in the range of responses offered in the framework of a deinstitutionalisation policy, on condition, of course, that it is hedged with the indispensable guarantees. One of the present dangers for the rights of the child seems to us to be in fact the « ideological approach», the militancy, whether it is for or against adoption, especially inter-country adoption. To consider adoption as THE answer to the problem of abandonment or portray it as « diabolical» are two equally detrimental extremes for children.

See too: Adoption and the Best Interests of the Child - Chantal Saclier - 2000 - [www.iss-ssi.org/Resource\\_Centre/selman.PDF](http://www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/selman.PDF) .

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