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NEWSLETTER

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ISS and CRC Committee: Synergising for child rights advancement. 30th Anniversary of the ISS/IRC

Prof. Ann Skelton, Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the CRC Committee) serves as the guardian of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), overseeing and ensuring the effective implementation of its provisions. Expert civil society organisations, such as the International Social Service (ISS), significantly contribute to this process, offering valuable information, fostering the exchange of knowledge, and driving collaborative advocacy initiatives that enhance the CRC Committee's ability to protect and promote children's rights globally.

ISS as a pivotal force in shaping and implementing relevant international standards

The UN [Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#) were conceived from the recognition of significant gaps in implementing the UNCRC for millions of children worldwide without, or at risk of losing, parental care. ISS, alongside SOS Children's

Villages and UNICEF, was foundational in bringing attention to these gaps. This collaborative effort sparked a call for the international community to unite and formulate comprehensive guidelines to address these critical issues¹.

The Guidelines emerged after five years of discussions and negotiations involving the CRC Committee, governments led by Brazil, UNICEF, experts, academics, non-governmental organizations, and, notably, young people with care experience.

ISS actively participated in consultations, expert meetings, and pivotal discussions, including the Day of General Discussion in 2005. The organisation provided invaluable contributions from its General Secretariat and network, bringing a wealth of expertise and practical insights to the Committee's deliberations.

Since the Guidelines' inception, ISS, together with other leading child rights organisations², has

¹ [Decision No. 7 on children without parental care](#) (2004), 37th Session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; Recommendations of the Day of General Discussion 2005 ([CRC/C/153](#)).

² [Moving Forward Handbook](#) (2012); Global Alternative Care Conference in 2016; Development of 3 MOOCs (Alternative Care;

continued to play a key role in their effective implementation. ISS's ongoing commitment and collaborative efforts serve as a testament to the organisation's dedication to the protection and promotion of children's rights worldwide.

It is also noteworthy to highlight ISS's leadership in the adoption of the [Verona Principles](#) (Principles for the protection of the rights of the child born through surrogacy). These principles received endorsement from the majority the CRC Committee members, further underscoring ISS's leadership in standard-setting on a global scale.

Decades of expert assistance: ISS/IRC's technical support to the Committee

Over 30 years the International Reference Centre for the rights of children deprived of their family (ISS/IRC), created as a global knowledge hub and expertise centre, has been a crucial technical partner for the CRC Committee offering effective and multi-faceted support. ISS/IRC made significant contributions through various initiatives, including the submission of alternative reports (ISS/IRC's fact sheets), active participation in the Days of General Discussion—particularly in 2005, 2006 and 2020—contributions to different General Comments, and the organisation of different side events during the HRC Sessions.

UN Treaty bodies, including the CRC Committee, rely on alternative reports to complement State reports and enhance their discussions during sessions. Within the framework of the reporting procedure, ISS/IRC has been submitting alternative reports, in the form of fact sheets, to the CRC Committee since 2009. These fact sheets provide a concise analysis of the extent to which law, policy and practice in a State party comply with the provisions of the CRC as well as its Optional Protocols, and more specifically, those relating to children deprived of their families. By sharing this analysis, they equip Committee members with concise and comprehensive information, fostering an informed dialogue with the respective States.

These reports provide essential context, shining a light on the challenges, gaps, and opportunities for improvement within the child protection landscape. Moreover, they act as catalysts for formulating policy recommendations. By pinpointing areas where children's rights face risks

or inadequate protection, these fact sheets contribute to the creation of targeted and impactful recommendations.

Arguably the most significant contribution, ISS/IRC's fact sheets, offering an independent and unbiased assessment, provide a basis for the CRC Committee to hold States accountable for their obligations under the UN CRC. The Review process results in a dialogue that persuades States to take concrete steps to fulfil their obligations towards children's rights.

The ISS/IRC contributes to **the CRC Committee's General Comments**, enriching the Committee's guidance with technical insights. Two good examples, linked to ISS' mandate and thematic focus, are the General Comment No. 21 on children in street situations, and the Joint General Comments No. 22 of the CRC Committee and No. 3 of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers (CMW) and No. 23 of the CRC (2017) and No. 4 of the CMW. Throughout the meticulous process of General Comment elaboration, the CRC Committee actively engages with external actors and partners, placing significant emphasis on the involvement of CSOs. Another valuable channel through which expert CSOs contribute is by **organising side events**. These events provide a platform to delve deeper into specific issues related to children's rights. ISS, with its expertise, actively engages in organising side events, fostering discussions that enrich the Committee's understanding and contribute to the broader dialogue on safeguarding children's right to family life. For instance, a notable side event ISS, together with Child Rights Connect, was *The Anniversary Trifecta: 10th Anniversary of the UN Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children and 5th anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on a communications procedure* within the framework of the [global conference](#) which celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2019.

Building a bridge between International Human Rights Law and (IHRL) and Private International Law (PriL)

Beyond the UN CRC, ISS/IRC extends its expertise to encompass the framework provided in the 1993

and 1996 Hague Conventions. This dual expertise places ISS/IRC in a unique position to navigate the intersection of IHRL and PriL. This is especially relevant when dealing with complex family and child protection matters, with cross-border components, such as intercountry adoption or international surrogacy arrangements.

This concrete expertise makes ISS/IRC a valuable partner capable of assisting the CRC Committee in addressing the intricate legal landscape where IHRL

and private international legal considerations converge, ensuring a comprehensive and well-informed approach to complex issues within the fields of child protection, alternative care, and adoption.

The CRC Committee is appreciative of ISS/IRC's role in fostering a harmonious relationship between IHRL and PriL, ensuring that both fields are mutually reinforcing to promote the rights of children.

In commemorating the 30th anniversary of the ISS/IRC, as Chairperson of the CRC Committee, I express heartfelt congratulations on this remarkable milestone. Over these three decades, ISS/IRC has been an invaluable partner, effectively assisting the CRC Committee to fulfil its mandate. ISS as a global network and organisation remains integral in shaping a future where the rights of every child, particularly those without parental care are not only acknowledged but actively safeguarded and upheld. The CRC is committed to continue this fruitful collaboration. May the next chapters be filled with continued success, impactful work and an unwavering shared commitment to the rights and well-being of every child.



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