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40 years fighting for Children's Rights : The international Movement of Defence for Children International turns 40.



2019 marks the 40th anniversary of [Defence for Children International \(DCI\)](#). Symbolically, 2019 is also the year the world celebrates the thirty years anniversary of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**.

Defence for Children International was born on the 5th of July 1979 in Geneva. Since then, it became a [worldwide Movement present across 5 continents](#).

DCI was granted consultative status at the United Nations in 1983 and then became the Coordinator of the NGO group co-drafters of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, until the treaty was adopted in 1989. The UNCRC is now the most universally ratified binding international treaty the world has ever agreed on. The Convention changed perceptions about children from passive objects of care and charity to full human beings with a distinct set of rights. But a treaty, no matter how universal, is only a piece of paper until it is effectively



applied. Since the convention was adopted, DCI has focused on its implementation through lobbying and direct actions.

We chose to celebrate the 40 years of DCI and the 30 years of the convention together with children worldwide. We organised a [Children's Rights Award: "Hear my Story, know my rights"](#). Through which DCI gave children around the world the platform to express themselves artistically, with a variety of media; paintings, drawings, videos, poems and songs that highlight their ideas, opinions, views, and hopes regarding children's rights. Such interactions with children in their communities encourage a better understanding of their rights enshrined in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, more specifically the articles of the Convention on which DCI focuses its work.

Hundreds of children around the world submitted their artworks which were reviewed by an international jury made up of child rights experts; Philip Jaffé, member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Anne Grandjean, Child protection expert at UNICEF, Nigel Cantwell, Founder of DCI, and Christine Cornwell, member of DCI Advisory Committee, and Alex Kamarotos, Executive Director of the DCI.

The two winners received as a prize the opportunity to come to Geneva during the official celebrations and participate in the debates at the United Nations. Emah Def, a 16-year-old girl from Mauritania, was one of the winners with the painting "Female Genital Mutilation", expressing the violence of this traditional practice in Mauritania. Saadia Abbassi, a 12-year-old girl on behalf of a collective of children from Morocco, was also a winner with an animated video on "Child-friendly justice", which shows several child trials addressing justice for children and the best interests of the child.

Defence for Children International's annual strategic meetings

The International Executive Council (IEC) of the Defence for Children International (DCI) Movement met this week in Geneva, Switzerland for its annual strategic meetings which coincide with the mid-term of DCI's Strategic Framework and the 40th anniversary of the creation of DCI. The IEC was joined for two days by DCI's Advisory Committee composed of child rights experts from around the world (Nigel Cantwell, Christine Cornwell, Jaap Doek, Moushira Khattab, Rosa Maria Ortiz, Meskerem Geset Techane) who advise the Movement on key strategic issues. The IEC is composed of one President, four Vice-Presidents which represent each region, a Treasurer and two Councillors, and currently stands as follows:

President: Abdul Manaff Kemokai

Treasurer: Mirjam Blaak

Vice-President Africa:

Nirmal Busgopaul

Vice President Americas:

Juan Fumeiro

Vice-President Europe: Margaret Tuite

Vice-President MENA: Khaled Quzmar

Councillor: Fernando Sabogal Baez

Councillor: Arwa Al-Fakih

"The purpose of these meetings," said Mr. Abdul Manaff Kemokai, President of the Movement, "is to meet, brainstorm, and strategise. They allow us to exchange ideas on how best to promote and protect children's rights, and to empower children to defend their own rights."

The meetings were the opportunity to engage in discussions on the current challenges, successes and direction of the Movement, coming at a crucial point for children's rights. 30 years after the adoption by the United Nations and Member States of Convention on the Rights of the Child, situation of human rights of children remains alarming in many parts of the planet. The International Executive Council discussed the situation of children in the world, especially in the areas of armed conflict and under occupation, and stressed on the responsibility of the international community for providing protection for all children and enhancing the



accountability system to hold war criminals and child rights' violators accountable. The Council of DCI reviewed the escalating humanitarian and children's rights crisis in Yemen, the increased pressure to give children and youth a platform to express their voices, and the current issues accompanying increased global migration, including the impact and implications for children on the move. We see these challenges in every region where Defence for Children International is present; in Africa, the Americas, the MENA region, and in Europe, so it was a priority for the IEC to establish strategies on how best the movement can address these issues.

*"The [Strategic Framework 2017-21](#) of DCI, giving specific focus on justice for children, violence against children, children on the move, children in the context of conflicts, and deprivation of liberty, among others, remains more than ever a top priority across regions, **said Mr. Alex Kamarotos, Executive Director of Defence for Children International.** Going through a mid-term evaluation of the Strategic Framework we decided that efforts should be reinforced in order to face challenges of a shrinking civil society space and aggressions on child rights. Deprivation of liberty is one of them".*

DCI is working since 2013 for the realisation of a [Global Study on Children Deprived on Liberty](#). It is now leading together with Human Rights Watch a Panel of 170 NGOs supporting the independent expert (Prof. Manfred Nowak) who recently presented his [report to the UN General Assembly \(October 8th\)](#). According to the Global Study, at least [1.3 million children a year are locked up](#). DCI will continue the fight against child deprivation of liberty together with the NGO Panel and promoting the recommendations of the Global Study. The full 800-page study will be officially delivered in Geneva on 19 November, during the official celebrations of the UNCRC 30th Anniversary at the United Nations. The global study will provide much needed information and data on children deprived of their liberty around the world. DCI urges governments to carry out the Global Study's recommendations. These include collecting reliable and systematic data on children deprived of liberty, and creating national action plans aimed at an overall reduction in the number of children in detention and/or the elimination of detention for children.

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