



To celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNRIC - in partnership with UNICEF and the European Commission - welcomes you to the Academy Award-winning film

# “BORN INTO BROTHELS”

By Ross Kauffman and Zana Briski



## BORN INTO BROTHELS – SYNOPSIS

British-born photojournalist Zana Briski overcame barriers of language, culture, and ethnicity when she immersed herself into an impoverished and illegal neighborhood in the Third World metropolis of Calcutta, India. An award-winning photographer, Briski befriended the children of Sonagachi (the city's red light district), starting a photography workshop for them and equipping them each with their own camera.

The transformative power of this simple object is remarkable; within weeks, the children show new spirit and several have discovered a talent for the art. Briski and her co-director, Ross Kaufman, follow the children as they filter their marginalized, forgotten world through the camera lens. Over the course of the film, a central narrative unfolds--the children's quest, fueled by their newfound hope and strength, to leave the brothels for a better life.

By intercutting their own images with those taken by the children, the directors establish the distinct personality and voice of their subjects. Among them are Avijit, a rotund, serious 11-year-old of immense talent, whose mother is murdered by her pimp during the filming; Kochi, a quiet slip of a girl, destined to follow the family line of prostitution; and Puja, a feisty tomboy whose tenacity allows her to photograph the district's most dangerous areas. Though the beauty of the story is marred by tragedy and heartbreak, this fine documentary is ultimately a testament to the immense power of art, even in the bleakest of environments.

**Kids with cameras – <http://www.kids-with-cameras.org>.**



**Avijit, 11**



**Kochi, 10**



**Tapasi, 11**



**Manik, 10**



**Puja, 11**



**Shanti, 11**



**Suchitra, 14**



**Gour, 13**

## **SPEAKERS**

### **Charles-Michel Geurts**

Deputy Head of Human Rights Unit, Directorate-General for External Relations,  
European Commission

After completing his law degrees (UCL Louvain - EUI Florence), Charles-Michel Geurts joined the Secretariat General of the Commission in 1992, as a coordinator on institutional and deregulation issues before joining the 'greffe' (secretariat to Commission and Heads of Cabinet meetings) in 1996. Since 1999 he worked at the EC Delegation to Hungary contributing to Hungary's EU accession process first as Financial Officer and then as Political Counsellor. From 2004 to 2008, he was posted as Political Counsellor to the EC Delegation to the United Nations in New York and was in charge the peace and security portfolio. Charles-Michel is now Deputy Head of the human rights and democratisation unit of the Commission in Brussels.

### **Karen Schroh**

Advocacy Manager, Plan International - EU Liaison Office

Karen Schroh is the EU Advocacy Manager for Plan International at the Plan EU Liaison Office in Brussels where she coordinates Plan's advocacy work on child rights and development policy toward the European Union, with a particular focus on bringing the voices of children into the decisions which affect them. Karen was one of the founders of the Child Rights Action Group (CRAG) in Brussels as well as a past Vice-Chair of the Policy Forum for CONCORD, the European Confederation of Development and Relief Organisations. Karen has been with Plan since 2003. Before coming to Plan, Karen was a Canadian Foreign Service officer, working on Africa and the Balkans. She holds a Masters degree in International Affairs from Columbia University, and a BA Honours in History and African Studies from University of Toronto, Trinity College.



### **Lila Pieters**

Senior Adviser, UNICEF

Lila Pieters, a senior advisor at UNICEF PARMO Brussels, has a degree in law and economics and had been working in the field of human rights for the past 20 years. She held various senior positions with UNICEF in developing countries prior to coming to Brussels. During her time with UNICEF Bangladesh, Lila managed the largest UNICEF program in Bangladesh - protecting children from sexual exploitation.

## **MODERATOR**

### **Janos Tisovszky**

Deputy Director of UNRIC

Janos Tisovszky has been working with the United Nations since October 1990. He currently holds the post of Deputy Director of the United Nations Regional Information Centre (UNRIC) in Brussels. Prior to taking up that post he worked in the Peace and Security Section of the Department of Public Information (DPI) where his primary duties focused on the United Nations counter-terrorism efforts. He has also served as the acting Director of the UN Information Centre in Islamabad in the summer of 2009. His previous tasks included serving as the Spokesman for the President of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the General Assembly between September 2007 and September 2008. Prior to joining the New York office of DPI in 2005, he worked at the Vienna offices of the United Nations. Before joining the United Nations, he was an editor and columnist with the foreign affairs section of the Hungarian daily, Magyar Nemzet (1987-1990) and before that he worked as a reporter and associate editor with the English language section of Hungarian radio (1984-1987).

## CRC 20

### Convention brings progress on child rights, but challenges remain

By Dan Seymour

*In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child became the first legally binding international convention to affirm human rights for all children. While great progress has been made on child rights in the past 20 years, much work remains to be done. Dan Seymour, Chief of the Gender and Rights Unit of UNICEF's Policy and Practice Division, offers his assessment.*

NEW YORK, USA, 30 June 2009 – The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) represents a major milestone in the historic effort to achieve a world fit for children. As a binding treaty of international law, it codifies principles that Member States of the United Nations agreed to be universal – for all children, in all countries and cultures, at all times and without exception, simply through the fact of their being born into the human family.

The treaty has inspired changes in laws to better protect children, altered the way international organizations see their work for children, and supported an agenda to better protect children in situations of armed conflict.



#### Worldwide impact

In every region of the world, we find numerous examples of the CRC's impact on law and practice. In 1990, Brazil followed ratification of the Convention with a new Statute of the Child and Adolescent based on its principles. Burkina Faso created a Children's Parliament to review proposed legislation, in response to the principle of participation set forth by the Convention.

The CRC was the first international convention to be ratified by South Africa, leading to changes such as the prohibition of corporal punishment and development of a separate juvenile justice system. The Russian Federation also set up juvenile and family courts in response to the CRC, while Morocco established a National Institute to Monitor Children Rights.

Finland took a number of new measures for children inspired by the Convention, such as a plan for early childhood education and care, a curriculum for the comprehensive school, quality recommendations for school health care, and an action plan against poverty and social exclusion.

And Eritrea issued its Transitional Penal Code, with penalties for parents or guardians who neglect, abuse or abandon their children.

#### Challenges ahead

This wide acceptance of the CRC can give the misleading impression that it is neither challenging nor new. Yet the very idea that children are the holders of rights is far from universally recognized. Too many children are considered to be the property of adults, and are subjected to various forms of abuse and exploitation.

The recognition that children have a right to a say in decisions affecting them, articulated in Article 12, is not only disrespected on a regular basis; its very legitimacy is questioned by many.

Nor can we claim that we live in a world where children's best interests are the primary consideration in all decisions affecting them – as demanded by Article 3 of the Convention. In fact, the contrary is evidenced by the way the humankind allocates its resources, the limited attention it gives to ensuring the best for its children, the way it conducts its wars.

### **Foundation for change**

Like all powerful ideas, the CRC reflects a demand for deep and profound change in the way the world treats its children.

That the world fails to respect the rights of its children – even to deny that children have rights – is clear in the alarming numbers of children who die of preventable causes, who do not attend school or attend a school that cannot offer them a decent education, who are left abandoned when their parents succumb to AIDS, or who are subjected to violence, exploitation and abuse against which they are unable to protect themselves.



We cannot claim that the Convention has achieved what needs to be achieved. Rather, it has provided all of us with an essential foundation to play our part in changing what needs to be changed.

### **Power of the Convention**

Effecting that change requires us to use the CRC in its fullest sense, and to take advantage of its three fundamental strengths.

- **First**, it is a legal instrument, defining unequivocally the responsibilities of governments to children within their jurisdiction



- **Second**, it is a framework for the duties borne by different actors at different levels of society to respond to the rights of children, and it helps us understand the knowledge, skills, resources or authority needed to fulfil those duties

- **Third**, it is an ethical statement, both reflecting and building upon core human values about our commitment to collectively provide the world's children with the best we have to give.

This 20th anniversary of the CRC reminds us, most of all, of what we have left to do. The Convention demands a revolution that places children at the heart of human development – not only because this offers a strong return on our investment (although it does) nor because the vulnerability of childhood calls upon our compassion (although it should), but rather for a more fundamental reason: because it is their right.

For more info: <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite>