



Outcry of Small Voices

"In their weakness, let us be their strength; in their moment of fear and silence, let us be their voice and mind to speak; in their battle against abuse, let us be their defense."

by Richelle Villamor

One of the vulnerable sectors of society is our children. Children refer to persons below eighteen (18) years of age or those over but cannot fully take care of themselves or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of mental disability or condition, as defined under Republic Act 7610.

Children are developing – physically, mentally, emotionally, and psychologically – so we cannot expect them to behave and decide like adults. It is the period of childhood in which a human is vulnerable. Thus, they become an easy target for child trafficking, statutory rape, and other child-related crimes. They do not fully understand what is happening and do what it means to protect themselves. What is alarming is that parents, relatives, guardians, or persons charged with their care and guidance often perpetrate these crimes. These crimes usually occur in all settings, including homes, schools, and communities.

Every year more than 3.6 million referrals are made to child protection agencies involving more than 6.6 million children in which a referral can include multiple children. Likewise, a report of child abuse is made every ten seconds. Child abuse includes any threatening or violent interaction of a physical, psychological, or sexual nature that may cause physical or physiological harm to the child. Child abuse also includes neglect and withholding essential aid, medical care, and education. Sexual, mental, and physical abuses are forms of physical violence. The other forms of child abuse include bullying or peer violence, cyber violence, dating violence, forced consummated sex, and collective violence.

With the frequency of children victims of all forms of violence, adults play a vital role in protecting our children against any forms of abuse. To protect children is to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation,

and abuse against them, including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labor, and harmful traditional practices.

To achieve this ambitious undertaking to protect the world's most precious asset – our children – parents, the community, and the government must be able to recognize, consider and act on children's rights. Regardless of how young or developing they may be, children also have human rights, which must be heard and respected.

Every parent and every person holding substitute parental authority shall see to it that the child's rights are respected. In addition, he must comply with his duties. He shall, mainly, by precept and example, imbue the child with high-mindedness, love of country, veneration of national heroes, fidelity to democracy as a way of life, and attachment to the idea of a permanent world of peace.

The government should ensure that children are adequately cared for and protected from violence, abuse, and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them. The government's responsibility is to take available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. This responsibility involves assessing social services, legal, health, educational systems, and funding levels for these services. The government is obliged to take all necessary steps to meet the minimum standards set by the Convention of the Rights of the Child in these areas. Further, it must help families protect children's rights and create an environment where they can grow and reach their full potential. This initiative may involve changing existing laws or creating new ones in some instances.

There can be no human rights without children's rights. Failing to recognize and consider the rights of these innocent children means preparing a generation that will also fail to do the same for others, resulting in further human violations.