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Children's Rights are Human Rights

by Maureen Paul Turlish

NCR Today

United Nations member nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Dec. 10, 1948. That event is commemorated on different dates throughout this month.

The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the U.N. general assembly on Nov. 20, 1989, and Children's Day or the International Day of the Child, is commemorated on various dates in different countries.

We do not ? as yet ? however have a comparable universal pledge to defend children from sexual abuse and exploitation and a day to commemorate that pledge. Why not?

This is the season when Christians worldwide celebrate the incarnation of one very special child, Jesus, the Christ Child.

Does it make any sense to celebrate that event with our children if we do not do everything we can to protect the voiceless of the past and the present as well as those of the future?

The sad fact is that the exploitation of children is a pandemic and it can be seen in far too many incarnations.

We have all read the horror stories in our local newspapers -- of children who were locked in closets as punishment, leashed like animals and kept in cages. This happens here in the United States. Pummeling children's bodies to vent frustration, burning them with cigarettes, leaving handguns around for them to find and use have become everyday occurrences in our neighborhoods.

National and international newspapers inform us of the growing number of suicides resulting from vicious

bullying.

We read the names and positions of those arrested for the downloading and/or possession of pornography and we are shocked at who has participated in the exploitation of men and women, as well as children. A victimless crime? Hardly.

Children, however, are voiceless because they have no leverage; they do not vote.

But, children grow up, they find their voices and they do vote.

We, as a civilized society, are slowly beginning to realize that the death penalty may not be the best way to punish individuals, even those whose humanity we have serious reason to question.

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Let us also realize that those who were sexually exploited, violated, molested, abused, raped or sodomized by any trusted individual be it minister, rabbi, priest, imam, teacher, doctor, father or mother also have a right to the full protection of the law.

I would suggest that we commemorate the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Day of the Child by removing criminal and civil statutes of limitation in regard to the sexual abuse of children in every state and providing at least a two year window for bringing forward previously time barred cases.

In that way perhaps we will be able to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child without our own moral hypocrisy adding to our qualms of conscience.

Children's rights are human rights.

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