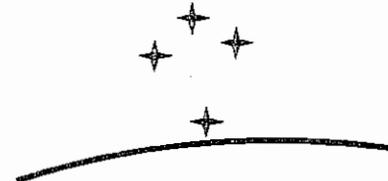




URUGUAY



MERCOSUR

58o. PERIODO ORDINARIO DE SESIONES DE LA ASAMBLEA GENERAL

TERCERA COMISION

**Discurso del Embajador Dr. Felipe H. Paolillo
Representante Permanente del Uruguay ante las Naciones Unidas
En nombre del MERCOSUR, Bolivia y Chile**

Tema 113: "Promocion y Protección de los Derechos del Niño"

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Felipe H. Paolillo
Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations
On behalf of MERCOSUR, Bolivia y Chile**

Item 113: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child

New York, 20 October, 2003

Mr. Chairman,

The delegation of Uruguay has the honour to speak on behalf of the member countries of Mercosur, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and the associated countries of Bolivia and Chile.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, we wish to thank the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for the reports that they have prepared for this session. We also thank the representatives of UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Mr. Olara Otunnu for their introductory statements and for the replies which they gave the Committee.

The countries of Mercosur and associated countries have the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basic guideline and essential frame of reference for action on behalf of children and youth. Also among the guiding principles are the contents of regional and international documents that indicate the correct course of action in protecting children and youth. We attach great importance to the Optional Protocols to the Convention, which most of the countries in the Group have already ratified.

The Group stresses the importance of the final document of the special session on children, entitled "A World Fit for Children", which, in very concrete stages, proposes a strategy for achieving full compliance with the objectives of the Convention. The four principal objectives of that document reinforce the Millennium development goals, seven of which relate to the rights of the child.

The issue of the promotion and protection of the rights of the child is at the core of the social commitment of Mercosur and associated countries, which, in the Charter of Buenos Aires, decided to promote the effective application of the guiding principles aimed at ensuring the full protection of children and youth and at encouraging the elaboration of specific policies on their behalf that take into account their needs within the family and community.

Mechanisms have therefore been established to support the most vulnerable social groups, with priority being given to certain aspects such as nutrition, and special emphasis being placed on children, youth, women heads of households and mothers who are minors. Concrete measures have also been taken to satisfy the special needs of boys, girls and youth in situations of violence and sexual abuse, in particular problems such as teenage pregnancy, drug use and criminal behaviour.

In addressing the issue of child labour, Mercosur's position is reflected in the specific declaration of its Presidents, in which they reaffirm their commitment to strengthening national plans for the prevention and eradication of child labour and pledge to work towards the definition of specific common policies inspired by the goal of full protection.

The countries of Mercosur and associated countries have pledged to guarantee the right to basic education and to promote access to secondary, technical and vocational education, recognizing that these are key requirements for overcoming poverty and ideal vehicles for social and economic advancement.

Recognizing that democratic societies and social equity are achieved by educating boys and girls and youth and by training them for insertion into the labour market in a satisfactory and productive manner, our countries are working to improve the quality of education through teacher training, promotion of civic values in schools and through use of information technologies.

We also consider it essential to take the family nucleus as the unit of intervention for social policies aimed at, inter alia, promoting the retention of boys and girls in the education system at the primary level and of youth at the secondary level.

In this respect, it is important to point out that in this process, we are also seeking to include the large number of indigenous children and afro-descendants present in most of the countries of Mercosur and Bolivia and Chile. One of the ways to promote respect for their cultures is to guarantee them bilingual education – an enormous challenge for our countries in light of the considerable financial and human resources needed to make this a reality. In this connection, mention should be made of the recent ministerial meeting of the management group for the project “*Educate in diversity in Mercosur countries*”.

A key issue for Mercosur and associated countries relates to health care and health services which, thanks to the efforts already made, are indicating better rates of coverage in the countries of the region, but which at the same time pose an ongoing challenge, owing to the difficulties being encountered on the path to economic and social development. Particularly challenging is the need to provide care for boys, girls and youth affected by HIV/AIDS, an area in which the countries of the Group have given a clear commitment that is reflected in significant initiatives in prevention, care and treatment.

Despite the intense work that has been done to combat the problem, both at the public level and by civil society and non-governmental organizations, our countries must still face up to the serious problem of children working/living on the street.

These young victims, lacking a family environment of which they can become a part, outside of the educational system, and exposed to all types of risks such as drug addiction, maltreatment and exploitation, often end up being pushed into crime, and at times even put an end to their lives for this reason.

Nor can we fail to mention our concern at the increase in the number of cases involving children from the subregion who have been abducted or kept in the custody of one of their parents residing outside the continent. This concern must be viewed in the broader context of human rights that impose the international community a conduct that should be guided by the best interest of the child, the right to maintain regular contact with both parents and to be heard by the competent courts. In this connection, the countries of Mercosur have been examining initiatives to systematize the way in which the issue of the return of minors is dealt with at the international level.

Lastly, the members of Mercosur and associated countries commend the Committee on the Rights of the Child on its work and congratulate them on the passage of the amendment providing for an increase in the number of experts on the Committee, so as to ensure an adequate number of members for the conduct of its important work.

I thank you