

a ward of the State and therefore I have a personal commitment to this. I know how important it is to protect our children in care. I know that from my own personal experience. So I'm not going to let anything go if we need to do things better."

He went on to say:

"We've made more reforms than any other government in the history of Queensland and we've funded this area more than anyone else. We've put \$188 million in, ... we've got strategies that are more designed to be preventative rather than simply cure the problem. ... But frankly, I think everyone could have done better, we're doing our best but if there are ways that we can improve it further we will."

According to a report in *The Age* on 15 August 2003, a number of Families Department officers have been stood aside or quit over the abuse claims, amid police and internal departmental investigations. Mr Butler said the CMC would consider an indemnity for department officers who wanted to provide evidence but were concerned they might incriminate themselves in criminal activity.

This inquiry is will run contemporaneously with the current audit of foster carer files being monitored by Queensland's Commission for Children and Young People. The Commission for Children and Young People is an independent statutory authority, and the Commissioner reports directly to the Premier. The Commission is actively involved in the audit, will contribute to the development of subsequent recommendations and will monitor the implementation of those recommendations.

The CMC has called for written submissions and will hold public hearings in Brisbane from October 8.

See <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/08/15/1060871762549.html>

And see

"Premier braces for CMC foster care inquiry"
Broadcast: 15/08/2003

<http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/qld/content/2003/s925542.htm>

A World Fit for Children

UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL SESSION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

❖ From the 8-10 May 2002, more than 7000 people participated in the most important conference on children in more than a decade

❖ In his opening address, UN Secretary General Koffi Annan said to the children of the world:

"We, the grown-ups, have failed you deplorably... One in three of you has suffered from malnutrition before you turned five years old. One in four of you has not been immunized against any disease. Almost one in five of you is not attending school... We, the grown-ups, must reverse this list of failures".

❖ At the conference, the nations of the world committed themselves to a series of goals to improve the situation of children and young people, so as to create "a world fit for children":

1. Put children first. In all actions related to children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. Eradicate poverty: invest in children.

3. Leave no child behind. All forms of discrimination affecting children must end.

4. Care for every child: children should be nurtured in a safe environment that enables them to be physically and mentally healthy

5. Educate every child.

6. Protect children from harm and exploitation.

7. Protect children from war

8. Combat HIV/AIDS

9. Listen to children and ensure their participation

10. Protect the Earth for children.

❖ Representatives of Governments who participated in the Special Session, which included Australia, agreed to develop, *by the end of 2003*, a national plan of action with a set of specific time-bound and measurable goals in order to achieve the above objectives, which are based on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

So the question arises: what is Australia doing about this?

When, late last year, a member of Amnesty International Victorian Branch's Children's Rights Group wrote to the Hon. Larry Anthony, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, asking about the development of the Plan, she was informed that the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) was undertaking its preparation, and that 'key stakeholders' would be consulted. This has since been reiterated in a face-to-face meeting with Ms. Suzan Thomas, Director, FACS recently.

Larry Anthony committed to a National Plan of Action (NPA) at a regional forum held in Bali several months ago and an intergovernmental task force has been established to work out how to proceed with the NPA and government departments on the task force include: FACS, DIMIA, AG's Dept, DFAT, Health and Aging, Employment and AusAid. They had not at that stage decided on how NGOs would be consulted or involved in the drafting of the NPA or how children would participate.

Amnesty International, the Victorian Branch Children's Rights Team, and DCI are asking to have input into the Plan by reading and commenting on a draft and stressing the importance of asking children for their opinions. The Plan is a very important document, able to set standards against which behaviour towards children can be measured.

DCI urges the Australian government to develop and consult on the plan.

ILO and Child Labour

Update from the UN Ad Hoc Committee on Disabilities

Following is a summary of the opening session which took place on June 17th. Discussion at the meeting was about the principle of non-discrimination and equality from a disability perspective.

ACCESS: Think About It

Presently, the UN is considering adopting a Convention on Disabilities. As part of the process, the UN has undertaken a process to improve access to its own facilities. Process is about change and it is fair to say that since last year's Ad Hoc Committee meeting, there has been change. For example, this session, unlike the last, we have from the beginning a more accessible meeting room and some communication accommodations.

As with any process, there is considerable room for improvement. Were it not for the Convention process, there would not have been this level of understanding at the UN Headquarters about the issue of access for persons with disabilities. Similarly, the international human rights framework can benefit from this understanding.

When we talk about the Convention, we say we need it to:

- provide an immediate statement of international legal accountability regarding the human rights of people with disabilities
- clarify the content of human rights principles and their application in the context of people with disabilities
- provide an authoritative and global reference point for domestic law and policy initiatives
- establish independent mechanisms for more effective monitoring of the rights of people with disabilities, including reporting